

THE MAKING OF THE INDIGENOUS CLERGY (HC 302)

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A critical comment on:

The making of the indigenous clergy in Edendale.

An interview with Rev Jabulani Andreas Shabalala.

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Critical comment on the interview with
Rev Jabulani Andreas Shabalala

1. Biography of Rev Shabalala

Rev Jabulani Andreas Shabalala was born in the Basotho homeland Qwa Qwa in the North Eastern Free State at 14 March 1960. The family had to move to a township in Harrysmith, where the father - who died in 1988 - could work in a factory. Rev Shabalala has two younger brothers and two younger sisters, who are still living with the mother as they are unemployed.

In Harrysmith he went for four years to lower primary school, for four years to higher primary school and for another three years to secondary school. As a born Catholic he deviated together with his family from the Catholic church to the Zionist church at the age of 10.

After secondary school he worked in a factory as there^{te} was no money for further education and got into contact with the Lutheran congregation in Harrysmith. One year later he went to the Bethlehem high school for another two years to complete his matric.

After completing his matric he went to Umphumulo to be trained as a Lutheran pastor and at 6th June 1987 he was ordained at Umlazi, Durban by the late Bishop L M Dhlamini.

He first worked as a pastor in the New Castle parish in northern Natal, then he came to Durban where he worked in the Durban South Umlazi Kwanakhuta parish and moved then to Port Shepstone at the south coast.

In 1992 he came to Machibisa/Edendale where he has to serve 10 congregations in his parish.

Rev Shabalala is married to Ingrid Nomkhosi from Naceza - a Norwegian Mission Station - and has three daughters together with her.

2. Material Circumstances

I experienced it as a big advantage that I knew Rev Shabalala before the interview. I visited him several times in Macibisa, attended his services and got a good contact with him. My neighbour in the Lutheran Residence where I am staying is a good friend of him. For that reason Rev Shabalala is quite often, at least twice a week, in the residence where I also got a good relation to him.

It has been the Lutheran Residence where I made the first contact with him, concerning the interview. I told him about oral history and the course I am taking in the University. He was very interested in the topic and open minded. Therefore he agreed to be interviewed by me, although he thought that he might not know enough to answer all my questions. But as I told him that I am convinced that he will have a lot to say, he said that he is looking forward to the interview.

We met once more before the interview to find a suitable time and place of the interview. He told me that it would be more comfortable for him to be interviewed in my place, because the interview might be disturbed several times when we would do it in Machibisa, as there are always people who want to talk to him. Due to the fact that I know Macibisa quite well, I agreed. After two further telephone-calls we agreed on the time - because of time-pressure for both of us, we agreed to make the interview very soon.

The interview itself also had good material circumstances. We were not disturbed by anybody, as I told the students in my residence not to disturb us and as I put a "No disturbing"-note on my door. After 1 hour and 15 minutes we had a break for about 15 minutes for refreshing. Altogether the interview lasted for about 2 and 1/2 hours, so that both of us felt quite tired after the interview.

All together I would describe the material circumstances of the interview as very good. I had enough time before the interview to make contact with the interviewee and to tell him about the interview. So he already knew before the interview what is going on and could prepare himself. On the other side the interview itself took place in good conditions.

3. Assessment of the social structure of the interview situation

There were different dynamics in the interview itself. In the beginning the interviewee, but also myself were quite nervous. Although I gave the interviewee an idea of what is going on in the interview his main fear was that he would not have enough to tell me. I myself was nervous if the interview would be successful. But our nervousness came to an end quite early and right from the beginning I had the impression that the interviewee enjoyed it to answer my questions. I even had sometimes the feeling that he was leaving the field of my original question and starting to talk about something else. But still, we both always managed to come back to the theme of the interview.

