

## **From Mission to Church: The Formation of the Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa**

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### **Background note**

Various terms and names will be used in this article that require clarification along with an understanding of events in nineteenth and early twentieth Scottish church history. Black South Africans are variously named as “indigenous,” “black” “Native” “African” and *bantu*. At the period covered by this article, the term “Native” was becoming insulting and obsolete, while the term *bantu*, meaning people, was acceptable. Black people then and now currently prefer to be called black. The only differentiator here is that due to the Scottish mission operating mainly in the Eastern Cape, the ethnic names *amaXhosa* and *AmaMfengu* are used where relevant. Natal blacks constitute the *amaZulu*. In the Johannesburg area many blacks relocated for labor purposes were *amaXhosa* and remained under the care and discipline of the Presbytery of Kaffraria. White people are referred to as whites (as a general term of reference), settlers and colonialists according to their purpose in emigrating to South Africa. These terms have been adopted within church circles where, for instance the Presbyterian Church of South Africa has historically been referred to both as a settler and colonial church.

The Scottish context was largely determined by the “Disruption” in 1843 as a result of a secession of one third of its members from the national Church of Scotland to form the Free Church of Scotland (FCoS) after a period of ten years conflict between those who adhered to the principle of “the Church by law established” and those who supported the voluntary principle and asserted the spiritual independence of the church according to Scottish church historians.<sup>1</sup> South African historians Hofmeyr and Pillay argue that the “Disruption” “ultimately led to the split in missionary work and the formation of the Bantu Presbyterian Church.”<sup>2</sup> However, it would also be true to say that it sowed the seeds of the Mzimba Secession in 1898. The newly formed Free Church of Scotland espoused the cause of foreign missions as the result of the influence of its voluntarist members and supporters. From 1843, almost all missionaries belonged to the Free Church. In 1847, the United Secession Church and the Relief Church came together to form the voluntary anti-

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<sup>1</sup> James H.S. Burleigh, *A Church History of Scotland* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 266; Alec C. Cheyne, *The Ten Years' Conflict: The Disruption, an Overview* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1993), 1

<sup>2</sup> J.W. (Hoffie) Hofmeyr and Gerald J. Pillay, eds., *A History of Christianity in South Africa* (Pretoria: Haum, 1994), 73.

establishment United Presbyterian Church of Scotland (UPCoS). It was co-operation between the FCoS and the UPCoS in favor of disestablishment as well as in other areas of church life including missions that led in 1900 to their union as the United Free Church of Scotland. The clock turned full circle when the United Free Church united with the established Church of Scotland to form the Church of Scotland in 1929.

The broader South African context in which mission work developed, first in the Eastern Cape, was in a developing settler community where the indigenous peoples were being forced to move westwards and northwards to facilitate the land ambitions of the settlers. This brought about a century long resistance movement which is referred to as the Wars of Dispossession<sup>3</sup> and resulted in a progressively closed and more consolidated frontier for the benefit of white settlers. This, along with the cattle killing disaster of 1856–57 and the forced reduction of the power of the chiefs within the colony, resulted in the destabilization of the Eastern Cape for much of the nineteenth century and produced a volatile situation in which missionaries sought to do their work.<sup>4</sup> The ordination of the Rev. John Ross in 1823 by the Presbytery of Hamilton, Scotland, and his setting apart for missionary work came on the eve of the Church of Scotland officially recognizing the necessity of overseas mission in 1824. Subsequently, the Presbytery of Kaffraria was established on 1 January 1824, and it organized the financial affairs of the missions until 1830s, supported by funds from the voluntarist Glasgow Missionary Society (GMS).

The early missions were missions of the Free Church of Scotland. The GMS transferred its work to the Free Church in 1845 following the “Disruption.” According to Cheyne, the “Disruption” had a positive effect on missions with the development of “missionary endeavour on a scale and of a quality hardly surpassed by any other communion in the English-speaking world.”<sup>5</sup> In 1837, the GMS split over the voluntary principle. The continuing GMS allied its work with the established Church of Scotland and later the Free Church; the offshoot Glasgow African Missionary Society (GAMS) worked with the UPCoS, which was formed in 1847. Both societies’ missionaries had worked together in the same presbytery.

## Introduction

all Native Churches in our colony and on our borders must be largely, if not altogether, supplied with pastors from themselves. The native churches must be stirred up more and more to realise and even to desire this coming state of things.... They cannot remain forever in the leading strings of the European church, and must endeavour to maintain and perpetuate themselves. And the sooner they begin to aim at this consummation the better.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Graham A. Duncan, *Lovedale—Coercive Agency: Power and Resistance in Mission Education* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2003), 76, 126.

<sup>4</sup> See Jeff B. Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856–7*, (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> Cheyne, *The Ten Years’ Conflict*, 12.

<sup>6</sup> *Kaffir Express* (an international missionary journal published by Lovedale Press), June 1871, UNISA.

This was an ideal explanation of the “three-self” theory that was so influential from the latter part of the nineteenth century and deeply influenced the mission policy of the United Free Church of Scotland (UFCoS) but who was to do this stirring up? This raised the issue of the relative roles of missionaries and local black people in the South African Presbyterian context. The UFCoS Foreign Mission Committee (FMC) saw this as the role of its missionaries. The purpose of this paper is to investigate why it took one hundred years for an autonomous black church to be established by the Scottish Presbyterian Mission in South Africa, why the process gained momentum after 1898 as the result of the Mzimba secession from the Scottish mission and the subsequent formation of the Presbyterian Church of Africa, and to trace the development towards the formation of the Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa in 1923. Internally, at this time locally-initiated churches had only been formed by seceding from mission churches. Externally, the context was the developing policy of the Foreign Mission Committee (FMC) of the Free Church of Scotland (FCoS) which aimed to transfer leadership to autonomous black churches in the face of opposition of missionaries who were ensconced in positions of authority within mission councils, established in 1866, at the behest of the Free Church of Scotland (FCoS) because they felt strongly that black people were not yet capable of assuming authority. The arrival of a younger generation of missionaries facilitated the process leading to the establishment of the first of the black churches by a church of European origin in which the FCoS was a leader. This study will focus largely on the records of the FCoS, although this is somewhat problematic.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Early History of the Scottish Mission**

The Scots Confession was one of the formative documents of the Church of Scotland established in 1560. It is headed with the quotation of Matthew 24:14, “and this glad

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<sup>7</sup> An important secondary source for this paper is David Burchell, “The Origins of the Bantu Presbyterian Church in South Africa,” *South African Historical Journal* 9 (1977), 39–58, the first attempt to trace the constitution of the Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa (BPCSA). Although I have been interested in this subject since I began studying for my master’s degree in 1995, I have been unable to verify a number of the references in Burchell (1977) due to several reasons. The Lennox papers have been transferred from the Howard Pym Africana Library (HPAL) to the National Heritage and Cultural Studies Center (NAHECS), at the University of Fort Hare (UFH), and have been recatalogued. The records of the Presbytery of Kaffraria and the Synod of Kaffraria, remain in the Howard Pym Africana Library, UFH. Several of the references could not be traced in the Henderson and Stormont papers at the Cory Library, Rhodes University. At the time Burchell was writing, the Henderson papers were unclassified. Classification has since been completed. None of the references to documents in the RPCSA Offices in Umtata could be traced in 1996 or later. The material there was neither filed nor catalogued and a number of items have disappeared without trace since the references found in Burchell’s work (1977). Although attempts to contact David Burchell over the years have failed there is no reason to doubt the integrity of his sources and references. Following the union of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa and the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa in 1999, to form the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa, the RPCSA office in Umtata was closed and the remaining church archives were transferred to the Cory Library for Historical Research at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, where they remain uncatalogued, although this process is in process at the time of writing.

tidings of the kingdom shall be preached throughout the whole world for a witness to all nations; and then the end shall come.”<sup>8</sup> The Confession concluded with the prayer: “and let all nations cleave to the true knowledge of Thee. Amen.”<sup>9</sup> This marked it out as a missionary church. Despite the apparent commitment to foreign mission, little real action took place before the end of the eighteenth century for a variety of reasons: “The severe shortage of ministers may well have been responsible, in part, for this state of affairs as well as the internal political situation in Scotland,”<sup>10</sup> including the imposition of an episcopal form of church polity by Charles I of England in 1637–1638.

Mission in South Africa was hampered as the result of a decision taken by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1796 which stated: “To spread abroad the knowledge of the Gospel amongst barbarous and heathen nations seems to be highly preposterous, insofar as philosophy and learning must in the nature of things take the precedence: and that, while there remains at home a single individual without the means of religious knowledge, to propagate it abroad would be improper and absurd.”<sup>11</sup> As the result of this decision, foreign missionary outreach was taken up initially by voluntary societies such as the Glasgow Missionary Society.<sup>12</sup> The GMS became active in the Eastern Cape in 1821 three years prior to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to inaugurate missionary activity in the same area in 1824. However, Rev. John Ross had been ordained by the Presbytery of Hamilton in 1823 to serve in South Africa. From this modest beginning the mission grew until by the beginning of the twentieth century, it had spread throughout the eastern Cape, Natal, and had begun work in the northern Transvaal.<sup>13</sup> Until this time there had been no clear plan of development despite an overarching vision on the part of the Scottish Presbyterian church whose mission policy in South Africa, from its inception, prefigured the formation of an independent church.

As the nineteenth century progressed, that aim seemed to recede as generations of missionaries faithfully carried out their mission in the way and in the places they considered best for the advancement of Christ’s Kingdom among black South Africans. However, in the process, they brought all their western values and presuppositions about the superiority of Christian culture to bear on what they considered to be a primitive context. Yet, as their work both in evangelism and education resulted in the emergence of a group of educated black people, there was a reluctance to entrust and share responsibility

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<sup>8</sup> Arthur C. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1966), 162.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>10</sup> Graham A. Duncan, “Scottish Presbyterian Church Mission Policy in South Africa, 1898–1923” (MTh. dissertation, UNISA, 1997), 26.

<sup>11</sup> Johannes du Plessis, *A History of Christian Mission in South Africa* (London: Longmans Green, 1911), 182.

<sup>12</sup> Duncan, “Scottish Presbyterian Church Mission,” 27–29.

<sup>13</sup> John Lennox, *Our Missions in South Africa: Missions of the United Free Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Foreign Mission Committee, United Free Church of Scotland, 1911), 84–85.

to and with them. Their power was exercised through non-indigenous Mission Councils<sup>14</sup> and was imposed without consultation with blacks. This enabled their role, as well as that of Mission Councils, to be self-perpetuating. In this way the role of the courts of the church were subverted and the views of blacks were suppressed until they took courage in a time of protest and resistance to express their views cogently, and request that their views be taken seriously and acted upon that they might play their full role in the journey towards the Kingdom of God. By the close of the nineteenth century, the time had arrived when various options had to be given serious consideration for the sake of the future of the Mission. One of these options was rather drastic - secession.

