

Botshabelo, place of refuge

S.P.P. Mminele reported that

On the 30th December 1864 Rev Merensky summoned all missionaries of the Berlin mission in the Transvaal to a conference at Gerlachshoop at which they had to decide on what next to do with the Bapedi Christian refugees and the remnants of the Bakopa Christians. Merensky and Grutzner were charged with the task of finding a vacant farm within the Transvaal Republic, which could be suitable as a mission station. But before they could embark on this mission, Endemann informed them that he had met a Boer who told him of a farm, Boschhoek, which was for sale along the Klein Olifants (Mohlotsi) river, some sixty-five kilometres south of Gerlachshoop and about twelve kilometres North of Nazareth. The owner was selling it at a low price of \$75 (+- R150.00) because it had poisonous plants.

(Mminele 28:83)

After the crossing of the Steelpoort River, it was not clear whether the mission will continue with its work. The converts were scattered in the district of Lydenburg, whereas Merensky stayed in Lydenburg for a while. The news about the land gave Merensky and his converts hope. It was not a dream but a reality. The land was inspected and approved to be good for a mission station. It was a free land from Sekhukhune and Mabhogo's influence or control. It was surrounded by white farms and claimed by the whites as their area. The other good thing about it was the fact that it has sufficient tall trees to provide wood for the building of houses and making fire. It was also found that it has a good climate and high rainfall in summer. Finally the Klein Olifants River that runs through it will provide water for them and their animals.

The whole work was left in the hands of Rev Merensky to negotiate with the Zuid Afrikaanse Republiek on behalf of his Christian converts. He immediately established a Commission consisting of the Landdrost, the field-cornet and a farm inspector, to look at the possibility of such a mission station to come into reality.

This is all what they found:

- The farm was lying between two rivers, that is Olifants and Sterkspruit, so the rivers formed a boundary between the Middelburg Town, the farm and the station.
- The high ridges between the Town and the farm or station gave a safety between the two groups.
- That Rev Merensky must commit himself to look after and to take care of his Bapedi group or Christian refugees and the responsibility of any harm or danger to the state from the side of his Christian converts.
- It was also agreed that the responsibility of the Reverend was to see to it that his Bapedi Christians are not recognized as an organized tribe rather than being Christians.
- The Commission further stated that the Bakopa group must be allowed to settle on the farm on condition that:

- ✓ Chief Rammupudu would subject himself to the power of the Zuid Afrikaanse Republiek.
- ✓ The Chief would take control of his subjects and be able to identify them.
- ✓ The Chief must not give shelter to enemies of the Republiek or state.

The Commission made it loud and clear to the Chief of Bakopa, Chief Rammupudu that if he is found guilty of one of the conditions mentioned above:

- ✓ His tribe would be disbanded and be scattered on the farms to work for the White farmers.

Merensky wasted no time. On the 7th of February 1865 he called all Christian subjects to gather at the farm of William Jacobs where he will meet them. The refugees came from all over the Lydenburg district and gathered at the farm. The farm was just near Boschhoek farm which was to be named Botshabelo. On the 8th of February 1865 they all arrived at Botshabelo, their new place.

Reverend Merensky had already built a wood house for him on this farm. But because of the heavy rain that welcomed them to their new place, the wood house built by the Reverend fell down.

The Christian converts who had arrived on that day consisted of Eighty-five adults and thirty children. Amongst them were no less than three of Sekhukhune's royal wives who defied the King and finally fled with other Christians.

The other group of Christians who joined the Bapedi Christians at Botshabelo were the Bakopa Christians led by Chief Rammupudu. They were 130 in number.

In that heavy rain they had to sleep without a roof on top of them including their leader Rev Merensky. To them the rain was a sign of blessing. It was a blessing because the rain symbolized happiness. It was a blessing and a warm welcome because a visitor had to be welcomed by the owner of the land. This time the rain was the owner and it opened its hands to give the blessings.

