

Lesseyton: A Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Experiment in African Industrial and Theological Education

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Abstract

This article explores the long history of both industrial and theological education and ministerial formation that since the 1850s has included, inter alia: Healdtown and Lesseyton; Kamastone; D'urban (Peddie); Bollihope; Fort Hare and Rhodes Universities; the Federal Theological Seminary and John Wesley College; and Kilnerton, Pretoria. Taken together, the story of these places speaks of the Methodist Church's long-standing commitment to invest in the education and formation of those who respond to God's call to the ordained and other ministries (Seth Mokhitimi Methodist Seminary 2018). Compared with Healdtown and Kilnerton, Lesseyton institution is less well known and appreciated. Nevertheless, it played a significant role in South African education in the Eastern Cape and particularly in industrial training and education for ministry within the Methodist Church. This provides the focus for this article.

Keywords: Bertram JP; Lesseyton; Methodist Church of South Africa; ZK Mahabane

Context

The broad context of this study is the “political turmoil” (Elphick 2012, 21) caused by the century-long “Wars of Dispossession” which ravaged the Eastern Cape from the closing decades of the eighteenth century. In 1851, a war broke out between the amaXhosa and the Cape colonial authorities; many amaThembu joined the hostilities against the colonial government (Lesseyton, South Africa 2017). Following this event and partly as the result of it, the development of education in South Africa was given a significant boost as Sir George Grey was appointed Governor of the Cape (1855), leading to the opening of mission schools including Lovedale (opened in 1841), St Matthews (1855), Healdtown (1867), Adams, Natal (1853) and Mariannhill (1882) (Christie 1985, 67–68). Lesseyton, opened in 1857, was among the earliest of such mission institutions. They all tended to share a similar view of the curriculum to be studied, which was derived from the Western home bases of the missionaries.



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Methodist industrial schools were established at inter alia, Grahamstown, Kamastone, D'Urban (Peddie), Lesseyton and Healdtown (Gqubule 1977, 98) alongside other mission schools. The basic premise on which these institutions were run was the philosophy of hard work and character building. Prior to the introduction of industrial training, the discipline of manual labour (manuals) was part of the curriculum, partly for its own sake and partly as a cost-cutting exercise (Christie 1985, 66, 73).

The basic approach to education was first to develop literacy and literary education, followed by industrial education (Gqubule 2006, 74). Grey, as governor of the Cape (1854–1861) introduced a policy of “pacification” and “civilisation among the African inhabitants in order that settlement of the province by whites could proceed apace” (Madise 2003, 71). Rev. Barnabas Shaw commented on “the character of the school intended by Sir George Grey. It was to be a superior order, in which native youths might acquire European notions of civilisation, and be raised to respect themselves as something above the position of mere herdsmen” (Correspondence, Shaw to Impey, 25 October 1863). Clearly, the pacification of the region was a sub-text for the positive educational motive. Grey’s policy was restricted to the Eastern Cape. Part of this process was the introduction of industrial schools to teach black people trades, make them more compliant and less likely to challenge the loss of their ancestral lands while involved in more industrious activities. In addition, their work required less land which was a constant bone of contention between the settlers, the colonists and the indigenous peoples. Grey provided grants to facilitate this development. When he left the Cape, this financial aid was withdrawn leading to a crisis in educational provision (Millard 2003, 99). Lesseyton was one of Grey’s target projects (Webster 2013, 56). Webster (2013, 26) describes this as a “double-edged sword” due to its aim to develop and subdue the local peoples.

Elphick (2012, 183) summarises the missionary response to this development. They:

... seem to have welcomed the government’s initiative, provided the objectives of missionary education were recognized to extend beyond the cultivation of a colonial labor force. They agreed with officials who thought industrial education would inculcate diligence, precision, and discipline—characteristics the missionaries thought sadly lacking among Africans—and that it would promote the emergence of a Christian middle class.

The particular context was the desire of early Methodists to convert the heathen of South Africa. They followed the Wesley brothers’ commonly held views of their time: all races had a common origin, but because of the Fall, all were in need of redemption (Ashley, 1980, 32). Added to this was the desire of South African Methodists to have their own conference and their own African ministry (Balía 1991, 45–47). This is well expressed by Millard (2003, 93):

Ever since the first appearance of Methodist Church representatives on the shores of Southern Africa, there has been an awareness of the need for training indigenous clergy to serve the people of Southern Africa. This awareness has not always been apparent. Full ordination was almost fifty years in coming. Nevertheless, without the help of indigenous people among whom the missionaries worked, the Word of God would never have spread. The work of the

evangelists and individual Christians cannot be underestimated in assessing the work of the Methodist Church in Southern Africa.

It is important to note that many of the early foreign missionaries had little formal theological education. Yet they, often assisted by their wives, provided the foundation for the training of indigenous clergy, which was offered from their own homes (Millard 2003, 95).

Methodist Education

The overall context for education in South Africa in the nineteenth century was: “Mission churches [which] dominated the day-to-day operations in the period” (Paterson 2005, 380). From the outset of Methodist mission work in South Africa, education was the servant of evangelisation. William Shaw, a leader among the 1820 settlers, developed a vision of a series of mission stations moving eastwards and northwards towards Natal. These missions and the schools opened adjacent to them provided “the infrastructure for the early development of theological education and ministerial training in Southern Africa” (Richardson 2007, 133).