I have argued elsewhere that the Mzimba Secession was a catalyst for action, which eventually resulted in the formation of the Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa.<sup>15</sup> South African historian, Les Switzer offers a comment on the context for this: “Missionary enthusiasm for ordaining African pastors was declining by the 1880s as arbiters of a segregationist culture began to separate church congregations and limit contact between white and black clergy.”<sup>16</sup> Rev. Pambani J. Mzimba had been ordained in 1875. In 1898, Mzimba, minister at Lovedale who had been raised and educated at Lovedale, and a large section of his congregation,<sup>17</sup> seceded from the Scottish Mission to form the Presbyterian Church of Africa (PCA) (part of the Ethiopian-type church movement), on the grounds that he could no longer work co-operatively with the missionaries. This occurred in a period when there were a number of secessions from mission churches for similar reasons, often including issues of responsibility, ordination and finance.<sup>18</sup> This was a stark challenge to the missionaries that their power and authority was no longer absolute. Yet, this alone does not tell the complete story as other factors were at work including United Free Church of Scotland policy, which was itself evolving as events developed. But all of this was happening against the backdrop of a wider South African context in the years following the secession to which we now turn. There were national issues at stake following the South African War (1899–1902); the progress towards the formation of the Union of South Africa (1910), the formation of the African National Congress (1912), the Land Act (1913),

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<sup>14</sup> Graham A. Duncan, “The Role of Mission Councils in the Scottish Mission in South Africa: 1864–1923,” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 38, 1 (2012), 217–34.

<sup>15</sup> Duncan, “Scottish Presbyterian Church Mission Policy in South Africa”; Graham A. Duncan, “‘African Churches Willing to Pay Their Own Bills’: The Role of Money in the Formation of Ethiopian-Type Churches with Particular Reference to the Mzimba Secession,” *African Historical Review* 45, 2 (2013), 52–79.

<sup>16</sup> Les Switzer, *Power and Resistance in an African Society: The Ciskei Xhosa and the Making of South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1993), 125.

<sup>17</sup> Karla Poewe and Ulrich van der Heyden, “The Berlin Mission Society and Its Theology: The Bapedi Mission Church and the Independent Bapedi Lutheran Church,” *South African Historical Journal* 40 (1999), 42.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 44–46.

the Bambata Rebellion (1906), the Bullhoek Massacre (1921), and various forms of protest and resistance during the 1920s in urban areas.<sup>19</sup>

The Afrikaners were bitter having lost the war and the British were anxious not to antagonize them further. The Afrikaans population demonstrated a negative attitude towards black people in the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910. This led to the subsequent opposition of many black leaders, a large number of whom had been well educated at mission schools who “were often active members of mission churches with strong British connections. Some of them had been educated in the United States and some went to the States on a trip organized by Rev. Pambani Mzimba.<sup>20</sup> Such leaders represented both traditional (adhering to traditional religious and cultural values) and modern (converted, civilized and educated) elements in South African life since the incursion of colonialism, from tribal chiefs to church and community bodies and educated black professionals, along with those drawn from the Ethiopian-type churches [e.g., Mzimba’s PCA]”<sup>21</sup> which had seceded from the control of churches of European origin as the result for frustration with the slow or non-existent pace of change towards a greater level of Africanization through inculturation and transfer of responsibility. The black leaders were influenced by notions of nationalism, and their Christian commitment challenged the racial discrimination that was entrenched in the constitution of the Union of South Africa (1910) and formed the South African Native National Congress in 1912 (renamed the African National Congress in 1923), to promote the values of justice, human rights, and freedom:

On January 8th 1912, chiefs, representatives of people’s and church organizations, and other prominent individuals gathered in Bloemfontein and formed the African National Congress. The ANC declared its aim to bring all Africans together as one people to defend their rights and freedoms.<sup>22</sup>

Mission educated Pixley ka Seme, a founding member of the SAANC, spoke at the founding conference and stated the aims of the congress: “We have called you therefore, to this conference, so that we can together devise ways and means of forming our national union for the purpose of creating national unity and defending our rights and privileges.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Duncan, “Scottish Presbyterian Church Mission Policy,” 69–71.

<sup>20</sup> Daryl N. Balia, *Black Methodists and White Supremacy in South Africa* (Durban: Madiba Press, 1991), 75.

<sup>21</sup> John W. de Gruchy, “Grappling with a Colonial Heritage: The English-Speaking Churches under Imperialism and Apartheid,” in Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport, eds., *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social and Cultural History* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1997), 156.

<sup>22</sup> African National Congress, nd., “A Brief History of the African National Congress,” <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=206> (accessed 13 May 2014); see Saul Dubow, *The African National Congress* (Stroud, UK: Sutton, 2000), 1.

<sup>23</sup> Richard V. Selope Thema, “How Congress Began,” *Drum*, July 1953, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/206854093/African-National-Congress-A-Documentary-History-of-the-Struggle-Against-Apartheid-in-South-Africa> (accessed 15 May 2014).

These rights were systematically removed during the next few years through legislation, notably the Mines and Work Act of 1911 and the Land Act of 1913.

But one sphere in which blacks were determined to assert their African and Christian identity and assume greater responsibility was in their church lives. It was during this time that two policy options other than secession began to evolve within the now United Free Church of Scotland and the South African settler and mission church communities, which will now be addressed.

### **The Two Option Policy:**

From 1900, the FMC pressed for the formation of a native church in correspondence with missionaries, the word “native” being synonymous with “indigenous.” Theoretically, it might consist of people of all races though this was certainly not clear at the time. Rev. John Lennox, a fairly recent addition to the missionary body in South Africa, interpreted this to mean a “black church.”

### **The “United Church” Option**

The FMC of the United Free Church of Scotland (UFCoS) was keen to promote its ideal of one church within which black and white would co-exist happily on an equal basis. James Henderson, a missionary of a younger generation, was probably largely correct when he commented that, “It is admitted by all that this is the Christian ideal.”<sup>24</sup> This, however, failed to take adequate account of the developing racial situation in South Africa: “there is largely prevalent among the colonists a sentiment adverse to association with the African *native*.”<sup>25</sup> It was anticipated that the predominantly white Presbyterian Church of South Africa (PCSA), established in 1897, would build up an independent “native” church in South Africa. This was an unrealistic view as the result of the racist attitude of white people towards blacks, the colonialist ethos of the church, the desire to maintain white power and authority and the early desire to unite with the Dutch Reformed Church. While it may have been “the Christian ideal. It is a direct effort to overcome racial differences by following the mind of Christ.”<sup>26</sup> This is important in the sense that Henderson was one of the new generation of missionaries who did not accept the traditional view of the *status quo* or the future of the church and mission:

The Committee ... has no reason to anticipate that any detriment would ensue to the cause of Christ from the whole of the Native Church formed by our Mission uniting on an acceptable basis, as part of it has already done, with the Presbyterian Church of South Africa. While fully alive to the serious difficulties which always attend the mingling in one Church of those with antecedents so diverse as European colonists and the Native South African peoples, the Foreign Mission Committee believes that all such difficulties will be most happily overcome by being left, as far

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<sup>24</sup> James Henderson, “Our Missions in South Africa,” 1902, MS 14849, 1–2, Cory Library for Historical Research (hereafter Cory), Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 9–10.

as possible, to be dealt with by the brethren in each of our Mission fields, trusting them to act in a spirit of loyalty to the one Lord and Head of the Church, and of kindly consideration and forbearance one towards another for His name's sake.<sup>27</sup>

This minute was agreed to in 1904 following representations by South African missionaries to the African subcommittee of the FMC. It moved against the sentiments expressed by James Stewart (see below), Lennox, and others, who opposed the concept of the “incorporating union” of the white and black sections of Scottish Presbyterianism. While a total union of South Africans in Presbyterian streams descended from Scottish roots might appear more democratic, with all participants having an equal voice, it did not necessarily lead to freedom of expression and the opportunity for development and leadership particularly among the historically disadvantaged black constituency in a united church.<sup>28</sup> The formation of the Presbyterian Church of Africa (PCA) had made Lennox realize the inadequacies of colonial mission policy and also made him critical of it:

we offer the native church the finest product of our thinking and experience, while at the same time we remove from them the discipline of thinking out these questions in relation to their own traditional life.... We could do no greater disservice than to do all their thinking for them. They must take their responsibilities on their own shoulders.... They must cast themselves on the future in faith and must garner and use the lessons of their own experience.... They are not..., to be reckoned failures.<sup>29</sup>

Lennox was trying to promote a development from the *status quo* to indigenous leadership, taking account of the significant developments amongst black people through the educational opportunities they had received at mission institutions like Lovedale and Blythswood. This involved affirming the historic contribution of missionaries and envisioning a changed role for them in the future; also, a transition in responsibility and a move away from the concept of segregation and trusteeship to that of partnership in which black people would assume leadership positions in the church. This would involve a transformation within both the missionary and black Christian communities. These rather innovative views of a younger missionary were encapsulated in the only other option available for consideration.

### The “Native Church” Option

In 1902, the paper *Our Missions in South Africa*, almost certainly written by James Henderson of Lovedale, claimed that “The Mission begins in order to create a native Church; the Mission naturally ends when the native Church has become self-supporting,

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<sup>27</sup> Foreign Mission Committee (FMC) minute, 22 March 1904, National Library of Scotland (hereafter NLS); see Henderson, “Our Missions,” MS 14849, 12, Cory.

<sup>28</sup> Bengt G. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1961), 31–32.

<sup>29</sup> Robert H.W. Shepherd, *The Separatist Churches of South Africa* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1937), 455, cited in Joan A. Millard, “A Study of Perceived Causes of Schism in Some Ethiopian-Type Churches in the Cape and Transvaal, 1884–1925” (DTh. thesis, UNISA, Pretoria, 1995), 223.



self-governing, and self-propagating,” not to mention self-reflecting and theologizing. The term “native” “meant a church proper to the country in which it was planted. Such a church might be inclusive of different races dwelling in that country.”<sup>30</sup> This interpretation was formulated by the General Assembly of United the Free Church of Scotland. This comment was significant in light of later criticisms made of an autonomous “native” church that did not achieve all that was envisaged in the short or medium terms, although its greatest success had always been in the area of self-propagation. The weakest area was always financial self-support. But, beyond this, the aim was consistent with the contemporary view of Protestant missions enunciated by Henry Venn, Rufus Anderson, and Gustav Warneck who were the originators of the concept of the “Native Church” and who “understood that local pastors should be trusted and trained to assume the government of new churches.”<sup>31</sup> The FMC agreed to support the three-self policy in 1866 for as early “as native congregations are formed, the care of them ought ass speedily as possible to be consigned to the native pastorate.”<sup>32</sup> These churches were to be under black leadership, but they were not conceived as being exclusively black for it was anticipated that white missionary support would be required for the foreseeable future.