The Reverend was in the company of his wife and their newborn baby named after the events of flight at Sekhukhune's warriors Mamotshaba (Mother of flight). The following day, the 9th February 1865 became the busiest day. Men were seen going to the veld to cut wood for their shelters. On the other hand women divided themselves into two groups, the one group for cooking and the other one to cut grass for roofing houses.

The first house to be built was that of Reverend Merensky, a rondavel.

On the other side of the river they built two royal houses, one for the Chief of the Bakopa and the other one for their Chief, Dinkwanyane. Chief of the Bakopa was the son of Chief Boleu. The Bakopa Chief, Chief Rammupudu came to Botshabelo because of the wars in his land, especially wars against the AmaSwazi that left the whole nation unsettled.

It was jubilation on Sunday when they held their first service under the tree. It was as if they are dreaming when for the first time after a long period of time they worship together without any fear of death. It was for the first time after a long period worshipping without being spied by Sekhukhune's soldiers. It was a free service in a free land that gave them powers to think of building their own church in their own land together with their own Reverend for their own God.

The Christians then built their own conical grass-thatched huts, which had stonewalls. These huts were built closer to each other in a form of a circle with an open court in the centre. The aim was for protection against any attack. However this was changed later and people settled in rows. The Bapedi Christians and the Bakopa settled in two separate villages on the Southern part of the valley across a stream. There was only one entrance going to these two villages and the entrance was made out of stonewalls. A wooden door for their own protection closed every night the gate or entrance. Their livestock was also protected by being kept in a big stonewall kraal on the outskirts of the villages.

Later as people were coming to Botshabelo to be Christians, Merensky made some alterations. The AmaNdebele who wanted to become Christians also came to Botshabelo. Merensky made them to settle between the Bakopa village and those animal kraals or enclosures. The other group that arrived later was the Bakone of Phokwane from the abandoned Phatametsane mission station from Sekhukhune land. They arrived with their leader Petrus Maserumule immediately after the founding of Botshabelo and thus formed the third group to arrive at Botshabelo. Beside people or Christians who came as a group or as individuals, more and more people kept on coming to Botshabelo. The last group to arrive was the group, which unlike the others, which came for Christianity, came for education and was a group from Ga-Masemola or Batau also in Sekhukhuneland. Paulus

Mabowe led this group. ⁸⁰ [University of Pretoria etd – Rikotso, G J \(2005\)](#) The group was mainly attracted by the school and educational opportunities offered at Botshabelo.

Rules and Regulations for settlement

Because the ground on which Botshabelo was founded was the property of the Berlin mission, Reverend Merensky had the highest authority at the mission station. And because the mission station or Botshabelo was in the land of the Boers, the station was automatically under the control of the Transvaal Republic and the residents were expected to obey the law of the state and to pay their taxes regularly. And the Transvaal Republic will be expected to give the mission station or the people of Botshabelo protection.

On the other hand Merensky as their spiritual leader met the two traditional leaders, that is Dinkwanyane and Rammupudu to strike a deal that would guide them. He made it clear that he expected them and their subjects to be a law-abiding community. A big meeting of all the Botshabelo Christians at which Merensky explained the rules and regulations that will guide and bind all of them followed that.

“All who live on the farm express their willingness to receive further religious instructions from the missionaries of the Berlin Missionary Society and that God shall always be their highest Master and Leader and they shall ever strive to glorify His Name in all they do.”

That was made clear to all Christians and it meant the mission station or the people of Botshabelo were a God fearing community, all customs and traditional practices that were at conflict with God’s word were forbidden. That is worshipping false gods, rainmaking feasts, witchcraft, adultery, drunkenness, gambling, marriage by cattle dowry or “lobola”, polygamy and circumcision. But they were allowed to live as Bapedi or Africans in accordance with the customs and traditions of their forefathers. Though they were now closer to whites they were supposed to know that they were not whites but blacks.