Richardson (2007, 133) delineates four eras of Methodist education:

The first (1867–1948) was the missionary era which was characterised by two main interfaces—the interface of cultures between Western Christianity and Africa, and the interface of power between British colonial authority and the loss of African autonomy. The year 1867 saw the first Africans admitted into training for ministry within the Methodist Church.

The second era lasted from 1948–1990 (the apartheid era); the third overlapping from 1960–1990 (resistance against apartheid); and the fourth from 1994 to the present (the emerging post-apartheid period).

The basic principle of Methodist educational mission, epitomised in the Watson Institution at Grahamstown established in 1837, was that it “was not an institution established and fixed at one particular place, but represented at every Mission Station where it was established” (Gqubule 1977, 99).

Lesseyton

Lesseyton, 10 km to the north of Queenstown among the Tembu people, “in a beautiful triangular-shaped valley at the base of the broad Hengklip Mountain” (Whiteside 1906, 285), was established as an educational and industrial school by Rev. Johannes Petrus Bertram in 1847 (Wesley 1863, 56). There is some dubiety regarding the date. Gqubule (1977, 111) gives it as 1857. Gqubule may be correct since Bertram’s reports begin in the late 1850s and not earlier. This is supported by Hewson (1959, 201). The institution opened with 20 students. The Glebe land occupied 400 acres within a larger area of church land, amounting to 24 000 acres (Cape of Good Hope Report 1864, 5, hereafter Report). It was “held, in trust, by the General Superintendent of Wesleyan Missions ‘that the land shall not be used for other purposes than those connected with the establishment of an industrial school’” (Report 1864, 5). No formal definition was given of “industrial” but it cannot be denied that many clergy

were extremely “industrious” and even zealous in pursuit of their mission. This interpretation could then allow for theological training. This was certainly true of Lovedale Missionary Institution which began theological education at an early stage and it was conceived as integral from the beginning (Duncan 2003, 99, 107). Bertram was responsible for the erection of the first buildings and in 1857 reported “a considerable outlay has already been made in the purchase of wood and *materiel* [sic]” (Report 1859, 6), but that financial assistance was needed. He also reported that the mission buildings were nearing completion as a result of the contribution of the apprentices.

Lesseyton: Industrial Training

While industrial training for whites evolved quickly from a non-existent base in the late 1800s, forms of industrial training had been part of the mission school tradition. But by the turn of the century this industrial training which involved substantial skills had become concentrated in only a few mission institutions. The missionary schools had become extremely diverse in terms of the quality of their instruction and curriculum as a direct consequence of the freedom of the competing missionary societies to strategically allocate resources to maximize conversions and increase membership, or to provide educational opportunities. (Paterson 2005, 384)

This was the general context for the establishment of the industrial school at Lesseyton. The education department at Lesseyton focused on producing bilingual learners. Bertram’s first 20 students thereby gained experience in quarrying stone, brick-making, building and carpentry. The following year he revealed his future oriented plan for expansion. In 1858, Bertram reported that the buildings had been completed (Report 1859, 7). The subjects taught included Xhosa, English, arithmetic and scripture. Industrial subjects included carpentry, building, tailoring, wagon-making, shoemaking and agriculture with domestic training (home-making and needlework) for the girls. The first students included Samuel Mzamo, John Mvayavine, Samuel Nohe, Paulus Rasmeni, Henry Tshotsha, Hermanus Vanqa and Klaas Masiko. An average of 10 students was admitted per annum (Denis and Duncan 2011, 27). The building process involved the students in quarrying stone, brick-making, building, and carpentry. The following year, Bertram made plans to secure the services of a master craftsman to supervise in the trades of smithing, carpentry and wagon-making. The master would receive half of the profits. The institution would provide tools and materials. A loan of £400 allowed a flock of sheep to be purchased (Hewson 1959, 201).

Only trades which were profit-making were developed—shoe-making and wagon-making. At the end of each year, apprentices returned to their villages to carry out their trades and it seems that they did well in these pursuits. Bertram reported during the early years that “the results were equal to our expectations, in an enterprise which may yet be considered to be an experiment” (Report 1860, 3). The innovative nature of the experiment probably relates to its financial viability. The shoe-making department was paying its way (Report 1860, 3) but wagon-making was not; yet, agriculture was in “a healthy state.” Further, “the masons and carpenters have become useful in the neighbourhood, where they have laboured for their own benefit and account” (Report 1860, 4).

By 1861, Bertram (Report 1861, 3) stated that “the scheme of industrial schools among the native of South Africa is practicable.” Perhaps this was a further sign of the success of the “experiment” although a year later, his report adopted a less confident tone: “I cannot say that the Institution will become self-supporting. I think that unless endowed with property or a regular annual grant, it cannot be continued” (Report 1862, 5). The following year, a drought placed the institution in greater jeopardy, such that “the experience of five years does not warrant the expenditure for carrying on this institution on a large scale” (Report 1863, 4). Whiteside (1906, 280) is of the opinion that:

Industrial training was costly ... Book learning was relatively cheap. So the acquisition of handicrafts, important to a race struggling to escape from barbarism, was neglected, and elementary mental education assumed an exaggerated value.