Yet, in Scotland, the Convener of the FMC, Dr. Lindsay, claimed in 1901 that the Scottish missionaries in South Africa “do not seem to have grasped the idea of a Native Presbyterian Church”<sup>33</sup> because, he argued, it was the aim of missionaries to form a black church “in harmony with the church’s avowed policy.”<sup>34</sup> This occasioned the reintroduction of mission councils in 1901 (under Act II of the 1901 General Assembly of the United Free Church of Scotland).<sup>35</sup> However, blacks were soon to be excluded from membership of these mission councils.<sup>36</sup> This indicates that it was missionaries themselves who were obstructing development of an indigenous church. It also confirms that the idea of establishing an indigenous church was already in the minds of the FMC as Lennox refers to this being the policy of three previous conveners of the FMC,<sup>37</sup> so the policy was not even a new development. Lennox rejected Lindsay’s accusation through lack of available evidence: “We on our part have been loyal to the system we found in existence

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<sup>30</sup> Henderson correspondence, MS 14849, Cory, 1.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Reese, *Roots and Remedies: Of the Dependency Syndrome in World Missions* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2012), 27.

<sup>32</sup> Sheila M. Brock, “James Stewart and Lovedale: A Reappraisal of Missionary Attitudes and African Response in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, 1870–1905” (Ph.D. thesis, Edinburgh University, 1974), 439.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 439.

<sup>34</sup> Lennox to Henderson 24/5/1901, Letterbook of the Presbytery of Kaffraria, 28 July 1898–14 April 1904, Lennox correspondence, Howard Pym Africana library (HPAL), University of Fort Hare (UFH).

<sup>35</sup> Brock, “James Stewart,” 57; David E. Burchell, “A History of the Lovedale Missionary Institution, 1890–1930” (MA dissertation, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1979), 48.

<sup>36</sup> Act I of 1917, in *Rules and Methods of Procedure of the FMC*, 20 February 1923, RPCSA archives, Cory Library, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Lennox to Henderson, 24 May 1901, Letterbook of the Presbytery of Kaffraria 28 July 1898–14 April 1904, NLS 7799.

when appointed, and which we had no reason to believe was opposed by the [FMC] Committee's general mission policy." The policy proposal of the three aforementioned conveners was in support of the development of self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating churches. Yet, a new method of achieving this had been introduced in the form of mission councils that had been disbanded between 1881 and 1901. Other missionaries also denied the charge but correspondence and subsequent events tend to support Lindsay's view. While accepting Lennox's integrity regarding the need for policy development, it is not clear that all missionaries shared his view on this matter. This would raise the question of the indigenous nature of the PCSA when the term "colonial" more clearly expressed its ethos. Joining the newly formed PCSA (1897) would not achieve the end of severing "the leading strings of the European church"; nor would it result in the emergence of black leadership. The FMC policy, established prior to changes in 1866 and maintained by Dr. George Smith, its secretary, was that vacant congregations should be filled by black probationers (licenciates for the ministry during their final year of training) although there was little active interest in this policy, for in 1905 there were only ten black ministers in the entire Mission.<sup>38</sup> FCoS missionaries in South Africa worked under the supervision of the Synod of Kafraria and decided not to participate in the union that brought the white dominated settler Presbyterian Church of South Africa into being in 1897. This was a union that the FCoS had favored. Four members of the synod having voted in favor while ten, including Lennox, voted against joining the union. Yet, the views of black members were not clear by 1904 from the black vote in the PCSA.<sup>39</sup> Its own mission did not agree and maintained its stance until agreement was reached to form the Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa in 1923. The FCoS had favored the concept of one Presbyterian Church in South Africa.

James Stewart of Lovedale and William Stuart of Burnshill favored the idea of a black Presbyterian church, which could be inclusive of blacks and whites, quite separate from the Presbyterian Church of South Africa, and took the view that:

a Church constructed on the basis of uniting colonists and natives in one ecclesiastical fellowship must at some future time encounter difficulties occasioned by racial antagonisms which will prove disastrous to it.<sup>40</sup>

Stewart drew a distinction between the presence of Scottish missionaries in a black church along with any others who were committed to participating in a black dominated Christian community, and South African settlers who were committed to white domination in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century. In

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<sup>38</sup> Smith to Weir, 28 October 1904, in file "Mission Council 1902–1905," Lennox correspondence, NAHECS, UFH.

<sup>39</sup> Lennox to Stewart, 28 February 1904, D65/48, 23A (ix), J.W. Jagger Library, University of Cape Town, 32.

<sup>40</sup> Henderson, "Our Missions," MS 14849, Cory, 10. This was prophetic in the light of developments since the union of the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa and the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa to form the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa in 1999. As in earlier union discussions and in recent experience, this comment has proved to be accurate.

addition, Stewart considered that the new South African Presbyterian Church would have to struggle to support itself for some time, lacking sufficient personnel, finance and church management experience, not to mention an inclination for missionary work in its early days. As has already been noted, this confirms that Stewart normally took the long view of progress in mission and that black people had not reached the stage of maturity to govern themselves: "European supervision and constant direction are necessary; but with these, *if considerable time* be allowed, fairly good work can be produced"<sup>41</sup> (emphasis in original). Yet, he had support in Scotland from senior UFCoS elders and industrialists, Sir William Dunn and Lord Overtoun, among others, who felt that Scotland was not in a position to formulate policies opposed by missionaries.<sup>42</sup> Van der Spuy affirms Stewart as a "realist" who "knew the racial attitudes which existed in the South African situation."<sup>43</sup> He was Principal of the prestigious Lovedale Missionary Institution from 1870-1905 during the period associated with paternalism and trusteeship as opposed to the earlier approach of non-racialism in mission institutions. This led him to the conclusion that a black church was the only viable alternative. Yet, Stewart was not so liberal that he derived any positive benefits from the vision of an independent church such as the opportunity for blacks to develop their own gifts in a situation where they had total responsibility for their actions and consequences. Nor was he keen to ordain blacks as per the wishes of the FMC concerning "the elimination of the European and the handing over of all these older as well as new stations to native guidance and care."<sup>44</sup> Stewart viewed this prospect with great foreboding: "We know what will happen if this takes place."<sup>45</sup> This would imply a change in the *status quo* and he foresaw the prospect of chaos arising out of black people being set up to fail by being given too much responsibility prematurely.

Despite his support for a black church, Stewart was not confident that this was an imminent prospect. His view was that the time was "not yet" opportune and that "the African would need the Anglo-Saxon alongside of him for the next 50 or 100 years."<sup>46</sup> Stewart viewed missionaries as overseers, reflecting his paternalist attitudes towards black people. Rev. David Stormont, Principal of Blythswood Institution in the Transkei, shared Stewart's attitude in this matter claiming that the older generation of missionaries encouraged the belief among black ministers ordained within the Scottish mission that the missions were their inheritance, as can be seen from Stewart's sponsorship of Rev. Pambani J. Mzimba, one of the first black ministers ordained by the Scottish mission in 1875. Stormont objected to the idea that missionaries should do pioneering work: "they

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<sup>41</sup> James Stewart, *Lovedale: South Africa* (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1894), 19.

<sup>42</sup> Burchell, "The Origins of the Bantu Presbyterian Church," n 43, n. 28.

<sup>43</sup> Denis D. Van Der Spuy, "The Origins, Growth and Development of the Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa" (BD Thesis, Rhodes University, 1971), 29.

<sup>44</sup> Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets*, 30.

<sup>45</sup> Stewart to Roberts 26/12/1902, private collection of Roberts papers, Mr. P. van Lill, in Burchell, "Origins of the Bantu Presbyterian Church," 44.

<sup>46</sup> South African Native Affairs Commission, II, 44980 (Cape Town: *Cape Times*, 1905), 911.

[blacks] want routine work and a fixed salary.”<sup>47</sup> It is fair to say this from the position of being in receipt of a regular guaranteed stipend. Scottish missionaries had this as pioneers, black ministers did not, and what stipends they did have were substantially lower than their white colleagues.<sup>48</sup>

Henderson and Lennox presented the opposite argument. They believed that missionaries had to occupy a continually decreasing role indicating a potential change in policy. Regarding the missionaries, Brock comments: “There were few who managed to rise above..., natural handicaps [i.e., imposed by Victorian imperialist society], few whose imagination could so overcome contemporary prejudice and mores as to commend to their followers the adoption of alternatives.” They were “typical of that younger generation of missionaries”<sup>49</sup> such as Henderson and Lennox at the beginning of the twentieth century who were “filled with the ideals of a self-governing church.” In saying this, Sundkler notes that the emergence of these missionaries coincided with the worst period of secessions.<sup>50</sup>

### **The Ongoing Effects of the Mzimba Secession**

The assessment of Shepherd (one of Stewart’s successors at Lovedale Institution) that the Mzimba Secession, which had led to a separation from the Scottish mission in 1898, had no significant impact on the African church nor on Scottish missions is not accurate for it had an ongoing psychological effect on Scottish missionaries.<sup>51</sup> This was especially so for James Stewart, for it had “caused him great anxiety and taken greatly from his strength.”<sup>52</sup> The evidence points to the contrary and even scholars such as Burchell did not give the secessionary movement sufficient credit. Further, the period 1880–1910 witnessed a spate of secessions from missions in South Africa, including the Tsewu secession of 1906.<sup>53</sup> Burchell says that it “contributed much to the turmoil, uncertainty and anxiety in the Scottish mission field particularly in the first decades of the twentieth century.”<sup>54</sup> But he does not discuss its impact on black Christians. His conclusion is more true of the missionaries than the black church members because they had more to lose in terms of power and influence. While it is difficult to assess the degree to which Mzimba affected thinking with regard to future mission policy, he envisaged a time when the PCA might enter into an arrangement with another church, presumably the PCSA, He failed to secure

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<sup>47</sup> Stormont to Auld, 18 March 1910, MS 7352, Stormont papers, Cory.

<sup>48</sup> Millard, “Perceived Causes of Schism,” 222.

<sup>49</sup> Brock, “James Stewart and Lovedale,” 430.

<sup>50</sup> Millard, “Perceived Causes of Schism,” 222.

<sup>51</sup> Robert H.W. Shepherd, *Lovedale: South Africa, 1824–1955* (Lovedale, South Africa: Lovedale Press, 1971), 59–60.

<sup>52</sup> Lindsay to Stormont, 20 October 1898, MS 14303, Stormont papers, Cory Library.