More land needed

Because of many people developing an interest in Botshabelo, more people flocked to Botshabelo and the need to buy big land was a necessity. In 1865 Reverend Merensky increased his area by acquiring Toevlugt farm. As if this was not enough the following farms near Botshabelo were bought by the Berlin Mission Society:

Leewpoortjie farm no. 229 was bought on 18 August 1869, Groenfontein farm no. 410 was bought on 07 January 1871, Draaihoek farm no. 1144 was bought on 18 December 1871 and Doornkop farm no. 42 was bought on 05 December 1876.

All these farms formed the Botshabelo Mission area. There were about 11 395 hectares extended. The money which the Berlin Mission society spent in buying this farms was 10 775 German marks, +- R10 760.00. Toevlugt farm which was 840,5 hectares remained the most important farm throughout the history of missionary enterprise in the Botshabelo mission area because in it they built all the buildings of the mission station except the watermill.

Buildings at Botshabelo

Beside their huts or houses, the people of Botshabelo also found it good to build their mission station, and their own school to educate themselves and the future generation, and they found it good to build their own buildings for industrial work.

They built the first stonewalled and grass-thatched church in October 1865 at the foot of a hill near Merensky's rondavel. Rev Merensky consecrated the building the same year. The church building was 18 ft x 50 ft, which could be +- 6 x 15 metres in size. But because of the population's growth the church building proved to be small. In that case the second church building followed, it had the capacity of 70ft x 23ft (+- 21 x 7 metres). It could accommodate 600 people and was fitted with a gallery and was built just next to the first one. The church building was completed in February 1868 and on the 15th March

University of Pretoria etd – Rikotso, G.J. (2005)

1868 the building was consecrated. On the very same day Chief Rammutupudu was baptized and given the name Joshua.

Before the end of that year the very same building proved to be too small. It could not accommodate the rapid growing population of Merensky's Christians at Botshabelo. So the third church was built. It was the size of 120 ft (+- 37 square metres) long. It was built in Gothic style and the church building was consecrated on the 26th October 1873. The third building was built across the existing second church building, so it somehow made a cruciform. The church was built by two Europeans, one from Germany who was a missionary and the other one was a carpenter. The Yellowwood used for the roof and gallery was transported by ox-wagon from the Pongola forests in Natal. Reverend Merensky described it as "the most beautiful church in the Transvaal and the biggest". It has a capacity of 800 people. The first church building was turned into a school when the second one was built. That was used until August 1872, when a proper school building was built to the left of the three church buildings. The school building had the capacity of 2 000 square feet (+- 186 square metres). It had three classrooms, two of which had the size of 20 x 25 ft (+- 6x 10 metres). Rev Carl Endemann describes it as "the biggest and stateliest school building North of the Vaal River".

To prove that Christians in Botshabelo had a purpose, not far from this building to the left, a small building meant for the start of the Seminary was completed within a short time because of their hard work. This building was used to train blacks to serve as "National Helpers" or as Evangelists amongst their fellow black Christians. The building had only one class and was completed in 1878.

First it was their houses, the church, school and the Seminary, and the last building that they thought of was a building for industrial work. The building was behind Rev Merensky's dwelling house. Though the building before 1878 was moved to better buildings about half a kilometre West of Merensky's house at the foot of the "koppie" hill.

The workshop was defined as a wagon-making shop, a smith shop, a carpentry shop, and much later, a printing and a bookbinding shop. The original building next to Merensky's house was turned into a wagon shed and a cowshed. Coming closer to the workshop a dwelling house for the German artisans was erected. In addition a watermill consisting of a 30 000 cubic ft (+- 850 cubic metres) trench was built and completed on the 2nd March 1869, about twelve kilometres downstream along the Mohlotsi River. Just before the end of 1872 the Berlin Mission Society built a shop. Kamann a certain German hired a shop. But before the end of 1876 Hellmuth Beuster took over the running of this shop on behalf of the Berlin Mission Society. Finally the new and bigger shop was built in 1878. The size of the shop was 80 ft (+- 24 metres).