Writing from a century-old perspective, the assumption that the blacks were barbaric and struggling to change is not supported, except in the eyes of whites. Whiteside (1906, 280) himself described the lack of certain skills as equal to barbarism: “An unskilled people are not far from barbarism.” Then there is the matter of whether or not industrial education was cost effective. This appeared to be a perennial issue, but he does not offer any other reason for favouring formal education. Yet, he clearly favoured industrial training to “book learning alone”:

Trade schools, costly as they may be, are absolutely necessary to the elevation of the native races. They create the need they are intended to supply. When natives see their sons making good and strong seats, they are less willing to squat on the ground. When they see windows and doors made by their own children, they perceive how dark and ill-ventilated their huts are. When their children come home from school decently clad, they discover how mean their heathen garments are. When they see a European house, the desire arises to possess comfortable cottages of their own. The trade school is an important factor in the regeneration of the habits of the people. (Whiteside 1906, 281)

Despite the positive view of industrial education, this statement is replete with capitalistic assumptions epitomised in the comment, “They create the need they are intended to supply” by instilling a sense of dissatisfaction with their present way of life which was reinforced through “book learning alone which tends to the formation of exaggerated ideas of progress” (Whiteside 1906, 281). It is not clear if black people themselves saw these changes in their lifestyle in a positive light, or whether they were simply imitating an imported and imposed Western way of living. Rundle (1991) summarises the situation:

Five Methodist schools in the Eastern Cape benefitted from the programme of Sir George Grey, Governor of the Cape Colony from 1854 to 1859, for the establishment of industrial training centres, Healdtown, Lesseyton, Salem, Peddie and Kamastone. However, when Sir Langham Dale, Superintendent-General of Education in the Cape Colony from 1859, was sent in 1862 to investigate the schools which were receiving grants, he was very critical of the inefficient teaching he observed at most of the centres. The industrial departments at all the Methodist schools were closed down in the early Sixties. During the Sixties, a period marked by depression and drought, little progress was made in the mission field. (Rundle 1991, 309–310)

When Grey left the colony in 1861, the government grants were withdrawn from the labour schools and Lesseyton became a Collegiate School for European boys (Whiteside 1906, 237). By 1862, the Education Department reported that pupils under 14 years of age were given elementary instruction; the Industrial School gave lessons for four hours daily in the “four R’s”: reading in English and Xhosa, writing, reckoning and religion. All this was a substantial achievement by Bertram with the assistance of two African pupil teachers.

The Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) was firm in its commitment to education but it hesitated to entrust this task to trained specialists. The missionaries had to bear the burden of teaching in addition to the supervision of teaching, preaching and pastoral work (Hewson, 1959, 116). Their trust was largely limited to foreign ordained clergy.

Holden (1887, 297; 306–307) noted that:

Lesseyton is the place where the Collegiate School is established; the Rev. Theophilus Chubb, B.A., being Governor and Head Master ... There is also a Native Circuit connected with it, of which Johannes Mahonga, Native Minister, is in charge.

Mahonga was clearly subservient in role to Chubb. However:

Since that time the foundation of Lesseyton, near Queenstown, has been established, and for a while appeared to progress favourably; but recently has been brought into serious difficulties, so as to jeopardise its existence. In connexion with the visit of the Bev. G. T. Perks something was done to place it on a more secure and permanent basis, and it is to be hoped that it will be a success. (Holden 1877, 335)

In 1863, the industrial institutions at Lesseyton and Lovedale received commendations from Dr Langham Dale, Superintendent General of Education. By that time Lesseyton had produced:

5 carpenters, 3 masons, 5 wagon-makers, 3 smiths, 9 shoe-makers, 3 Schoolmasters and a number of useful lads, together with a number of girls have been discharged from the Institution; some are useful, all are improved, and, it is hoped, will benefit their people. (Bertram 1863 G.1 cited in Hewson 1959, 203)

In terms of prospects, Bertram reported:

I cannot say that the Institution will become self-supporting. I think that unless endowed by property, or a regular annual grant, it cannot be continued. Food and clothing will always be a charge; trades may be self-supporting after a little assistance in the beginning, but no dependence or calculation for income could be made from such sources. (Report 1863, 5)

However, during 1863 there was a widespread drought and Lesseyton was affected badly. Bertram concluded that:

The Experiment of five years does not warrant the expenditure for carrying on this institution on a large scale. The principle is sound, and the plan might be introduced with greater adaptation among the natives. Lesseyton would therefore be prepared to continue on a limited scale the operations as heretofore. (Report 1863, 5)

Part of Bertram's success at Lesseyton had been due to its proximity to a thriving town and its being situated on the main road to the gold and diamond fields of the north. So, its accessibility was an advantage. Bertram's devotion, energy and ability to delegate were other sources of its success (Hewson 1959, 204). In addition, he had the assistance of Mrs Bertram with the girls' work. Additional accommodation was built to house the girls, who were trained to be good housewives confined to their domestic role. Cock (1980, 288) affirmed that the education of black girls was mainly aimed to socialise them into domestic roles, in their own homes and as domestic servants (Cock 1980, 294).