<sup>53</sup> Graham A. Duncan, “‘Pull Up a Good Tree and Push It Outside?’: The Rev Edward Tsewu’s Dispute with the Free Church of Scotland Mission,” *Ned Geref Teologiese Tydskrif (NGTT)* 53, 1 & 2 (2012), 50–61.

<sup>54</sup> Burchell, “The Origins of the Bantu Presbyterian Church,” 47.

recognition by the FCoS but foresaw: “a time when, while we control our own church matters, there will be incorporation or federation with the Colonial Presbyterian Body.”<sup>55</sup>

Following the Mzimba secession, schism remained a threat and a reality. Referring especially to the missions at Macfarlan and Rainy, Lennox wrote to Lindsay of the FMC that “Mzimba is unceasingly active in trying to increase his following by breaking up existing missions”<sup>56</sup> This was also true at Gordon Memorial mission in Msinga, Natal, and was confirmed in 1909 in a *communique* on the FC mission:

Since 1898 ... certain of the native converts have been unsettled by movements which have affected other missions in South Africa. In a very few of the outstations week-day and Sabbath schools work has been temporarily arrested, chiefly, it is understood, through the unsettlement of the population among which the schools are situated.<sup>57</sup>

The South African Native Affairs Commission Report of 1905, reported that anti-white feeling throughout South Africa was attracting seceders who had been loyal to the missions of the sending churches until that time. Some of the attraction had its source in black ministers from different denominations meeting together in local fraternals to discuss issues that concerned them such as their conditions of service and the risk of losing even these if members of their congregations seceded.<sup>58</sup>

Further, in 1909, Henderson sought an accommodation with Mzimba as the result of problems relating to land tenure, overlapping congregational boundaries and disputes concerning secession, but not, from a genuine desire for rapprochement. His main concern was the time and energy wasted in fighting one another compared to what could have been achieved in trying to further the mission of the Kingdom. He was concerned that the emphasis on mission was on proselytizing one another's members rather than on evangelizing the unconverted Mzimba agreed and promised to try to end “this time of dissension and strife.”<sup>59</sup> Mzimba viewed the missionaries as being directly responsible for the secession because “we generally see things in different (disagreeing)(emphasis in original) ways which introduces bad feeling and distrust.”<sup>60</sup> There were “religious difficulties” and others such as matters relating to stipends, discipline, responsibility, racism, and the nature and forms of African religious expression, plus a desire “to work independently thinking that it might work better that way.”<sup>61</sup> Mzimba added that “[o]ur

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<sup>55</sup> South African Native Affairs Commission (SANAC), vol. 2, 10907, 793.

<sup>56</sup> 23 June 1898, Letterbook of the Presbytery of Kaffraria, 28 July 1898–4 April 1904, Lennox correspondence, HPAL, UFH.

<sup>57</sup> Cowan and Dalmahoy to Simpson and Marwick, 3/6/1909, in file “Synod 1909,” Lennox correspondence, NAHECS, UFH.

<sup>58</sup> SANAC, “The Church Separatist Movement,” paras. 319–321. South African Native Affairs Commission, 1903–1905 (Cape Town: Cape Times, 1905).

<sup>59</sup> Henderson to Lennox, 7/4/1909, in file “Synod 1909,” Lennox correspondence, NAHECS, UFH.

<sup>60</sup> Minutes of Presbytery of Kaffraria, 15 April 1898, HPAL, UFH.

<sup>61</sup> SANAC, vol. 2, 10893, 10901, 793.

experience is that the missionaries of the United Free Church are at present unable to understand the South African native or work with them. The minds of the Natives have been occupied with secessions and attempts at union.”<sup>62</sup> After almost eighty years of mission in the Eastern Cape black people had become increasingly frustrated in their failed attempts to prove themselves worthy of responsibility in church affairs. Even those who had received an excellent education at mission institutions, like Lovedale, and had proved faithful in their chosen vocations, like Mzimba, were denied equality and were never able to meet the standards required by their missionary mentors. This was not conducive to the growth of the mission.

Lennox reflected on the years 1910–1922 as “a period of no outstanding spiritual movement.” Like Henderson, Lennox believed that too much time and energy had been spent, and was still being spent, fighting the secessionists rather than focusing on their missionary obligation. This was an error on the part of the missionaries because they could have come to the conclusion that the secession was a natural, but forced, result of their missionary work based on the three-self approach.<sup>63</sup> Lennox claimed this on behalf of blacks, but matters related to both secession and union had also depleted missionary energy. However, he did feel that advances had been made in race relations because both the missionaries had to continue to work in the same areas and communicate with one another despite their differences and because families were split between both groups despite the fact that no settlement with the secessionists was achieved. Early in 1923 Rev. S.W. Njikelana attempted to form a union of all the black presbyterian missions. But missionaries thought it was too late for such an agreement.<sup>64</sup>

Burchell considers influences other than the Mzimba Secession for the problems that attended the years between 1898 (the Mzimba secession) and 1923 (the formation of the Bantu Presbyterian Church).<sup>65</sup> One was the FMC’s desire for a union between the mission churches and the PCSA. Since 1907, this had caused dissension among black ministers and office bearers who favored pursuing the spirit of the “Basis of Union” (May 1900) for developing a “Native” church predominantly governed by blacks themselves. Rev. R. Mure, in 1908, argued that: “The discussion of alternative solutions of the present difficulty in the presence of natives is calculated to bring about the very split we desire to avoid.”<sup>66</sup> Secession had made the discussion about union extremely sensitive especially at missions like Pirie where the minister and elders complained that the issue was being forced while other significant issues were being evaded; there had been no presbytery visitations for some time, finances were in a very poor state and no records had been kept

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<sup>62</sup> Shula Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion: The 1906–1908 Disturbances in Natal* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), 179.

<sup>63</sup> To J.H. Oldham, 11 December 1922, in file “Personal 1919–1922,” Lennox correspondence, NAHECS, UFH.

<sup>64</sup> Lennox to Henderson, 29 September 1922, Henderson correspondence, Cory Library, in Burchell, “The Origins of the Bantu Presbyterian Church,” 49.

<sup>65</sup> Burchell, “The Origins of the Bantu Presbyterian Church,” 49ff.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

for twenty years. Interference was likely to produce suspicion, which might in turn lead to further secession and the main purpose of achieving the growth of a black church could be defeated. Mure was concerned about missionaries' anxieties in the light of "divisions between some of the missionaries and some of the Bantu ministers, and between the former United Presbyterian side and the former Free Church side of the Mission."<sup>67</sup> All of this had an unsettling effect on ordinary church members.

Black ministers and office bearers made it clear that no change would be welcome if it altered relations with the UFCoS, and that included union with the PCSA. They were proud of their Free Church heritage in building up work among blacks during the nineteenth century and in virtually constituting it an "Order" in the FC with blacks "being trained to conduct business and to accept responsibility both in maintaining ordinances, and in sending the Gospel to the heathen."<sup>68</sup> The Mzimba Secession ruptured this policy of empowerment. UFCoS ministers (mainly white) and elders (mainly black) were not prepared to support union with the PCSA and those who did support union were motivated by their concern to maintain unity in their congregations. Rev. Elijah Makiwane, of the Macfarlan congregation neighboring Lovedale and a friend and colleague of Mzimba, who remained with the mission, spoke out at a Presbytery meeting at Lovedale, claiming that if members were coerced into joining the PCSA, both the PCSA and the Presbytery "would lose them to the last man."<sup>69</sup> Probably the only benefactor would be Mzimba's PCA if the FMC pushed its policy towards union with the PCSA. In the end, the FMC came to the conclusion that:

wisdom lay in allowing in the meantime that each section [of the mission] should continue to strengthen and consolidate all its efforts and forces just as they would have done if there was no question of Union being discussed, rather than allow any side to stand paralysed by the hope or proposal of Union.<sup>70</sup>

Throughout the period following the Mzimba secession, the PCA offered an alternative home to discontented members of the Presbytery of Kaffraria and beyond, especially those who were not enamored by the prospect of becoming members of the PCSA. During this period they had seen little to attract them in this direction and the PCA was an alternative prospect if they were denied their own autonomous church.

### **A Change of Plan**

When John Lennox spoke to the General Assembly of the PCSA in 1913, he proposed a plan that came to fruition in 1914. Along with James Henderson, Elijah Makiwane, John Knox Bokwe, and Holfort Mama, Lennox was appointed by the Synod of Kaffraria to a

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<sup>67</sup> "Union," attached to Mission Council minutes, 5 August 1908, on Mission Council minute, 1908–1915, BPC Office, Umtata, in Burchell, "The Origins of the Bantu Presbyterian Church," 50.

<sup>68</sup> Memorandum of Native Ministers and Office-bearers, UFCoS Missions, SA, 26 September 1908, file "Synod," Lennox correspondence, NAHECS, UFH.

<sup>69</sup> Report of Makiwane, 29 April 1908, file "Synod," Lennox correspondence, NAHECS, UFH.

<sup>70</sup> Memorandum of Native Ministers and Office-bearers, 26 September 1908, file Presbytery, HPAL, UFH.

joint consultation along with representatives of the PCSA. Their remit was to consider the possibility of formulating an agreement on ways of co-operating in the mission field “so as to maintain the unity of the Church and at the same time admit of the native section of the Christian community assuming duties and responsibilities that are properly theirs.”<sup>71</sup> This agreement was achieved in theory, but the *status quo* of separation within a federal structure remained because:

In the opinion of the conference the organisation of native Presbyteries and Synod would meet the existing situation.... The relationship of the Synod to the General Assembly should include the right of appeal, submission to the Assembly of reports of work, and consideration of questions arising from the relationship of the Synod with non-synodical areas of mission work.<sup>72</sup>

This view excluded mission outreach and focused on internal ecclesiastical matters. In addition, within this proposed federal arrangement, there was to be mutual representation in the highest courts of the PCSA and the Presbyteries with the Synod of Kaffraria. The FMC approved the outcome of the report. However, the position of the Presbytery of Kaffraria became anomalous as the result of the union of the UPCoS and FCoS missions in 1900, since missionaries in the Kaffrarian Mission Council were unhappy about Synod having property vested in its name rather than in the Trustees of the UFCoS. This concern arose out of fear of further secessions, fear of black control of property and an attempt to limit the Presbytery’s power.