The building of the Fort

The ongoing wars amongst African Leaders made the Botshabelo Christians unsettled. In order to protect the mission stations against any possible attacks from Sekhukhune, Mabhogo or the AmaSwazi, Merensky organized men from his converts to build a strong-walled –fort on the crown of the Northern hill. The fort was completed in October 1865. He named it “Fort Wilhelm I”. The fort was built in the format of the Boers, while it showed the unique style of the Basotho architecture example. The walls were 12 ft (+- 4 metres) high, much like the walls of the German castles of the middle ages. At the bottom the walls were 5 ft (+- 2 metres) thick measuring upwards. These walls had loopholes from which the whole surrounding area could be clearly seen and controlled. It had five watchtowers, one main tower that was the highest (about ten metres high), plus four corner towers. The main tower was the one overlooking the valley below. From these watchtowers, sentries kept a sharp lookout for enemies by day and by night. Fort Wilhelm was divided on the inside by cross-walls into four independent compartments, allowing the heaviest fighting within the fort to be controlled by the owners or defenders. Whenever the attackers challenged, the residents sought shelter in this stronghold, which was about 100 x 50 yards (+- 40 x 20 metres) in size. The garrison consisted of the fifty best shots and brave warriors under the command of the brave and renowned buffalo-hunter by the name of Jacob Makwetla who manned the bulwark.

This fort was best known as a “schanze” – a true fort built in the accepted European style. Merensky was so overjoyed with this fort that even before it was completed, he happily wrote to the Director Wangemann in Berlin as follows:

“Our fort is not ready yet, but we hope to complete it in a few weeks, and then we will defend ourselves with the help of God against such robbers. Then they will see that here are living Prussians, and not faint-hearted Boers”.

After the expulsion of Mampuru from the fort, he went to Nyabela the son of Mabhoko. The possibility that the fort might be attacked at any time mounted. The residents of the Bapedi and Bakopa villages also built a similar fort but smaller than Fort Wilhelm. This was done to take women and children refuge in the event of unexpected attacks from Chief Nyabela or Mampuru. Not only these but other similar forts were built at the strategic points on the hills surrounding the mission station. This was done in order to cover the different approaches.

Reverend Merensky’s dwelling house was also built in a way that it could also serve as a fort for his family. It was built of burnt bricks. It had a flat roof made of limestone so that it could not be burnt down. A wall protected the homestead.

When the news reached Sekhukhune and the other African leaders who wanted to invade the fort of Botshabelo, their ideas simply faded, and they abandoned their plan for good. It was how Botshabelo was saved.

On top of the main watchtower of the Wilhem’s Fort the following important symbols in history were displayed:

- ✓ The black and white Prussian flag was hoisted.
- ✓ The British Union Jack
- ✓ The Vierkleur of the Transvaal Republic
- ✓ And finally the National flag of the Republic of South Africa.

The fort after 1902 fell into disrepair. It was in 1959 when Otto Schwellnus, the first son of the Rev P.E. Schwellnus drew the attention of the Simon Van der Stel Foundation to the rebuilding of this fort. He gave the reason that the fort was important and it should serve as:

‘n Gedenkteken ter ere van daardie klompie Christene wat nie slegs die pynlikste marteling verduur her nie, maar ook al hul aardse besiftings vir hulle geloof prysgegee het’. (*Mminele 45: 83*)

The fort was rebuilt to its present shape with Simon van der Stel Foundation’s funds, and in 1962 it was declared a national monument. It was then renamed Fort Merensky in remembrance of the builder and the founder of the Botshabelo mission station. The Simon van der Stel Foundation took the responsibility of maintaining this fort. The fort was regarded as an important historical monument in the Republic of South Africa.

The Christians in Botshabelo were not only introduced to the Gospel of the living God that they may live by it, but even to the gun of a white man. What it meant here was that, Christians must know that guns can also defend and protect them in times of danger. Christians must know that those who do not know God are dangerous to them. They kill without mercy or fear of the Law of God that says: “Do not kill”. Christians from Sekhukhune land need not to be reminded because they have seen how cruel Sekhukhune could be if he wanted. They have seen how their brothers and sisters were prosecuted and tortured. They have seen how they died before them.