For a time, the work at Lesseyton appeared to progress well, but during the 1870s, continuing financial and other difficulties jeopardised its existence (Holden 1877, 336). However, it managed to continue with its work.

When the Wesleyan Methodist Church of South Africa Conference began in Cradock on Thursday, 14 April 1892, it received:

The General and Financial Reports of the following Institutions, viz: Heald Town, Ayliff, Lesseyton, Bensonvale, Lamplough, Clarkebury, Shawbury, Edendale ... The Conference refers the recommendation of the Queen's Town District Committee (Native Section) on the subject of providing for increased attention to training in industrial pursuits at our existing Institutions to the district committees when consisting of ministers and laymen and directs them to report to next conference. (Wesleyan Methodist Church of South Africa, Conference 1892, 64)

This arose out of a recognition that all was not well with the industrial schools. They were expensive to run and suffered from personnel problems. Holden (1877, 338) commented: "The unusual dearness of provisions has considerably increased the cost of supporting the students and their families" (Holden 1877, 338). Yet, the institutions were a valued part of the missionary educational process as they provided training, work and converts. In 1915, the Principal, Rev. E.O. Barratt, confirmed the entrance qualification as the Primary Teachers' Examination, and by 1917 there were no students who did not hold this qualification.

[B]y the turn of the century Cape government concentrated on designing a form of education applicable to all school-going Africans. The later conception of industrial education for Africans also proved far less ambitious than that of the earlier Grey Plan having been leached of marketable vocational skills. This did not present African learners with vocational skills that had real market value, leaving them with only their labor. This coincided with Muir's policy of fully segregating the mission school system. (Paterson 2005, 381)

Further, according to Paterson (2005, 382):

... in this period, the mission-church hegemony over the curriculum began to weaken, as the colonial education department gradually influenced both the kinds of knowledge purveyed in the schools and the standardization of such prescriptions. And "Africans perceived education to be an alternative source of economic security in a time of land dispossession" ... In the Cape Colony, debate around "industrial education" different curricula appropriate for different racial groups ... as ongoing.

Whiteside (1906, 286) comments that the Superintendent General of Education, Sir Thomas Muir, expanded the main institutions for the training of native teachers, and placed severe restrictions on smaller schools which had been performing well in this area. However, Maritz (2005, 47) states:

The fact that Muir did not concern himself much with black education was reflected in an article which appeared in the *Christian Express*, the mission magazine of Lovedale, in 1915 at the time of Muir's retirement: "It is also to be deplored that, probably on grounds personal to the SGE from his theory of the content of elementary education and want of close personal knowledge of Native needs, and perhaps no less from considerations of European policy, industrial training, while it was steadily maintained, was not fostered into extensive developments." Also: "He was content for the most part to leave native education to the missionaries. What might have been a period of considerable development was one of stagnation."

By depriving Lesseyton of the right to train teachers (a less expensive alternative to industrial training), the institution lost valuable income, thus placing its future at risk. While the government would make use of church buildings as long as it suited them, they would ultimately walk away from the responsibility to maintain them also when it suited them.

In 1917, leading educational expert, C.T. Loram, stated what was, in effect, government policy and was a precursor of Bantu Education:

On the necessity of industrial training for the Natives of South Africa there is remarkable unanimity. Government commissions and officials, missionaries and students of the Native Question, and the general public all agree that industrial training should be made the chief end of Native education. (Loram 1917, 146)

Focusing on the period 1890–1930, Paterson (2005, 380) defines industrial/agricultural education:

Industrial and agricultural ideas referred essentially to low skill forms of education participated in a segregated colonial society: their roles were in a largely rural environment. In practice, this study shows resourced mission outstation primary schools, what might be "industrial" education invariably took on a decidedly agricultural character.

This would be related to the scarcity of resources needed to provide comprehensive trades training. Industrial education was always a drain on mission resources despite the financial viability of some trades. Sadly, there are few comments on the immediate, medium and long-term value to educating the mass of the population in industrial subjects. Government assistance was vital but was not guaranteed on the long term:

As the years passed, it became clear that the government would take advantage of the educational facilities which the Church could provide for as long they needed them. Once the Government vacated the premises, the Church was faced with a new problem—the rent income ceased, and there was no money to renovate the buildings and convert them for use in other ways. Many past students have expressed dismay at what has happened to the Institutions of which they were so proud in years gone by. (Rundle 1991, 230)

A positive view emerged at the General Missionary Conference of South Africa (GMCSA 1904) that industrial education was not a fund-raising venture, nor a means of civilising and Christianising indigenous peoples, but rather “an extension, not a precondition,” of conversion, a way to help Africans “not to escape from the world, but to overcome the world” (Elphick 2012, 183). The outcome was that it was agreed that “industrial education was the wave of the missionary future. This was reinforced in the 1910 World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh (Elphick 2012, 184).

It is important to note that the scope of mission education was extremely limited beyond the local areas of those educated in skills. There was still a parallel education for the “elite.”