A further anomaly continued to be the existence of two Mission Councils in Transkei and Kaffraria, with yet another in Natal. On behalf of the FMC, its Secretary, Rev. Frank Ashcroft, questioned the possibility of “the formation of one General Council” on the grounds that “this will be *as* great [a] help as the one Native Church”<sup>73</sup> (emphasis in the original). However, because there was no initial enthusiasm in the Transkei Mission Council, the FMC hesitated to approve the union,<sup>74</sup> though it advocated the desirability of devolving responsibility for specified areas to native pastors and of having one general Mission Council meeting annually with three sub-councils.<sup>75</sup> The Transkei Mission Council considered the proposal inappropriate and favored the formation of sub-councils attached to Presbyteries.<sup>76</sup> Its conservatism at this time may be noted from the mission councils’ attitude to the place of women in the church, which “idea is neither practicable nor greatly desired.”<sup>77</sup> Since the disbandment of mission councils in 1881, their

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<sup>71</sup> Conference Report, 14 May 1914, BPC Office, Umtata, in Burchell, “The Origins of the Bantu Presbyterian Church,” 52.

<sup>72</sup> FMC, 15 September 1914, minute 3155, NLS.

<sup>73</sup> Ashcroft to Lennox, 29 September 1914, file “Synod” 1914–1916, Lennox papers, Box F76-83, NAHECS, UFH.

<sup>74</sup> FMC, 20 July 1915, minute 3514, NLS.

<sup>75</sup> FMC, 29 April 1913, Minute 2682, Ashcroft to Lennox, Box 10, F76-83, NAHECS, UFH.

<sup>76</sup> FMC, 16 November 1915, minute 3614:4, NLS.

<sup>77</sup> FMC, 21 December 1915, minute 3642:4, NLS.



reintroduction in 1901, and subsequently, there had been considerable change in the demography of missionaries. This was the “high imperial era” and the “high missionary era” during which the number of missionaries, especially women had increased substantially.<sup>78</sup> This was the result of the development of medical mission that required nurses and educational developments, which needed teachers such as at Emgwali Institution Girls’ School in the Eastern Cape. The FMC approved the union of the two mission councils, which became the Kaffraria Mission Council<sup>79</sup> in 1917 despite opposition from some Transkei missionaries, including Rev. W. Auld.<sup>80</sup>

The FMC also wanted clarification of the position of the Natal Mission Council concerning union. The Natal council was prepared to unite with the Kaffrarian Mission Council but it expressed concern about being swamped by the greater number of missionaries and black members in the Cape. It argued for proportional representation and for the same in representative bodies. The Kaffrarian Mission Council had twenty-four missionaries and its area contained 15,379 members, while the Natal Mission Council had four missionaries and 6,490 members respectively.<sup>81</sup> The FMC asked them to reconsider on the point of proportional representation.<sup>82</sup> The Natal Mission Council agreed on the conditions as stated.<sup>83</sup> The Kaffrarian Mission Council was pleased with the prospect and “sees no insuperable barrier to union”<sup>84</sup> referring to differences of attitude toward polygamy in the Natal Mission Council, which was more liberal and more accepting though it did not approve the practice. The place of the Natal Mission Council was not to be resolved until after the formation of the BPCSA.

From the union of the FCoS and the UPCoS in 1900 discussions had been under way in Scotland concerning the union of the two FMC’s of the former FCoS and UPCoS. The FMCs proposed that male and female members should be members of mission councils with equal rights as it was perceived that there was no need to separate work. It was the existence of two committees in Scotland that had necessitated a separation of business in South Africa. Mission Councils had been dealing with proposals dealt with by two committees “differing in their point of view as is inevitable when one committee consists mainly of men and the other mainly of women.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Andrew Walls, “British Missions,” in T. Christensen and W.R. Hutchison, eds., *Missionary Ideologies in the Imperialist Era* (Aarhus, Denmark: Forloget Aros, 1982), 191–99.

<sup>79</sup> 21 March 1916, Minute 3746, HPAL, UFH.

<sup>80</sup> FMC, 17/7/1917, minute 4151:5, NLS.

<sup>81</sup> FMC, 20 September 1921, minute 5669, NLS.

<sup>82</sup> 21 March 1922 Minute 5904:1, NLS.

<sup>83</sup> Lennox to Standing committee, 4 September 1922, NAHECS, UFH; FMC, 16 October 1922, Minute 6166; 21 November 1922, minute 6194, NLS.

<sup>84</sup> FMC, 17 April 1923, Minute 6407, NLS.

<sup>85</sup> FMC, 16 January 1923, Appendix: Report of Special Committee on *Assembly’s Remit on Amalgamation*, NLS.

A further advance was achieved when the newly formed Kaffrarian Mission Council agreed that, “the time has now come in South Africa to invite certain outstanding natives to sit as members of the Mission Council.”<sup>86</sup> This was, indeed, a significant move; it is obvious that missionaries as members of the Mission Council will do the choosing. Thus “outstanding” might be equivalent to “acceptable” and “quiescent.” The Kaffrarian Mission Council proposed adding one member to represent each Presbytery on the Mission Council “and that it be the concern of the Council, as sanctioned by the Foreign Mission Committee, to devolve progressively upon the highest court of the Native Church the duties heretofore belonging to the Council.” This was referred by the Kaffrarian Mission Council to the Africa sub-committee of the FMC to consult with other Mission Councils and report.<sup>87</sup> The Commission on Union<sup>88</sup> refused to recommend this proposal feeling that it was a matter that could be discussed after the birth of the new church.

Arising out of the 1914 conference, Lennox had sought to address the problem of the relationship between the white and black sections of the Christian community. The situation required some degree of sensitivity for:

It was easy to fail here, easy for the individual missionary to forget the temporary character of his mission office and to fail to shape his work in preparation for a day when the mission will be withdrawn and replaced by the permanent native church; easy for the church through a high sense of its Christian duty and a noble scorn of racial distinctions in the church, when we are one in Jesus Christ, to place black and white in a juxtaposition and professed equality of standing in the sight of God, in which the native Christians quite unintentionally but really shall be overshadowed and dwarfed by their European brethren.<sup>89</sup>

In this, Lennox was being farsighted for he took account of contemporary FMC mission policy that confirmed the temporary nature of mission and the desire to establish a black church. This was a reminder to his missionary colleagues who had become comfortable in their positions in the mission. He was well aware of the situation of racial tension that had become normative in the country. White people were susceptible to view the uneducated state of black people as they were almost a hundred years earlier when the mission was inaugurated. Apart from Henderson, few missionaries shared his vision. It was clear that neither union with the PCSA nor the formation of a native church would satisfy everyone as Lennox was well aware:

You [the PCSA and its missionaries] have stood for the visible unity of all in one church. We have stood for the liberty of development of the Native Christian community which we believe was not sufficiently secured by your method. Each

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<sup>86</sup> FMC, 1617/1918, Minute 4397:1, NLS.

<sup>87</sup> FMC, 17 April 1923, Minute 6407:8, NLS.

<sup>88</sup> Draft resolutions of *Committee on Relations with Other Churches*, Lennox correspondence, NAHECS, UFH.

<sup>89</sup> Lennox to PCSA General Assembly, 20 September 1915, “Synod 1914–1916,” Lennox correspondence, NAHECS, UFH.

side had, I believe, been conscious that it lacked something and had not reached finality.<sup>90</sup>

Lennox was moving towards the 1914 solution of a synthesis of an independent synod with mutual representation where black Christians would have the freedom to organize and structure their church according to their own mission and vision, and where contact would be maintained between black and white, allowing for consultation between Presbyteries and congregations. However, this would not alleviate the possible problem of white (PCSA) ministers dominating proceedings of Synod and intimidating black members. The PCSA, by this time had had twenty years of experience as a church plus considerable business, commercial and legal expertise at its disposal compared with black presbyterians who had none.<sup>91</sup> Rev. John H. Soga preferred the idea of union with other black churches, a point also suggested by Henderson.<sup>92</sup> The Congregational Church was already talking to African Presbyterians as well as to the PCSA.

During this time the PCSA continued to hope that union might be effected. As early as 1915, it had expressed a desire for closer relationships with the Synod of Kafraria and in 1916 approved a Draft Basis of Union that had been adopted by the Synod. On 18 September 1916, the General Assembly of the PCSA resolved to:

instruct the Native Mission Committee to forward in every way possible the movement towards union of the Missions of the United Free Church of Scotland in Kafraria and Natal with our Church.<sup>93</sup>

The Presbytery of Kafraria declared such a step “impracticable” and by 1919 there was still no agreement on union despite the adopted view that “an approximation to it has been attained.”<sup>94</sup> There was still a hope in the FMC that agreement might be achieved by May 1920. This was not to be. It was realized that it was a futile exercise at that point in view of the degree of opposition that existed on the side of black ministers and elders in the missions, and some influential missionaries like Henderson and Lennox who exercised a strong influence on the Synod of Kafraria, the superior court of the Free Church Mission. They believed that the autonomy of the Synod was vital in the progress towards the evolution of an independent mission church. In 1920, Lennox described it as a “true native court.”<sup>95</sup> For Henderson, it was virtually an independent organization whose business was dealt with in good spirit. Lennox was convinced that there was a possibility that “the

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<sup>90</sup> Lennox to PCSA General Assembly, 20 September 1915, “Synod 1914–1916,” Lennox correspondence, NAHECS, UFH.

<sup>91</sup> T.B. Soga to Lennox, 15 November 1920, “Commission on Union,” Lennox correspondence, NAHECS, UFH.

<sup>92</sup> Draft of Committee on Relations with Other Churches, Henderson correspondence, in Burchell, “The Origins of the Bantu Presbyterian Church,” 157.

<sup>93</sup> PCSA General Assembly Minutes, Ac 1971/Ah1.3.-1.4., William Cullen Library (WCL), University of the Witwatersrand.

<sup>94</sup> PCSA General Assembly Minutes Ac 1971/Ah1.3.-1.4., WCL.

<sup>95</sup> Lennox to Soga, 27 November 1920, Commission on Union, Lennox correspondence NAHECS, UFH.

material of Native Christianity is ... still so sufficiently plastic that it may initially set into a mould different from any of the recognised European patterns.”<sup>96</sup> It would take some time before an evaluation could be made of this prediction in the areas of worship, discipline, doctrine and ecclesiastical dress, or whether the South African church would become a replica of its Scottish counterpart. For Henderson, white control stifled indigenous development. Missionaries would still be required in a distinctive church but in the role of “advisers, not the devisers of policy”<sup>97</sup> This was a vain hope in view of the continued existence of mission councils in the post-1923 period and the strong views of the personnel involved. Lennox preferred a more grass roots democratic approach and was critical of the Anglican experiment of incorporating the Order of Ethiopia into a multiracial church:

The whole system of Church government, all the regulations for worship, everything in fact which gives outward expression to the belief and permanent form to the Church is imposed from above on that which is below.<sup>98</sup>

Consequently, he would never have agreed to a federal arrangement with the PCSA.