It is important to be recorded that the interviewee and myself are both from different age and cultural background. The interviewee is ten years older than myself and experienced the oppression during the time of Apartheid as a black person. I myself come from the so called First World in Europe, had and have the privilege of education, peace and wealth. I can hardly imagine through what kind of experiences and difficulties the interviewee had to go in his life. In this regard there was the danger that the dynamics of the interview lead to pattern like black-white, poor-rich, academic education-college training and so on. But as I have already indicated, the interviewee and myself know each other for quite a while and we regard each other as friends. Further the interviewee has experience with people from Europe and had the possibility to visit Germany. Therefore I always had the feeling that the interviewee did not have the impression that he is used for an academic research of a privileged student, but he knows the situation at the university - as he is a part-time student at the university - and further it is not his first social relation he had with a white or even with a German. By saying this I do not want to deny that the pattern of a white student interviewing a black indigenous pastor is without any dynamics. Out of South Africa's history this cannot be the case. But I can say that the dynamics did not lead to any kind of tension, but I think we were able to find together the fruits of these dynamics.

Although the interviewee was talking about very personal and intimate things he was always very open. But I tried to avoid to get too close in personal matters. In these cases and also in the problem of getting away from the original theme of the question I was always very thankful that I could come back to my interview-outline. On the other hand I sometimes experienced it as a disadvantage that I had to look on the paper of my interview-outline. There was always a danger of losing eye-contact and the danger of misunderstanding that

I am not interested in the answers the interviewee was giving while I was reading in the interview-outline. But in a later stage of the interview I could handle this problem in a better way.

The most relaxed time was the middle part of the interview before and after the break. In the beginning there was the nervousness I was talking about and in the end we were both quite tired after more than 2 hours of listening and talking.

Altogether I would like to describe the social structure of the interview as very good, as we both knew each other for a longer time and as the interviewee seemed to be convinced about the fact that I was interested in his person concerning the subject of my interview, but that I did not want to prove him or his church wrong or blame them for any reason.

4. Non-verbal signs

From the beginning on I experienced it as an advantage to keep eye-contact with the interviewee. Always when I was looking on the paper of my interview-outline there was the danger that the interviewee thinks that I am losing interest in his answer. I could see that he was moving and looking what I am doing. But in a later stage of the interview he seemed to get used to see me looking sometimes on my interview-outline, and was not disturbed anymore, especially when he saw that I was not losing attention. On the other side I myself got more routine in questioning and did not have to stick to my written outline all the time.

Another interesting observation I could make was made possible when I heard the tape-record. I heard myself saying a lot of "yes", "mh", "aha", "I see" and other things like that. I remember that I was always moving my head up and down. I think that these non-verbal signs worked out as the interviewee spoke very free and with no fear. I could even observe that he sometimes continued to speak after a moment of silence when I just moved my head up and down or said something like "this is very interesting".

The last important observation I made was when I noticed that the interviewee was moving a little bit on his chair or just not being relaxed. These were clear signs of fatigue which I also felt myself. The first time I asked the interviewee to have a break and to drink

some coffee. When the signs of tiredness appeared a second time in the end of the interview I indicated to the interviewee that the interview will be finished soon and also shorted the interview a little bit.

All in all I remember the non-verbal signs as another positive indicators of the relaxed atmosphere of the interview as the interviewee was also using his whole body in developing his answers.

5. Restructuring of data

There is not too much literature which I could use to identify whether any data has been restructured. In common I can say that I did not find any reason to believe so. All the cross-references to available literature show that the interviewee reflects the historical view of historical writers. So there is of course the danger that his answers are somehow based on a official version of certain events. In point 7 I am going to compare the historical viewpoint of the interviewee with other references.

What is true about my interview is that I have asked questions to the interviewee concerning historical facts which he did not experience himself. So his answers were not always based on his personal reminiscence or memory only, but also on what he had heard about historic events. So it must be admitted that this interview is not only aimed on oral history as such - although the bigger part of the interview is - , but it is also based on the fact of oral tradition.