In 1912 in the Cape, those attending this form of mission institution represented only about one percent of the total number of African and Coloured students at mission schools. Yet the sophisticated and developed curriculum opportunities at these mission institutions came under attack, because a small cohort of African learners had obtained skills that gave them a competitive position in the Cape labor market. Between 1890 and 1910, mission institutions which had “Industrial Schools and Departments” fell on hard times. Funding dropped from £6,387 in 1890 to £1,338 in 1910. The long-term decline in the mission institutions and their industrial training capacity became clearly reflected in the decrease in the number of such facilities from 27 to 15 between 1912 and 1935. (Paterson 2005, 387)

This may be an inflated view of the situation, since many black people were unable to source work opportunities due to the poor training they had received and the threat to the white employment market. The Rev. Wardlaw Thompson argued in 1904 that two historical phases existed in the approach of the missions to economic activity—or labour. The “Industrial Mission” represented an early idea, namely the setting up of a self-supporting and self-propagating project to take place through the work of the missionaries themselves with the help of African supporters. For this purpose, Africans had to possess useful skills. There was a change to focusing on the African-Christian community around the early period, characterised by the need to train African Christians to help build the physical campus of each mission (Paterson 2005, 390).

Further, there was a character-building and ethical motive at work here:

The clarion call; “the dignity of labor” is redolent with associations of sacrifice, forbearance and suffering which emphasized the moral value of work. In conditions where low grade skills were “taught,” the main effect would be to inculcate attitudes and values. The “hidden curriculum” of such education was clearly understood in the missions. One missionary referred to the superior pedagogical value to be accrued through daily work as opposed to book learning. (Paterson 2005, 391)

The Rev. Wilder stated: “We would not advocate to compete with European mechanics, but should aim to prepare natives who would be able to supply the needs which come out of savagery, and which are to be met by skilled labor only ...” This group advanced the argument that “intellectual training” was as important as the acquisition of correct attitudes to work rudimentary skills because, in their view, “our native intellectual limits, as a rule, are

soon reached” (Wilder 1904, 392). Here we note the growth of ideas that would be developed further to support the aims and objectives of Bantu education.

Addressing the South African Native Affairs Commission in 1905, Dr A.W. Roberts of Lovedale stated:

The brown workman would always have to work under a European and therefore there would be no conflict. The cast of mind of the Native is such that he could rarely take charge. Lack of inventiveness and of ingenuity in mechanical work would make him inferior to the European as a trained workman, and at no time would he compete with the European. (Roberts cited in Paterson 2005, 393)

Within the broader context, at the time of the South African Native Affairs Commission 1905, the Cape’s Superintendent General of Education, concurred. He foresaw no possibility of the nation being flooded with trained Africans. He was also clear that the Cape Education Department did not have sufficient finances to produce skilled African labour in vast numbers. Hence, the fears of white skilled labour that they would be excluded by cheap labour, was unfounded (Paterson 2005, 394).

The issue of agricultural training centred around two matters; first, for agricultural labour on settlers’ farms. Second, it was important for black people in order that they be able to farm their own land allocated by chiefs and headmen as part of communal land tenure arrangements (Paterson 2005, 397). This situation deteriorated markedly in the wake of the 1913 Land Act.

Ultimately, the belief was confirmed that:

Africans therefore should receive “education for life” based on manual and agricultural work, small-farming, and the promise of “earning a progressive livelihood ... through their own industry and enterprise.” The Educational Adaptations Changing Society Conference of 1935 demonstrated the durability of these views. It expressed concern about training in the white man’s industries, [while] neglecting the indigenous crafts in clay, grass, and skin. (Paterson 2005, 399)

Concurrently, courses for girls included “needlework” and “housecraft.” These courses were meant to “civilise black people by improving the homes” and to “develop vocational work, by giving to girls who have to earn a living valuable training in an important branch of work” (Paterson 2005, 401).

Paterson’s (2005, 401) assessment of the outcome of the introduction and development of industrial education is instructive:

The period of segregation in the Cape Colony at the turn of the twentieth century enabled the implementation of a separate and different curriculum for Africans—a debased form of industrial education “soft” on technical skills and inclined to manual labor. The strictly labor orientated nature of vocational training for Africans proved unlikely to equip them with the appropriate repertoire of skills to compete with whites as skilled tradesmen or artisans.

Yet, H.D. Tyamzashe (editor of *The Worker's Herald*, cited in Christie 1985, 74) commenting in 1921, said:

Of many promising men thus trained, some can be traced to be more or less usefully occupied; but, sad to relate, the majority are not employed in the trades they learned. This is mainly due to the colour bar; there are no openings for native tradesmen.

However, Lesseyton was not only to become renowned for industrial education. Another significant project was developed there, that of theological education.

Lesseyton: Theological Training

As early as 1847, a Methodist missionary, Rev. Thornley Smith reported:

By the providence of God, a native ministry is being raised up in South Africa, which if increased and extended, must ultimately exert a powerful influence in the land; and tend as we earnestly hope to hasten on the evangelizing of the native tribes. (Smith cited in Shaw 1860, 298–299)

The first black candidates for ordination in the Methodist Church were accepted in 1866. They were sent for training at Healdtown Institution, the pre-eminent Methodist educational centre, which was to become a theological training centre in 1867. Its first students were James Lwana, John Lwana, Charles Pamla and Boyce Mama. All except Mama were ordained in 1871; they were the first black ministers of the Methodist Church in South Africa.