Just before the dawn of 1866 the Bapedi Christians on the Mission stations had more than thirty guns and the Bakopa Christians had not less than twenty-eight guns and ammunitions. By the year 1870 the black Christians in Botshabelo had more than 109 guns and ammunitions. The government as the main supplier made it clear to Rev Merensky that those guns remained State properties and that Rev Merensky is in charge of their safety. The guns are to be used when the enemies of the state attack. The church and

those black Christians on the mission station must be on the side of the State, even if it was their fellow brothers in Sekhukhune land, Bakopa or from Mabhogo's tribe. Black converts at Botshabelo were not only taught how to shoot but even the art of repairing the guns and they could even make gunlocks. The fort used to have its own supply of gunpowder and lead on hand.

Problems encountered

The first group of refugees came to Botshabelo in February when it was already too late for sowing. The residents were in need of food and the Berlin Mission Society could not supply more. Some men had to walk fifteen to twenty miles (+- 24km to 32 km) to search for work on Boer farms for their daily bread.

On the other hand Chief Mabhogo of the Ndzunza Tribe (Ndebele) claimed that Botshabelo was built on his farm therefore the residents must pay tax to him directly. As if this was not enough this man kept on watching the fort, and they tried but failed to steal their sheep.

Sekhukhune also tried to attack the fort twice. He attempted in 1865, but the plan failed because before they could reach the station, already the Botshabelo people were aware of their coming and ready for them. The second attempt failed because his men, particularly the leaders or the commandos refused to attack or to carry out the order because they said they were afraid to fight against the God of the Christians. Mampuru the half brother to Sekhukhune and enemy number one to Sekhukhune's kingdom came to Botshabelo mission station in 1867 to persuade the residents to join him or overthrow the Kingdom of his brother Sekhukhune who was also the enemy of the converts. Although Merensky intervened to restore order, many were ignited, especially the Bapedi Christians who felt like going back home to their King Sekhukhune, and that happened when the missionaries enforced the laws and regulations that were foreign to their lifestyle. That came into reality in 1873 when Chief Dinkwanyane of the Bapedi Christians left the mission station with 280 Baptised Christians to a place called Mafolofolo near Lydenburg. Because of all

these threats, Christians of Botshabelo had to live in fear. Some had to stay ready for the fight or wars. They were seen carrying guns to Sunday's worships. They were seen moving around carrying axes or spears and shields under their arms.

The other problem they encountered was the neighbouring Boers or farmers. The neighbouring Boers hated the mission as they were opposed to the education of the Blacks. This was condoned by the fact that some servants ran away from the Boer farms to seek refuge at Botshabelo, so to them Botshabelo became a small haven of laziness and idleness. A number of Boers even planned to attack the mission station to recover their servants. But Merensky stuck to his guns and refused to send the servants back, even with the instruction of the field-cornet. On the other hand some of these servants who fled to the mission had a language problem, they could speak Afrikaans only and knew no Sepedi language as they have been born and bred on the Boer farms. So Merensky had to limit the number of these sanctuary-seekers.

Finally the Government of the Transvaal was expected to bring peace and stability in the country, especially at Botshabelo, only to be found that it was too weak. The Botshabelo residents were promised to be given protection by the State, but the protection was never enjoyed. The Botshabelo residents were expected to pay taxes regularly and fully. They were also expected to buy and possess passes. To their amazement, only blacks in Botshabelo or those staying in White areas were forced to pay tax, but blacks in their homeland or chiefs were not registered and therefore they were not paying tax. So blacks in Botshabelo saw the Boers' government as an enemy. When Merensky tried to intervene by explaining why they should pay tax, he was seen as a traitor and friend of the Boers.