Burchell argues that Henderson and Lennox had confidence in the ability of the African to reshape Christianity in an original and meaningful way.<sup>99</sup> This came to be especially true of the Women’s Christian Association (*uManyano*), formed in 1893, and the Young Men’s Christian Guild (*amaDodana*). They based their case on the *status quo* where:

The mission fields are passing into the hands of Native converts as pastors and officebearers. Christianity is beginning to take on a South African garb and adapt itself to the genius of the African people.<sup>100</sup>

This was the situation Rev. Frank Ashcroft and Mr. Andrew Houston of the FMC came to South Africa to try to resolve in 1920. Their mission was to establish the Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa.

## **The Formation of the Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa**

### **Preparations for a New Birth**

In 1920, two United Free Church of Scotland FMC deputies, Rev. Frank Ashcroft and Mr. Andrew Houston, were sent to South Africa to deal with the issue of bringing together the two branches of the Scottish Mission in South Africa. Burchell points out one innovation

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<sup>96</sup> Report of the Proceedings of the Third GMCSA, July 1909, 84, in Burchell, “The Origins of the Bantu Presbyterian Church,” 45.

<sup>97</sup> David E. Burchell, “The Origins of the Bantu Presbyterian Church in South Africa,” *South African Historical Journal*, 9, 1977, 45.

<sup>98</sup> GMCSA, July 1909, 88, in Burchell, “The Origins of the Bantu Presbyterian Church,” 46.

<sup>99</sup> Burchell, “The Origins of the Bantu Presbyterian Church,” 45.

<sup>100</sup> Henderson to Smith, 7 January 1908, Cory Library, unclassified correspondence, in Burchell, “The Origins of the Bantu Presbyterian Church,” 45.

in the approach adopted by the Deputies: “they came prepared to listen to the demands of these [black] ministers” which may have been the actual catalyst for the resulting establishment of a black church.<sup>101</sup> During his visit, Ashcroft addressed the 1920 General Assembly of the PCSA in support of uniting the missions. In response, Rev. J. Pollock of the PCSA proposed that:

This Assembly in view of the strong desire of the United Free Church of Scotland ... to have the congregations connected with their missions in Kaffraria and the Transkei united under one ecclesiastical authority, agrees to give the Presbyteries of Kaffraria and Mankazana full power to decide on the question of union with the Synod of Kafraria, leaving for future consideration the relationship to be established between the enlarged body thus formed, and this Presbyterian Church of South Africa.<sup>102</sup>

The purpose of this proposal was to remove pressure from the black Eastern Cape presbyteries in order that they might decide for themselves whether they wanted to remain part of the PCSA or re-establish their previous relationship with the Synod of Kafraria. In unanimously agreeing to this proposal, the PCSA appointed members to attend a conference at Blythswood Institution on 20 October 1920. Also present were representatives from the Mission Synod of Kafraria, the Presbyteries of Kaffraria, Mankazana and Natal, and the Mission Council of Natal. This conference was called to resolve the anomalous situation that had arisen over the existence of the two separate branches of the UFCoS mission and the deputies urged accordingly. They had already come to the conclusion that the relationship with the PCSA could be dealt with at a later stage because it was no longer considered a vital part of the issue of having one mission entity to deal with. The Commission on union was well balanced in terms of black and white, ministers and elders.

In their Blythswood Report of 21 December 1920, to the FMC the deputies stated that their views were “evidently in parts not quite welcome to all the missionaries.”<sup>103</sup> Some missionaries did not want a return to the previous *status quo* of missionary domination; others did. They reported that there were 15,000 members in the mission church and that the period of expansion was over. The deputies felt that the areas evangelized could have seen greater success had they been “more homogeneous and more limited in extent.”<sup>104</sup> Too much development had been carried out at the whim of individual missionaries without sufficient control or strategy.<sup>105</sup> The deputies considered that the mission council had failed in this regard because of “lack of union in the Mission between the missionaries formerly belonging to the Free Church and the United Presbyterian Church.” In the view of Ashcroft and Houston, the situation had improved,

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<sup>101</sup> Burchell, “The Origins of the Bantu Presbyterian Church,” 55.

<sup>102</sup> PCSA General Assembly Minutes, 20/9/1920, Ac 1971/Ahl.3.-1.4., WCL, 225.

<sup>103</sup> Ashcroft and Houston, Blythswood Report to FMC, 15 February 1921, Minute 5298, Appendix 1:4, National Library of Scotland (NLS).

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. Appendix 1:3.

but they also believed that “control in the future must be with the Native Church speaking through its Ecclesiastical Courts and not with the Mission Council.” This was necessary due to the development of competence in the black ministry and eldership and a sign of their confidence in black leadership.<sup>106</sup>

They highlighted the problem—the mission council that they had hoped would be the unifying bond of their South African missions “proved unequal to the task, torn as it was, by controversies over the question of our union.” They also commented on the “highly unsatisfactory state of affairs in Natal where overlapping was much in evidence.” This resulted from missionaries engaging in mission work in fields outside their own missions without consulting with colleague missionaries. This could have been avoided if comity agreements had been in place or if the expansion of mission work was under the control of the Presbytery of Natal. Union with the PCSA had not achieved significant benefits. Black Presbyterians were not happy with the discussion of colonial church business being forced on them. It was alien to them and did not engage with their lives, religious or otherwise. The Deputies reported that the General Assembly of the PCSA was:

evidently mainly concerned with the work of the colonial congregations ... not a suitable supreme court for the Kafir congregations, nor a useful Assembly for the Kafir ministers, who would be much more at home in a united synod of their own.<sup>107</sup>

There was also the memory of failed negotiations in the recent past. On the other hand, separation from the Synod of Kafraria had produced great problems.

The conference resulted in a “new and bolder” proposal to unite the Synod of Kafraria and the Presbytery of Kaffraria, which would take over much of the work previously carried out by the mission council. The place of missionaries was an issue and Synod and Presbytery felt that the FMC should express its mind on the appointment of missionaries along with the mission council and new appointments should be made jointly between the synod and the mission council, with the ultimate aim of reducing the number of missionaries in congregational appointments. However, the Deputies recommended that missionaries be full members of the enlarged synod. The new body should be responsible for evangelism and the withdrawal of missionaries should begin. The strength of anti-white feeling among blacks was acknowledged along with the lack of unity among missionaries that was impeding the growth of the Mission. The Deputies considered their proposal to be proactive: “to meet the desire for more independence by such a scheme as we suggest seems to us to be true Christian statesmanship.”<sup>108</sup> Their aim was “to give increasing responsibility to the Synod with a view to forming, as early as possible, an independent, self-supporting Church” and “the Mission Council should entrust as much business to it contenting itself with confirming arrangements made by it unless they seem so detrimental as to compel interference,” such was the missionaries’ *modus operandi*. The problem was that the mission council was largely ineffective as an administrative unit. Here, the

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid. Appendix 1:4.

<sup>107</sup> Report of Deputies, 21 December 1920, PR 3983, Cory, 8.

<sup>108</sup> Report of Deputies, 21 December 1920, PR3983, appendix 1:5, Cory.

deputies envisaged an elevated position and role for the Synod, including the establishment of central funds, training evangelists, the supply of students, and the production of a simplified creed. This proposal took account of the suspicion black members had for the Synod due to not being represented on it. This was an early example of positive discrimination by the deputies, which aimed to remove disparities in the relationship between synod and mission council. The same policy was to be applied in Natal, which was not, at this juncture, strong enough to replace the Mission. The Presbytery was not well developed and was too small to sustain withdrawal. The deputies acknowledged that such withdrawal of support for the mission would simply benefit the Ethiopian-type churches.

In their report, the deputies offer little knowledge or understanding of the implications of the Mzimba Secession on their arrival in South Africa:

It is disappointing to hear that a large proportion of the Lovedale congregation seceded under Mzimba about twenty years ago ... which should never have occurred. The tendency to divide over comparatively small matters has been the curse of our missions in South Africa.<sup>109</sup>

The main point of understanding is found in the comment that the secession should never have happened. The deputies made an error, encouraged by the missionaries, that this was a minor matter. It was part of an ongoing movement that was gathering momentum through the early development of a form of black consciousness influenced from within and from the United States. It was due to the dilatory attitude of missionaries who had not read the signs of the times either politically or in the ecclesiastical domain. Their views were adequately expressed in the Lovedale journal, *Kaffir Express*, and the FMC had access to these views. The missionaries still did not realize the problematic situation the secession had led to. Ecclesiastically, secessions had been occurring for over twenty years due to issues of power and control.

South Africa had been undergoing significant political change since the South African War (1899–1902). A struggle had taken place regarding the formation of the Union of South Africa (1910) and much of this discussion had been published in the black secular press.<sup>110</sup> This was a time of increasing protest and resistance marked by events such as the Bambata Rebellion (1906), the Formation of the South African Natives' National Congress (SANAC, 1912, later renamed the African National Congress [ANC]), the Land Act (1913), the Bullhoek Massacre (1921) and a variety of protests throughout the nineteen twenties.<sup>111</sup> The same lack of understanding is revealed later in the same report when the deputies commented on the riot at Lovedale in 1920. They were unable to understand the connection between the “strength of racial antagonism,... traces of which were evident to them even within the Christian Church” and what they described as “largely a domestic matter ... no doubt inspired by the new political feelings so prominent

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<sup>109</sup> Report of Deputies, PR3983:2, Cory.

<sup>110</sup> Switzer, *Power and Resistance in an African Society*, 164–92

<sup>111</sup> Graham A. Duncan, “Scottish Presbyterian Church Mission Policy in South Africa, 1898–1923” (Master’s dissertation, UNISA, Pretoria, 659–71).

in the native press” to which they were susceptible.<sup>112</sup> It is clear that Ashcroft and Houston had not been fully apprised of the political situation in South Africa prior to and at the time of their visit. They demonstrate a lack of awareness of the national implications of the food riots.<sup>113</sup> However, by the time of writing their recommendations, they had become much more aware of the mission situation arguing that too rapid withdrawal of the mission in Natal would lead to much of the work done disappearing and “the bulk of our converts would pass into the Ethiopian Church, with its strong anti-white feeling.”<sup>114</sup> The missionaries divided over the deputies’ proposals concerning the formation of an independent black church. Revs. J. Lundie, W. Stirling, and the Aulds believed the establishment of a black church reflected a racial attitude.<sup>115</sup> This was a view that was important in the decision-making context regarding the formation of the BPCSA. One united church was certainly the ideal. However, it did not take account of the racial realities of South Africa in the early twentieth century. Rev. J. Auld was subsequently nominated and declined the office of Moderator of the General Assembly of the BPCSA for this reason. The lack of readiness among black people had been used by James Stewart of Lovedale (died 1905) as a reason for delaying the formation of a black church. Stewart’s views were perpetuated by some. Rev. Tiyo B. Soga favored a black church for black people. Shepherd claimed:

It became manifest in the conference that union was desired by the whole Synod and by the Native ministers and elders of the Presbytery of Kaffraria, forming a large majority of that body, but that some of the older members of the Presbytery were unwilling to abandon an ideal to which they had clung during many years, with the approval of the Home Church.<sup>116</sup>

The Home church was the UFCoS and the union Shepherd was referring to would lead to the formation of a black church. The views of the majority prevailed and a Commission on Union was established with Rev. James Henderson as Chairperson and Rev. John Lennox as Senior Clerk. James Henderson, by now Principal of Lovedale raised an important issue with Ashcroft regarding the relationship of the Scottish missionaries and black ministers. Henderson believed that the black ministers “have not been a spiritual force in the Church nor excelled in any way in administrative work,”<sup>117</sup> yet black ministers and elders wanted unrestricted freedom. The FMC agreed that missionaries would have an equal place in the black church “for the present,” but that their contribution would decrease in time and that

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<sup>112</sup> Ashcroft and Houston, Blythswood Report to FMC, 15 February 1921, Minute 5298, Appendix 1, Riot 1:10, (NLS).