Gqubule (1977, 106) affirms that “There was no planning done to mount such an important pioneering scheme” of training black ministers prior to 1880. The basic approach adopted was to offer training for the ministry by providing both general and theological education (Madise 2003, 67). The lack of enthusiasm may be related to the fact that often missionaries themselves were not well trained, and certainly none were trained in South Africa who were able to train ministers for the South African context. Certainly, in the early days of education, priority was given to general rather than theological education (Richardson 2007, 134).

In 1880, Rev. John Kilner, Missionary Secretary for Africa, “the architect of the South African conference, and the father of the African ministry” visited South Africa to evaluate the state of the mission and make recommendations (Hewson 1959, 276). He presided over the Triennial Conference of the South African Districts at Queenstown in June 1880 (Le Roux and Millard 2003, 4). Kilner emphasised the need for an educated African clergy. Yet, he was concerned that “There were many [African] men who doubtless had a call to the work who were kept back by a timid, if not at times, a jealous hand” (Kilner 1881, 15). He commented that many were better educated than their colleagues in England (Millard 2003, 101). The many referred to, numbered between 50 and 60 men. This led to a stronger commitment to develop and prepare for an African ministry.

During 1866, an evangelical revival took place during the visit of William Taylor of the American Methodist Episcopal Church in the USA assisted by Charles Pamla (Balila 1991,

26–28). “The impact of the 1866 revival did produce ... a new awareness of a need to establish a ‘native ministry’” (Balía 1991, 28).

In 1883, the responsibility for theological education was transferred from Healdtown to Lesseyton (Millard 1995, 64). So Lesseyton Missionary Institution was among the early theological education missionary schemes.

A problem which troubled Methodist projects persisted, which Switzer (1993, 386, n.26) highlights:

The Wesleyans gave virtually no support to the training of their African pastors. There was little supervision, and admission and performance standards were very low compared with those of the Presbyterians. The mission could afford only one full-time teacher-administrator, who was also the superintendent and minister for the local church circuit. In addition, the theological teacher at Lesseyton was in charge of the mission’s industrial and teacher-training school for girls.

This transfer allowed Healdtown to concentrate on teacher training (Gqubule 2006, 78; Millard 2003, 100). Theological education developed at Lesseyton under George Chapman who was a supernumerary (1875–76, 1879–82) following his service at Healdtown (1875–6, 187). This indicated the low esteem in which the training of a black ministry was held. The reason for the move remains unclear although Hewson (1959, 258) attributes it to Chapman’s desire to retire to Lesseyton; and Gqubule (1977, 111) also states that he was the most experienced person available. Chapman’s curriculum was the same as that he had taught at Healdtown and included theology, biblical studies, general knowledge, homiletics, grammar and Wesley’s sermons (Millard 2003, 100).

By 1917, the theological curriculum consisted of Bible history and introduction, dogmatic theology, Methodist history and polity along with Wesley’s sermons; there was little emphasis on Homiletics. Courses lasted between three and five years, but two years became the norm. Whiteside (1906, 268) correctly commented that “this made a fairly comprehensive curriculum for natives” although it took no account of the context. The norm became the curriculum used in the English system, replicated in and for Africa. One of the aims was to bring the Methodist system into line with the standard of theological education offered at neighbouring Presbyterian Lovedale (Hewson 1959, 258; cf. Denis and Duncan 2011, 24). It is to be noted that at this time, no thought was given to any curricular form other than that in which the missionaries themselves had been trained and, due to the lack of indigenous personnel, no black mentors.

In 1916, the Methodist Conference decreed that a third year should be added as soon as resources were available. During the period 1908–1910, Rev. Z.R. Mahabane claimed that his student colleagues, Solomon Mdala, Alexander Makalima, BB Rwairwai, Ambrose Mazwai and Joseph Bam remained at Lesseyton for a third year as the result of not being able to find vacancies in circuits.

As an outsider, Holden (1877, 338) presented an interesting evaluation of the state of Methodist mission education in the field of theological education:

The general advance of education amongst the Christian Natives, and the growing acquaintance of the Native youth with English literature, so largely impregnated as it is with sophistries and errors, render it a matter of great importance that our Native Ministry should attain to a high degree of general and theological knowledge, and the Committee is confirmed in the views it expressed last year as to the importance of all Students for the Ministry having a good knowledge of the English language. All the Candidates take an active part in the work of the Circuit, and so are prepared for an important part of ministerial duty.

Training was offered in English, not the indigenous languages, which is somewhat surprising since ministry would be exercised in the indigenous languages. Perhaps this indicates a lack of facility in indigenous languages on the part of the missionaries. It also suggests that problems are experienced in the literacy teaching of trainee ministers, due to the difficulty of the English language, relative to the high level of theological education. However, Whiteside's (1906, 5) view is that English "opened up for them mines of mental wealth." This is contrasted with the practical training which prepares them for parish work. Both were necessary components of a comprehensive programme of ministry training. Nonetheless, these indigenous clergy proved to be well up to the task of evangelisation (Balía 1991, 28). This was confirmed by Holden (1873):

In a literary point of view some might think their attainments low, but for adaptation and qualifications for their office as plain earnest expounders of God's Word, and as being well able to apply it to the consciences of men, they were, and are, fully efficient whilst the success [that] has attended and followed their ministrations, is God's endorsement that they had not gone "a warfare at their own charges."