The Transvaal Republic also displayed its weakness by failing to return the children of Chief Rammupudu's subjects who were kept as slaves by the neighbouring Boers who did not want any compensation. The failure of Merensky to convince the State or government to assist in bringing back those children made the Bakopa converts to lose all the trust in the Boer government and in Merensky himself.

On the 1st of May 1874 Grutzner pleaded to the landdrost of Middelburg to pay the Chief at Botshabelo at least ten percent of taxes collected at Botshabelo because the Botshabelo people were up to date with their payments and these will raise the status of the Chiefs at Botshabelo because Chiefs would also be seen as salaried officials of the State. That would make Chiefs to work hard in organizing their subjects to be law obedient to the Republic of the Transvaal. This humble request was overlooked and rejected by the Middelburg laundress. The failure to recognize the black Chiefs was seriously noted by the Botshabelo Christians because their Chiefs influenced them not to pay taxes of the Republic and the annual tithe, which they had to pay into the mission coffers. Chief Rammupudu planned to leave the mission station, only to be stopped by the laundress.

From 1873 the Black residents of Botshabelo or Christians at Botshabelo were expected to serve as police and prison warders in Middelburg and on the highveld. The workers disliked this type of work because most of the prisoners were their own Bapedi brothers, some were convicted because of not having a Pass. They went to the extent of refusing such work, to their dismay the AmaZulu from Natal were hired to do the job. Once more Rev Merensky was called to intervene but his failure to convince the Middelburg authority was regarded as his aim and selfishness to take the place of their own Chiefs and made himself a Paramount Chief over them.

The Land Question

The Christians at Botshabelo started to ask many questions. They wanted to know to whom does the land of Botshabelo belong? Not many were surprised when they realized that the land belong to the German Berlin Mission Society. They were not at all surprised because all that they achieved went to the Mission Society. For instance when black Christians were asked to help the State in the wars against their fellow Blacks all was done for no financial benefit to themselves as individuals. Any reward went to the Berlin Mission Society. So these made the Botshabelo residents feel insecure and exploited.

Black leaders at Botshabelo took the upfront position. Chief Dinkwanyane of the Bapedi openly opposed the practice of women wearing long hair regarding this as the violation of the Bapedi custom. He wanted the Bapedi Christians to have pates. This also brought misunderstanding between the Chief and the Reverend Merensky.

Christians like Timotheus Maredi from the Bapedi group stood by their Chief and spread the idea of leaving the mission station as a free land. This influenced Chief Dinkwanyane to pull out from Botshabelo with more than 280 of his followers into a free land near Lydenburg on the 4th October 1873. The other group of the Bakopa with 222 followers also left the mission station. The exodus from Botshabelo into an independent land was not less than 400 Christians by the end of 1873. The number was not less than a third of the baptized Christian members of the Botshabelo congregation.

In response to the main course of the departure, Merensky wrote like this to the Home Board in Berlin, Germany.

“The missionaries can protect the blacks against arbitrary demands by the Boers, but against arbitrary demands by the Government they cannot do anything as such we cannot blame them too much for having left.” (*Mminele* 53: 8)

It was a clear demonstration by Rev Merensky that he had also lost confidence in the Boer republic hence he welcomed the British annexation of the Transvaal.

Early Education offered at Botshabelo

Education started at Botshabelo as early as 1865. It was the aim of Merensky to introduce education to his converts. Within a period of ten years more than ten types of schools had already been established at Botshabelo.

The kinds of schools were:

- ✓ Congregational school
- ✓ The catechumenal school
- ✓ The confirmation school
- ✓ The evening school for adults
- ✓ The Youth school
- ✓ The Sunday school
- ✓ The children school (Elementary)
- ✓ The trade school
- ✓ The Evangelist school
- ✓ The Evangelist Seminary

Although some of these schools were short lived, the following schools were taken as examples to highlight the kind of education which was offered at Botshabelo.

1. The congregation school

The aim of introducing this kind of education was to turn the eyes of all the residents to the eternal. The targeted students were all the Black residents at Botshabelo and even Black people from the neighbouring farms.