<sup>113</sup> See Duncan, *Lovedale—Coercive Agency*, 313–31.

<sup>114</sup> Report of Deputies, PR3983, Appendix 1, 12:9, Cory.

<sup>115</sup> Rough draft of Blythswood Conference, file “Commission on Union,” Lennox correspondence, NAHECS, UFH.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Henderson to Ashcroft, 28 August 1922, Henderson correspondence, Cory.



their envisaged role will become purely advisory until “they will no longer be required.”<sup>118</sup> In a multi-racial church there would be no guarantee that blacks would enjoy equal rights and status in reality, whereas in a black church no one would be specifically excluded, and where the question of control would be uppermost, especially in relation to the role of missionaries. While there was parity between Scottish missionaries and ministers in Scotland this was not the case with black ministers.

Anglican church historian Peter Hinchliffe, has suggested that “there is a direct connection between this insistence on standards and the decision to create an independent Bantu Presbyterian Church in this century.”<sup>119</sup> This instance was a significant factor, but only one amongst other instances. If the problem was that of differentials in levels of training and attainment, these would also exist in the PCSA for in neither option to resolve the situation was there parity as in the matter of stipends. Ordination would lead to parity in the Mission. Then, black ministers would, in theory at least, be eligible to be called to charges in Scotland while they were still members of a Scottish church, the UFCoS. But, it was the tradition that black missionaries should not have all the rights and privileges of their white colleagues. Black clergymen would remain, for the whole of their working lives, subordinate to the white ministers who might sometimes be quite young and inexperienced compared with their black colleagues. White missionaries might regard education as the source of longterm solutions. In the short term it seemed only to increase the tensions and frustrations between white and black clergy regarding the differentials in conditions of service. Hinchliffe expressed the view that the policy promoted by the UFCoS “provided so little scope for the emergence of a really indigenous Christianity.”<sup>120</sup>

The issue of indigenous Christianity was caused and exacerbated by the social and political circumstances of the country and it was true that: “granting full autonomy to a Native Church was something completely new in South African society.”<sup>121</sup> All of this occurred in a situation of unease (see above) where the development of the Scottish mission in the period 1898–1923 could be further destabilized as had occurred as the result of the Mzimba secession. FMC policy had aggravated this situation. It continued to promote its policy of promoting union with the PCSA stated in 1901, and again in 1909; all this in spite of the reaction of black ministers in 1908 against the idea of a multi-racial church.<sup>122</sup> A priority of the 1920 deputation was to listen to the views of black ministers and elders; the blacks concerned were educated people of some standing in the community and they had remained faithful to the Mission during, and in the aftermath of, the Mzimba Secession.

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<sup>118</sup> Lennox to Oldham, 11 December 1922, “Personal 1919–1922,” Lennox Correspondence Box 218–224, NAHECS, UFH.

<sup>119</sup> Peter Hinchliffe, “The ‘English-Speaking’ Churches and South Africa in the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 9 (December 1974), 31.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 36, 37.

<sup>121</sup> Van der Spuy, “The Origins, Growth and Development,” 41.

<sup>122</sup> Burchell, “The Origins of the Bantu Presbyterian Church,” 55.

In 1921, following the submission and consideration of the deputies' report, the FMC supported its deputies and their resolutions and reversed its previous policy of forming a multi-racial church. The deputies' opinions originated in the realization that the two mission organizations had to be united to present a united front for mission and bring about unity amongst missionaries themselves. The deputies argued, in line with Stewart's view, that the issue was a practical one to be resolved in the field and not a theoretical one to be dealt with in Scotland. Union with the PCSA produced no substantial benefits and separation from the Synod of Kafraria caused problems in a homogeneous area where two organizations were operating. There was a need for "[a]n authoritative supreme court of their own ... in which the African ministers would have a real voice."<sup>123</sup> A united church was necessary for evangelization of the entire area with suitable regional divisions and one practice and procedure. It was agreed by the FMC that the General Assembly of the UFCoS and of the PCSA were not appropriate bodies for blacks to relate to easily.

The deputies' resolutions included a note of the growth and development of the black church with a well-trained ministry and eldership "anxious" to undertake evangelism, which, until this time, had been under the control of the mission council, and the location of missionaries which was still to be done by mission council. They further advocated a reduction of missionary powers as the natural result of the above, of only appointing new missionaries in exceptional circumstances, and also reducing numbers of missionaries as suitable black ministers? became available.<sup>124</sup> This represented a novel move towards the formation of a "Native" black church and a greater sharing of responsibility with black ministers.<sup>125</sup>

A special meeting of the Kaffrarian Mission Council was called on 30 March 1921, to consider a response to the proposal of devolution of power to blacks.<sup>126</sup> It aimed to challenge this process, which would culminate in blacks assuming complete power of their own church affairs, despite reservations concerning the timing.<sup>127</sup> The view of missionaries was that, resulting from the failure to promote the union of the missions with the PCSA, the FMC adopted a reactive, rather than a proactive, role. The work of the deputies, according to some missionaries, enabled the FMC to begin financial retrenchment.<sup>128</sup> However, certain things had to be taken on board. The Mzimba Secession had seriously disrupted the mission and had the potential for further destabilization. The work of an independent Synod of Kafraria and discussions that had already taken place in

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<sup>123</sup> Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa 1971, *Souvenir Programme: 48th General Assembly of the Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1971).

<sup>124</sup> D.V.S. Sikutshwa, *Formation of the Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1946), 60.

<sup>125</sup> See FMC, 15 February 1921, Minute 5386, "South Africa—Report of Deputies," PR3983:2, Cory.

<sup>126</sup> See FMC, 23 March 1921, Minute 5518, NLS.

<sup>127</sup> Rev. D. Frazer to Henderson, 12 May 1922, unclassified Henderson correspondence, in Burchell, "The Origins of the Bantu Presbyterian Church," 56.

<sup>128</sup> Reply to FMC minute of 18 February 1921 in documents of BPCSA, Umtata, in Burchell, "The Origins of the Bantu Presbyterian Church," 56.

1910, prefigured an independent church. Blacks themselves grew to prefer the option of a black church.

In sum, the process towards union was not altogether smooth as we can note in a letter from Lennox to Ashcroft of the FMC for eventually: “we came face to face with the actual facts of the situation, sound reason and good feeling prevailed, and the Commission seemed to pass into a region of good mutual understanding and determination to co-operate.”<sup>129</sup>

### **Consummation of Union**

#### *The First General Assembly of the BPCSA*

It was agreed that “the Synod and Presbyteries be recommended to meet immediately before the convocation and General Assembly to resolve to dissolve with a view to uniting in the new church.”<sup>130</sup> The women’s associations were also invited to be present and conduct their own business concurrently, a practice which endured until the union with the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa in 1999.

The convocation of Presbyterian missions met at Lovedale on the evening of 4 July 1923, with Rev. P.L. Hunter in the Chair. After Rev. J. Lennox gave a brief historical survey of the events leading to union, the uniting missions tabled reports. The Synod of Kafraria resolved to convey to the new church all of its properties; the Presbytery of Kafraria tabled the disjunction certificates of all in the Presbytery with the exception of Rev. J. Lundie of Malan, along with the disjunction certificates in favor of the Presbytery from the PCSA. The Presbytery of Mankazana tabled its disjunction. And it was reported that the Mission Council of Natal had not been able to meet and would report subsequently. The membership of the new body amounted to 25,000 souls. Rev. William Stuart of Burnshill was then unanimously elected moderator of the General Assembly. Sundkler is wrong in his claim that Rev. Yekelo Mbali was the moderator of the first General Assembly of the BPCSA.<sup>131</sup> He was the first black moderator in 1925. Stuart then formally constituted the gathering and gave his Moderatorial Address. He commented that the coming together of the UP and FC missions with the Mission Council of Natal was “a forward step in the line of natural development” and a result of “earnest and prayerful deliberation, full and careful consideration of the many interests involved and persons specially concerned.” The highest office was open to blacks “as it ought to be,” so the new church retained the concepts of equality and parity. “The Church of Christ is for any and everyone,... irrespective of nationality, colour or tongue,”<sup>132</sup> though van der Spuy believes that this remark would have been more appropriate in the context of a united church.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Lennox to Ashcroft, 30 August 1922, Letterbook Mission Council, HPAL, UFH.

<sup>130</sup> Commission on Union, 6 February 1923, Box 12, F91-100, NAHECS, UFH.

<sup>131</sup> Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets*, 32.

<sup>132</sup> Rev. W. Stuart, Moderatorial Address at 1st General Assembly, BPCSA, General Assembly Minutes, 39.

<sup>133</sup> Van der Spuy, “The Origins, Growth and Development,” 45.

Many would disagree with this assessment (see below). Nonetheless the BPCSA “was placed in a paradoxical situation for while it claimed universality and color blindness, its very name, composition and future relationships proclaimed something different.” This was a rather negative view for it was open to all as many missionaries and a few non-missionary church workers discovered.