After Chapman, the following occupied the position of theological tutor: John, Cameron; C.S. Lucas; Edwin Gedye (on whose death in 1899 it was closed temporarily) (Whiteside 1906, 285); Wesley Hurt (who reopened Lesseyton in 1900); E.O. Barratt; and James Pendlebury (who transferred with his students to the South African Native College at Fort Hare in July 1920) (Gqubule 1977, 112–113) following the opening of the South African Native College in 1916. This was done in the hope that theological students might thereby be enabled to improve their general education and academic qualifications (Kerr 1968, 56).

Healdtown and Lesseyton had both been "One-man Colleges" (Gqubule 1977, 113). In addition to teaching and administrative responsibilities the head of the mission also had to shoulder the work of the local circuit. At Lesseyton, he was also responsible for the Girls' Industrial and Teacher Training School. This made the work of theological tutor too onerous to carry out successfully. The Methodist Church was slow to commit resources and support to the project of theological education. Nonetheless, Lesseyton produced men of excellent calibre, particularly hymn writers: W. Jijana, S.J. Mvambo, R.L. Conjwa, Alfred Mji, P.G. Ndebuka, E.J. Mqoboli, F. Nomvete, E.G. Rani, and Cannon Sidiyo. All these were influenced by Edwin Gedye and Wesley Hurt. The institution also produced preachers and administrators like Alexander Giwu, E.J. Mqoboli and J. Bam. Zachariah R. Mahabane was the most outstanding of all Lesseyton's alumni.

Rev. Zachariah R. Mahabane

Zachariah Mahabane (1881–1971) began his teaching career at the Moroka Mission (1902–1904) before becoming a court interpreter. He was ordained to the ministry of the Methodist Church in 1914 and appointed circuit minister in Cape Town. He became immersed in the activities of the Cape Province Native Congress, which was a branch of the South African Native National Congress (later the African National Congress [ANC] from 1923). In 1919, he was elected President of the Cape Congress and, in 1924, President of the African National Congress twice (1924–1927 and 1937–1940). He also served as its chaplain. He became involved in the work of the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM). Yet, his ministerial responsibilities did not suffer. Mahabane was appointed vice-president of the All Africa Convention in 1937. In 1956, having been a founder member, he was appointed President of the Interdenominational African Ministers' Association of South Africa (IDAMASA) which was active in its opposition to apartheid. Mahabane proved to be a strong critic of Bantu Education following the publication of the Eiselen Report in 1951 (Rundle 1991, 83). He also attended several International Missionary Conferences.

Mahabane had a holistic approach to the nation's problems, not either/or politics or religion, but both/and. He attended international conferences in both the political and church domains, as well as being an influence for good in the Conferences of the Methodist Church of South Africa. "He died on the 21st September, 1971, in his 90th years [sic] after 63 years of ministry" (Gqubule 1977, 114). He was an excellent example of a product of mission education who proved to be a critical participant in the affairs of his nation.

Evaluation

Richardson (2007, 134) expresses the extent to which mission education impacted on South African society. He sets the scene for an investigation of one of the smaller and less well-known mission industrial schools, which was also a centre of theological education:

During the period 1850–1870 there was tremendous progress in African education, a phenomenal growth in the number of schools and the number of children attending these. It was during this period that some of our greatest missionary institutions were established ... That Methodism made a glorious contribution to African education is beyond doubt. Together with other churches that were involved in African education, it transformed African life in the country. The influence of the church on individuals in society is immeasurable. It is significant that African leaders in almost every aspect of life in this country are products of missionary schools.

This affirms the truth that the history of education in South Africa is the history of mission education. However, all was not well despite the enormous contribution mission made to education:

The mission stations were, in terms of education, the most advanced section of the African people at the time [sic]. The missionaries had done magnificent work as school teachers, and the mission stations had produced some of the most militant and effective rebels against white domination. Dube, Seme and many of the builders of the African people had started life proud

to regard themselves as Christians; they died bitterly disappointed with the way in which the Christian Church aided the cause of white domination. (Ngubane 1963, 84)

Clearly, mission education—and industrial education in particular—did not produce all the results expected. There was an absence of systematic education, fuelled by the lack of facilities, equipment and expertise. Not all missionaries were convinced of its value; the colonial government failed to support it financially after Grey left the province. Then there was opposition which came from parts of both the settler and indigenous communities according to Christie (1985, 73), commenting on the findings of the Cape Education Commission on 1891.

But an even more trenchant critique was made of mission education by Dora Taylor under the pseudonym of Nosipho Majeke:

... legislation by itself could not ensure the continuance of white domination; for this a more subtle means had to be employed. Education itself had to be used as an instrument of enslavement. Having drawn the African into the economic system, the rulers had assigned them a particular place in their society. It was necessary to educate him to his “proper place.” This was to be the task of the missionaries more than any other educative force. (Majeke 1953, 135)

Nonetheless, Majeke was well aware of the powerful effect of mission education. This is supported by Rundle (1991, 17): “... there is a body of opinion which regards the mission schools as having been instruments of imperial domination from their inception.”