Educators

Reverends Merensky, Johannes Winter and Hermann During joined hands in this role; the Evangelists Martinus Sebushane, Andries Sekoto and Jacob Kgafane helped them.

Meanwhile the wives of the Reverends helped the women with religious conducts and handicrafts, such as sewing, knitting and crocheting.

Time table and the subjects taught

Bible understanding, Hymn singing, good conduct and manual-work formed the gist of the curriculum.

Every Sunday two church services were held. During the first service the catechumens and the outsiders were excluded from the first liturgy with its apostolic creed and from the last liturgy with its Benediction. The outsiders will only be allowed to come in to listen to the sermon. All from the beginning to the end attended the second service.

After the holy service in the afternoons the residents would form groups under the instructions of the Missionaries to continue studying on their own, that can even be done at different venues of their choice including their homes. The main aim was to teach them to read and write. Sunday became a communal learning situation for all black residents of Botshabelo. Besides the Sunday services two bible lessons were held weekly for the whole congregation.

The families were encouraged to pray daily in their homes, that is evening and morning with a hymn and scripture readings and prayer before and after meals. Agriculture was also strongly emphasized and in 1869 the whole harvest of the residents amounted to 3 460 bushels of products of various kinds: Botshabelo became the granary of the surrounding farms.

2. The Confirmation school

This is one of the schools that are still important today in the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The aim of this school is to prepare young boys and girls for full membership of the church. The small catechism, the sacrament and other elements of the Christian faith and hymn singing formed the real contents of the curriculum.

The confirmation class was formed in 1876. The candidates received lessons for one year. In 1877 twelve boys and ten girls became the first youth to graduate from this school. Ever since, the church held this Confirmation class for the different Lutheran Parishes.

3. The children's school

The main aim of introducing this school was to give the children a better knowledge of understanding Christianity at an early stage. The school was established for the first time at Botshabelo in 1865.

Educators

The Personnel who headed this school at that time were Rev A. Merensky, Rev H. Doring, Rev Ritcher and Rev Johannes Winter and three black evangelists, Martinus Sebushane, Zebedeus Sebushane and Heskias Mampe.

The project was successful, within a period of ten years the enrolment rose from 150 to 400 pupils.

Time Table and subjects taught

At a mission school children were taught bible knowledge, the catechism, Christian Ethics, singing, Arithmetic, Reading and writing and Geography which according to Merensky would make the children "think about and observe the wonderful acts of God in sustaining and governing the Earth".

The school was attended from Monday to Friday, though some other days lessons were combined with manual work, that is making some gardens for the stations. This was done freely because children were not paying school fees.

The first church building was used as a classroom, but later three decent classrooms were built. In 1869 Rev Bruno Kohler from Germany inspected the school and commented.

“I am highly satisfied with the standard of the pupils. Although the children are learning under unfavourable conditions, they could still compete favourably with White children in Germany if they were to sit for a common examination – despite the more and better learning facilities the white children had”.

4. The trade school

The school was introduced for two main reasons. First, to educate black residents to be independent workers, not to look on a farmer to give work opportunities. Blacks must do their own handwork and make a living of it.

Secondly the aim of the mission was to generate funds for the mission stations by producing wagons and furniture, which were to be sold.

Normally the lesson will start at 6am to 6pm in summer or 7am to 7pm in winter. The Berlin Mission Society sponsored the school mostly.

5. The Botshabelo Seminary 1880

Although there were many schools which came into being at Botshabelo which were not discussed, the Botshabelo Seminary of 1880 will be the last important school to write about. It was called the Seminary for Natives (Seminar Eingeborene). There were many reasons which prompted the establishment of this institution. It was the fact that there were no black theologians trained to preach amongst themselves and the fact that by 1869 White Missionaries were no longer allowed to preach in the neighbouring villages occupied by the AmaNdebele. Though reasons were not given, we must not ignore the fact that Nyabela the son of Mabhoko never trusted the Whites.