6. Significant omission of data

I do not have any reasons to believe that the interviewee omitted any data. From the impression I got in the interview, but also when I got through the interview on the tape and in written form I did not find any indications to think about omission of data on the side of the interviewee. I would even think that he was more open than he would thought in the beginning of the interview. To support this assessment I refer back to page 16 of the interview where the interviewee said: "..., even my wife for instance does not know all these details."

7. Cross-references

For the bigger part of my interview it is not possible to find any other sources. This is so because of the fact that the interview is very much based on the personal experience of the interviewee, on his personal way to ministry and on his assessment of events concerning the making of the indigenous clergy.

But there are still some points which can be compared. The literature which I am using reads as follows:

- * Lislrud, Gunnar: Church mergers and consciousness movements, 1993, unpublished, Oslo.
- * Nsibande, A. E.: The founding of Umphumulo seminary, in: Nelson, H. L. and others (ed.): Dynamic African Theology, Umphumulo's contribution, 1992, Durban: Pinetown Printers.
- * Wittenberg, Gunther: History and challenges of Lutheran theological education in Pietermaritzburg, 1993, unpublished, Pietermaritzburg.

One important point, the interviewee was speaking about in the interview was the question of Black Theology and the question of African Theology. He observed a challenge to emphasize these theological approaches during his studies in Umphumulo - that is in the early 80s (cf. interview, page 18). A similar observation is made by Lislrud, who is also addressing the fact that the Faculty and College Board pressed for more African lecturers, realizing that a White professor would not have quite the same possibilities in relating his theology to African students as his Black colleague (cf. Lislrud, page 5).

Another historical fact which can be confirmed out of other sources is where the interviewee speaks about Rorke's Drift as the first training centre for black pastors in the Lutheran Church in South Africa (cf. Interview, page 21). Nsibande confirms this fact and gives the year of the foundation of this college which is 1912 (cf. Nsibande, page 6). The same date can also be found in Wittenberg's article (cf. Wittenberg, page 1).

In the question of training of indigenous staff the interviewee could report that most of them had to go to Germany or America to get higher education (cf. interview, page 28). The same is reported by Lislrud, who noticed that African staff-members were trained in Germany or America (cf. Lislrud, page 5).

All these cross-references support my view-point that the historical facts which the interviewee gave are confirmed by other sources - other cross-references would have been possible, but extend this critical comment too much. But even this short number of cross-references gives an indication that the historical information, given by the interviewee, is confirmed and correct.

8. Assessment of the overall quality of the interview

As I have indicated above I have a good feeling about the overall quality of the interview. The communication - verbal and non-verbal - was very good, the interviewee did understand all my questions correctly with one exception in the end of the interview - page 32. But I would rather see the late stage of the interview as the reason for this misunderstanding than any other reasons.

More precisely I think that this interview gives a very good and intimate idea of a person who decided to go for ministry in the early 1980s. This is of course not a long time ago, but I still believe that this interview can be very helpful to understand the making of the indigenous clergy in a certain, very personal way. Further it gives an inside to the life in Edendale in different facets. The interviewee himself does not live in Edendale for a very long time. But he can tell a lot about its history, especially the history of the Lutheran congregation.

Last but not least the interview gives an idea of the history of indigenous clergy in the Lutheran church as such. The interviewee knows a lot about this special history and he also followed the road to ministry with all its ups and downs.

9. Assessment of the overall value of the interview in terms of historical research

As I have indicated in point 8, the advantage of my interview is the very personal and intimate atmosphere in which it was conducted and which gives a very special insight to the way of an African pastor in the Lutheran church.