Cochrane (1987, 21) also locates this debate in an even wider context:

No genuine understanding of the role of the missionaries is possible without considering the interconnections of religious, political and economic concerns. The way in which colonial missionaries engaged with the indigenous people; their hand in the subjugation of chiefdoms; their relation to the forces of economic expansion and to the creation of labour; their specific part in the emergence of a black elite with advantageous connections to the colonies and metropolis—all these themes come to the fore.

Rundle (1991) relocates the debate in the church context. Regarding Methodist involvement in schooling in South Africa during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, she states:

It is an exciting story of pioneering work in a vast, and often unwelcoming land. It is the story of men and women who believed the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and were anxious to take that Good News to the “heathen.” The fact that Christianity, Western civilization, imperialism and commercial enterprise very quickly became intertwined did not cause those pioneers great concern: their main task was to convert the “heathen,” and to “improve” their way of life by whatever means were available to them. (Rundle 1991, 19)

Then, a secular comparison was raised relating to the motivation for education:

Throughout this period, the Church, the State and the African people looked at education from very different perspectives. For the missionaries, education was but a necessary adjunct to evangelism, which was their primary concern; for the State, education helped in the process of “civilization” and acculturation of the African people, and in due course gave them

sufficient understanding of the white person's way of life and language to enable them to be useful workers in a society which relied heavily on unskilled and semiskilled labour ... for many Africans, education was seen as an essential prerequisite for employment, and the only means through which they might aspire to equality with the "whites" who ruled the land. (Rundle 1991, 39–40)

The missionaries denied the value of cultures they did not understand and value. They imposed Western values as an essential aspect of conversion:

Some of the most vociferous opponents of the missionaries were the chiefs, who resisted any moves which might reduce their power and authority within the tribes, or diminish traditional cultural norms. Many parents, too, regarded the schools and the teaching of the missionaries as being disruptive to their traditional way of life, and soon learnt how to reap the benefits offered by the missionaries—such as food and clothes provided for children who attended school—without succumbing to the control of the missionaries or the message which they preached. (Rundle 1991, 20–21)

But many chiefs also valued the presence of missionaries for what they could benefit from their presence, not least security during a period when there was a regular threat of being removed from their lands.

The results of education were clear for all to see:

Yea, already a great change has come over the Kaffir mind; education is highly valued by many, and the parents are willing to pay and actually do pay for their children being taught; so that it may be fairly anticipated that year by year this will increase, until, in a comparatively short time, a change will have passed over the Kaffir nation, by which, instead of melting away before the sun of civilization, they will be enabled to stand side by side and shoulder to shoulder with their Christianized and civilized compeers. (Holden 1877, 363)

In no part of the world has our Mission work been more successfully and satisfactorily carried on; savage races are being raised in the scale of civilization; a native literature has been created for those who cannot understand the English or Dutch languages; and the colonial Churches are for the most part the fruit of Missionary. (Holden 1877, 209)

This implied successful conversion in both the secular and sacred senses. This applied not only to the indigenous peoples but also to their colonial counterparts. However, conversion came at a cost, one that the Methodist Church was not yet prepared to pay in large measure. This was also a racial issue exacerbated by the lack of a coherent philosophy of education. Yet:

That Methodism made a glorious contribution to African education is beyond doubt. Together with other churches that were involved in African education, it transformed African life in the country. The influence of the church on individuals in society is immeasurable. It is significant that leaders in every aspect of life in this country were products of mission schools. (Gqubule 2006, 75)

Gqubule, having worked for most of his ministry in an ecumenical context, rightly comments that the Methodist Church was one among a group of churches of European origin which made phenomenal contributions to education in South Africa.

Conclusion

Several issues are prominent in Methodist theological and industrial training. With regard to theological education, they adopted a pragmatic rather than an intellectually developed academic and formation programme. Their programmes were simply English syllabi imposed on the South African context. This was partly due to their unwillingness to commit substantial finances to the project. There was no attempt to introduce parity with whites in training, experience and qualifications. They lacked sufficient academics and others who could assist in spiritual formation. Then there was inadequate planning and staffing. All of this demonstrates a marked lack of commitment. Yet, in spite of all these negative factors, innovative programmes were taught and excellent ministers were produced for South Africa.

Much the same is true of industrial education. However, it did receive government financial support for periods—which was never sufficient but which facilitated the development of tradesmen and women who could serve their communities and ultimately the South African economy. Having been trained at mission stations, they were schooled in a work ethic which would set them apart from their less well-prepared brethren. Our early fathers in the faith are to be commended for their strong faith, powers of endurance, responsibility to the church and for their charges.

Postscript

An event was held at Lesseyton on 9 February 2018, sponsored by the Queenstown and Lesseyton Circuit 302 in partnership with the Chris Hani District Municipality. The aim was to establish a fund to promote the re-establishment of Lesseyton Methodist Seminary, which has fallen into a sad state of disrepair. It is adjacent to a large township with a large high school nearby. Only the church sanctuary remains intact. The adjoining building is derelict. Foundations of other buildings are visible but some are no longer apparent. There are several graves of missionaries' families. No one knows the existing boundaries of the mission, although it is likely that some of the land has been built on, considering the original extent of the mission. The congregation is enthusiastic about the project as is the small outstation congregation at Lesseyton. Their vision is to restore Lesseyton to some of its former glory, but more so to be a part of the community assets.

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