Mminele reported that: “ Some young men of the congregation under Martinus Sebushane and Zebedeus Lefula voluntarily took over and went to preach there. On the 1st of June the same year Martinus Sebushane, Zebedeus Lefula, Petrus Tulwane Tebudi and David Motlatle left on a mission trip to Ga-Mankopane and they proceeded even further.” (*Mminele* 74: 83)

So it was a high time for the missionaries at Botshabelo mission station to train black leaders so that they should assist them in establishing and maintaining their own people wherever they may be gathered by using their own mother tongue. Their song closed saying: “Be learned so that you may go and teach people and bring them to God”.

At the end of 1872 the first four students graduated from this Seminary, namely Stefanus Marothi and Aaron Mokotedi who were sent to look after the spiritual lives of Botshabelo Christians working at the Diamond Mines in Kimberley. Hiskia Mampe served as a preacher and a teacher on the surrounding Botshabelo farms and at Botshabelo itself. Finally, Joseph Moeti was sent to Chief Mmutle at Ga-Mphahlele to do mission work. By the year 1878 Merensky’s dream was realized. Botshabelo had more than 400 school children. In the light of that, the Home Board in Berlin approved Botshabelo as central seminary for the southern Transvaal Synodal Region. The Botshabelo Seminary became the most important educational center of the Berlin Lutheran Missionary Enterprise in the whole of South Africa.

The impact of wars and laws

The wars amongst the nations of that time had a serious impact on the running of the institutions at Botshabelo. Although the residents needed peace, the wars launched by their archrival Sekhukhune disturbed them. Black Christians of Botshabelo were forced to take part in the war against Sekhukhune as porters, wagon drivers and ambulance men on the side of the white government. The Bapedi groups did not like fighting their own king. The fact that Botshabelo was made a peace negotiations place between delegates of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek and the delegates from Sekhukhune and leader Merensky being appointed to act as a mediator by President Burgers made the Botshabelo Christians to mistrust the role of the missionaries and Botshabelo itself.

- ✓ So the disruptions led to the slowing down of progress in education.
- ✓ Many lost their lessons and more so was the loss of lives.

On the score, Merensky had this to write:

“The people were tempted to mistrust the missionaries and the Chief purpose of the Mission society failed to reach their clear conscience”.

Although peace was reached after the defeat of Sekhukhune, damage was already done. More and more people left the mission to be independent. For that reason the number of students dropped. The Seminary was closed down. When it was re-opened, it operated in a different way under a changed condition. The Missionaries were trying to avoid the mistakes of the past.

During the closing and the re-opening, the Anglo-Boer war intervened. The end of war brought the British rule to the Transvaal and with it the first beginning of what came to be known as Native Education. After 1902, the State had a hand in the running of Native education by a system of registration of schools. The Berlin Mission Society registered its school in the year 1906 and the Botshabelo Mission Society was registered.

The First World War of 1914 fought by the mother sponsor, Germany made the seminary to close for ten years, from 1916 –1926. When the institution re-opened in 1926 after the war, it received government recognition again and things started to improve. In 1930 the Institution of Botshabelo welcomed the arrival of women for the first time. Up to 1936 Evangelists were still being taught at Botshabelo and stopped at the end of the very same year (1936). The Evangelist Courses were now separated from the Institution. But the Institution became more of a teacher’s college. The Second World War did not lead to the closing of the Seminary this time, but all the financial donations from the Berlin Mission Society were cut.

The Seminary had throughout its existence prepared men – and later men and women-for service. The motto: (“*Ntlhahle-ke-hlahle*”), that is “*Lead me that I may lead*” was a prayer, of course not all lead and guide, but there are always those who not only pray this prayer found in the walls of the Seminary but also act according to the prayer.

“Teach us Good Lord to serve Thee as Thou deserves.

To give and not to count the cost

To fight and not to heed the wounds.

To labour and not to ask for any-reward

Save that of knowing that we do Thy will.