Rev. J. Lennox was appointed Senior Clerk, and Rev. M. Sililo of New Scotland, Natal, Junior Clerk. Thereafter, a number of representatives of other churches brought greetings to the General Assembly, as did a number of tribal chiefs “to congratulate the Presbyterian Missions on the step they had taken and to stimulate the newly formed Church to greater and nobler efforts for the spiritual uplift of the African races.”<sup>134</sup> The FMC conveyed the Extract Minute recording its satisfaction with the completion of negotiations for union. In loyal addresses to the king and the prime minister there are references to the current situation in the country: “unrest and bitterness so widely manifest in the social and political life of the world” and to moves being made “to improve the relations between the different races in the land” that demonstrate the context in which the birth of the BPCSA has occurred and the church’s social and political concern.<sup>135</sup>

### *The Name of the Church*

Sikutshwa is extremely circumspect in dealing with the name of the new church. Prior to the formation of the Church, the agreed name was “The United Presbyterian Church of South Africa” in preference to the “Native Presbyterian Church of South Africa”<sup>136</sup> although there appears to have been ongoing discussions regarding this prior to union.<sup>137</sup> Sikutshwa does not even mention this. He refers to churches being named after their founders, i.e., the retention of the designation “Presbyterian” or its Xhosa form, *Rabe*. However, he suggests that the name of the church has to be seen in the light of attempts at a solution of the “Native Problem” and avoidance of “political tactics.”<sup>138</sup> Perhaps he comes nearest to the truth when he declared the importance of avoiding a name that is too similar to that of another church, i.e., the PCSA. Here there possibly could be confusion. In fact, the PCSA objected to the proposed name of “United” church. Its General Assembly had “agreed to facilitate a Native Church in federal relationship with the Presbyterian Church of South Africa and that the name of the proposed new body failed to make this clear and further would lead to confusion in the public mind.”<sup>139</sup> “Public mind,” would have meant white mind., The Commission on Union finally decided to recommend the name of “The Bantu [People’s] Presbyterian Church of South Africa” (BPCSA).<sup>140</sup> This

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<sup>134</sup> Sikutshwa, *Formation of the Bantu Presbyterian Church*, 12.

<sup>135</sup> BPCSA General Assembly, 1923, Minute 26, 46.

<sup>136</sup> Commission on Union, 15 August 1922, Box 12, F91-100, NAHECS, UFH.

<sup>137</sup> Lennox to Soga, 25 November 1922, Letterbook, Synod of Kafraria, HPAL, UFH.

<sup>138</sup> Sikutshwa, *Formation of the Bantu Presbyterian Church*, 13.

<sup>139</sup> PCSA Blue Book, 18th September 1922:34, Johannesburg, UPCSA General Assembly Office.

<sup>140</sup> Commission on Union, 5 February 1923, Box 12, F91-100, NAHECS, UFH.

became final choice of name and was adopted by a large majority over six votes cast for “The United Presbyterian Church of South Africa.”

### **Assessment of the Decision to Form a Black Church**

The role of the Mzimba secession has never been considered as a prime factor in the formation of the BPCSA; yet it was significant in various ways. It revealed and challenged the injustices of missionary jurisdiction. It also wrested the determination of the time factor from the control of the missionaries and forced the pace of the transition to autonomy. The formation of the PCA demonstrated that autonomy was not premature and that it could work in practice and its commitment and success emulated that of the missionaries work in education. This influenced the trajectory that would lead to the birth of the BPCSA.

From its inception, the BPCSA was viewed in different ways. Some missionaries, like Revs. J. Lundie, W. Stirling and the missionaries from the Auld family, considered its formation too spontaneous and without sufficient groundwork and preparation. Others considered it an expression of black consciousness that would achieve harmony<sup>141</sup>; yet others considered it another secessionist church.<sup>142</sup> This would have been the first secessionist church that was formed as the result lengthy negotiations and the full assent of the sending church. Yet, the BPCSA was the only African church to have a voice in the 1923 Native Affairs Commission, while “the Commission showed that in church matters, the South African government considered the voice of the missionaries more important than the voice of the indigenous church.”<sup>143</sup> So it was not an African Initiated church (AIC) in the usual sense of the term. Then the BPCSA was ignored in the work of the 1925 Native Affairs Commission on AICs. Shepherd concluded that the birth of the BPCSA was “the natural development of the hundred years of South African missionary work carried on by agents of the Churches in Scotland” though this opinion was not shared by all as we have seen above.<sup>144</sup>

Burchell claims that the establishment of the BPCSA was a compromise that allowed for the retention of substantial links with the Home Church (UFCoS) and for the development of closer links with the PCSA.<sup>145</sup> It also allowed for the Home Church to continue to exercise authority through powers committed to the Mission Council of Kaffraria. Union with the PCSA would have placed severe financial constraints on the mission part of any union and may have led to withdrawal of support from Scotland on the one hand and further disruption in the form of secession on the other. The possibility of further union was never rejected.

Brock, in an attempt to evaluate the progress of the BPCSA, comments that “ecclesiastical separate development in the political circumstances of South Africa since

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<sup>141</sup> Rev. J.W. Househam, BPCSA General Assembly, 1923, minute 185.

<sup>142</sup> Chief Native Commissioner of Natal to Lennox, 26 September 1923 and reply, file “General Assembly,” Lennox correspondence, Box F228, NAHECS, UFH.

<sup>143</sup> Millard, “Perceived Causes of Schism,” 96–98.

<sup>144</sup> Shepherd, *Lovedale: South Africa, 1824–1955*, 89.

<sup>145</sup> Burchell, “The Origins of the Bantu Presbyterian Church in South Africa,” 57.

1920 have not given much scope to the Bantu Presbyterian Church and it has not proved itself a particularly inspiring example to follow.”<sup>146</sup> It is important to raise the question of “separate development” again because at no time were whites ever debarred from membership of this church. However, those who wished to be a part of this experiment had to be aware that it was a black church they were associating with and not a body that provided an opportunity to exercise control over black people. Further, from its earliest times, the BPCSA has had a so-called colored constituency. It might also be said that if the history of the BPCSA has not provided an inspiring example to follow, then this may be due, in part at least, to the fact that it continued to be dominated for many years by the sending church through its Mission Councils and missionaries.

The BPCSA has provided one “workable answer to mission problems and tensions”<sup>147</sup> which provided “an independent African church in South Africa, controlling its own affairs and becoming ultimately free of white control and having, along with autonomous government, a federal connection with the Home Church.”<sup>148</sup> This is a fair comment although, at the time, the church was not free of white control either in terms of finance or personnel while the mission council continued in existence. But, it might also be considered a belated development in the light of the inability of the FMC to discover and come to terms with the total South African context in which the moves for the establishment of a Black church originated. It was a reactive development that had its roots, at least in part, in the growth of the AIC movement whose origins were clearly traceable to the wider South African situation of the time. However, the Church of Scotland was prepared to accept the consequences of the mission policy professed by them and other Protestant missions in making the first experiment of an autonomous and segregated black church.

In the face of all this, the young church faced a number of problems including the need to secure its financial arrangements, the challenge of the political climate, its development within its own peculiar cultural milieu, the formation of a distinctive liturgy, musical tradition and theological expression, its internal responsibilities, the need to establish clear control of the appointment of overseas personnel and problems in its relationships with other reformed and particularly presbyterian bodies, especially the PCSA and PCA. This was a challenge that it had to respond to in the years following its birth. Burchell is correct to a large degree in his assessment that “the missionaries claiming superior understanding of the South African situation, had contrived to deflect the wider purpose of the Home Church and had foiled their efforts to introduce a policy which claimed to ignore racial difficulties.”<sup>149</sup> However, it was the realization in Scotland that there was a difficult situation which required to be tidied up that led to the decision concerning the Deputies’ visit to South Africa in 1920 which was the ultimate catalyst which brought the new church to birth, which church post-1923 remained “under the

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<sup>146</sup> Brock, “James Stewart and Lovedale,” 60.

<sup>147</sup> Burchell, “The Origins of the Bantu Presbyterian Church in South Africa,” 57.

<sup>148</sup> Sikutshwa, *Formation of the Bantu Presbyterian Church*, 6.

<sup>149</sup> Burchell, “The Origins of the Bantu Presbyterian Church in South Africa,” 60.

guidance of the white church [UFCOS]. Independence could, therefore, only be obtained by establishing an independent church.”<sup>150</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This paper has demonstrated the culmination of the development of Scottish Presbyterian Church mission policy in the formation of the BPCSA in 1923 after one hundred years of missionary endeavor. Its development was long in coming to fruition but, between 1901 and 1909, when the FMC reaffirmed its commitment to union with the PCSA, and in 1923, an inexorable process had begun. Numerous views exist concerning the decision to establish an independent black church from the opinion that it was a racist act to that which considered it a bold act of faith in the ability and potential of blacks to govern their own ecclesiastical affairs. It certainly was the result of an emerging black consciousness in the sense of a developing awareness and desire amongst blacks in their ability to take control of their own affairs as is seen from the rise of the AIC movement of which Ethiopianism was a part and especially the Mzimba secession. But it was not secessionist because it did not disrupt the mission; rather it was the fulfillment of the early stated intention of the Scottish Mission in South Africa.<sup>151</sup> It might be claimed that the process took too long and was a late response arising out of practical necessity, considering that the mission was established in 1824 and the Mzimba Secession occurred in 1898. Nor was it a compromise for it was a clear alternative to union with a white dominated PCSA.<sup>152</sup> It was workable and independent to a degree but the continued existence of Mission Councils limited both its independence and the freedom of blacks to act without restraint and pursue their own policies and make their own mistakes and successes.

The BPCSA that grew out of the Scottish Mission actually became subordinate to the mission council after 1923 as the result of its control of finance and missionary personnel. Its independence was restricted, therefore, by the control exercised by the UFCoS through the mission councils. Because mission councils were exclusive they were able to exist without taking any great account of the views of blacks, which were possibly not expressed in Presbytery as the result of “intimidation” by missionaries who “knew better” but understood less. The position was worse in the case of women who were not represented in any courts of the church. Little had been learned from the active role women performed, even in leadership positions, in the Scottish “voluntary” societies or in the growing *uManyano* movement. The lay organizations in the church offered scope for development and leadership that found no easy or official recognition in the church.

Sheila Brock’s criticism concerning the BPCSA as an example of ecclesiastical “Separate development” and not an “inspiring” example at that is somewhat unfair.<sup>153</sup> This was the first independent black church of its kind to be formed and its actual development

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<sup>150</sup> Millard, “Perceived Causes of Schism,” 293.

<sup>151</sup> See Shepherd, *Lovedale: South Africa, 1824–1955*, 89.

<sup>152</sup> Burchell, “The Origins of the Bantu Presbyterian Church in South Africa,” 57

<sup>153</sup> Brock, “James Stewart and Lovedale,” 60.

has been no less distinguished than many churches with a longer history and more varied experience?

Despite the lack of resources from the black community, the fact that the Mission grew prior to 1923 and the Church has survived and grown ever since its formation bears witness to the many faithful blacks who carried the Gospel enthusiastically throughout their wider community. In the final analysis, despite reservations about the ability of blacks to handle their own church affairs, the birth of the BPCSA was a triumph of realism in the South African context.