There are some interesting points which I could discover in my interview and which can hardly be found in other sources:

One interesting point is the pilgrimage of the interviewee through different denominations before he finally joined the Lutheran Church (cf. pages 5f). He was by birth a Catholic, but his family and his grandmother in particular deviated from the Catholic Church to the Zionist Church when he was about 10 years. The reason for this change was mainly the lacking of traditional rites - such as curing of sicknesses and witchcraft - in the Catholic Church as a mainline church. He remained as a church-going member in the Zionist Church for about four years, before he was not interested in going to the church anymore. It is interesting that he even felt in this time of his life the impact of the Catholic Church on his spiritual mentality as he was still praying. After some years of independence from the church, the interviewee was then attracted to the Lutheran Church, but not so much as a Church, but he was attracted through the pastor (cf. page 22f), who himself used to be a witchdoctor before and who also did not belong to the Lutheran Church from the beginning on, but was a member of the Pentecostal Church. So there is an indication that a pilgrimage through different denominations, but also the way from a traditional member of the African society - such as a witchdoctor - into ministry is and was possible in terms of the making of the indigenous clergy in the Lutheran Church. Another enlightening matter is the fact that the grandfather of the interviewee was a minister in the Congregational Church (cf. page 15).

All this mixture of denominations and traditions concerning the way into the ministry is - as I think - highly interesting for the historical value of this interview. As I have indicated before, it is very difficult to find something written about the way of a pastor into ministry who went through so many stages of African tradition and religion on the one side and Western religion on the other side. It would be very interesting to go deeper into these questions in other interviewees and to see how common it was and is for the making of the indigenous clergy to go through different stages of denominations and African traditions. On the other side it would be very interesting to see how other indigenous pastors deal with these roots in their ministry. Are they including African traditions in the life of the congregation? Do they have a natural feeling for ecumenical questions as they were connected with different denominations? I think that the answer of my interview^{ee} is in this regard very interesting: "I used to feel that I am out but nonetheless I am also proud of carrying the Catholic baptism that kept me going, that catholic are on equal par. So even the pastor that was responsible to characterise my Christian life had his image dented because of his background as a witchdoctor so whatever was coming from him was not highly

appreciated even today. So I had this dent also to go through, I am still working on it. It is clearing one way or the other, there is now acceptability that is coming forthwith." (page 16) "... by the growth of the indigenous pastors who see things differently there is now accommodation for dancing which is central to the culture of our people, clapping of hands. Gradually some kind of Africaness is introduced in our services but the pace is very slow, very slow especially in my church. It is better with the Anglicans and Catholics - they are far ahead of us, far ahead." (page 26)

Another interesting finding in my interview is connected with the social status and the payment of the indigenous clergy. As the interviewee pointed it out, the salary of an indigenous pastor is very low (cf. page 31). This has led to many pastors leaving the ministry. But this is also the reason why the wives of the pastors play an important role: "Had it not been because of the wives many pastors today would not be in the ministry. The supportive nature of ministry and household lays squarely on the shoulders of the wives, who are employed as teachers and nurses, and therefore are able to sustain the family. Otherwise the pastors would not make ends meet. Even today within the course of ministry our wives are doing tremendous service to the church." (page 23)

I think it is very important to notice this contribution of the pastors' wives amongst the indigenous clergy, at least in the Lutheran Church. This contribution can hardly be found in written form in other sources.

Connected with these points is the social status of a minister. As the interviewee indicated his family was not very happy with his decision to join into ministry: "As an elder son they were expecting me to be providing - to be of providence to them wherever they are and that is out. So although they wanted but now the cost of ministry leaves much to be desired in terms of finance." (page 16) I think this is another important finding in my interview: Although the social status of a minister might be acceptable for the family, the son, and especially the elder son, can not fulfil his duties in terms of securing the financial future of the parents and the family. There is a clash between the expectations of the family and the financial possibilities of an indigenous pastor, at least in the Lutheran Church.

In conclusion I can say that the historical value of the interview has been proved by these findings. I think that this interview has enlightened some problems and advantages in the making of the indigenous clergy in the Lutheran Church in South Africa. In a next step other interviews should be conducted and the findings should be compared with this

interview, to prove if they can be seen as common historical facts or if these experiences are only restricted to the interviewee's history. This would be the task for further studies.