THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH TOWARDS THE PONDO REVOLT
IN SOUTH AFRICA
FROM 1960 – 1963

by

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DECLARATION

I, VICTOR MXOLISI MNABA, DECLARE THAT THIS IS MY OWN WORK AND THAT ALL THE SOURCES THAT I HAVE USED OR QUOTED HAVE BEEN INDICATED AND ACKNOWLEDGED BY MEANS OF COMPLETE REFERENCES.

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ABSTRACT

The dissertation demonstrates that during the revolt of 1960 to 1963 the role played by the church against the state was to respond to the way the Pondo’s were being treated, in terms of Bantustan issue of dividing and ruling in which the government of South Africa was grouping people (particularly blacks) into different areas. Rightful leaders were therefore being deposed, very much against their will and that of their followers. Much of the information was gathered through newspaper material and personal interviews with people who were either participants in or witnesses of the events that unfolded at that time. The involvement of these people (particularly in the revolt) meant that the impact of the revolt was either positive or negative, which required looking at the church’s involvement in its confrontation with the state. At the end the revolt not only affected people religiously but also economically, socially and politically.
SUMMARY

In the year 2004 South Africa celebrated its first ten years of democracy, which reflected the success of the struggle for the liberation of this country. The year 1960 was considered as a year of strong resistance throughout South Africa. Political leaders like Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Robert Sobukwe, Raymond Mhlaba, Chief Albert Luthuli, Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada, Lionel Bernstein, Dennis Goldberg and others played a vital role in leading the black people to resist the plan of the current Prime Minister Hendrick Verwoerd, who deprived Africans of their citizenship by forcing the Bantustan system upon them.

On the 6th June 1960 more than four thousand Pondos from eastern Pondoland (Bizana, Lusikisiki, Flagstaff and Ntabankulu) met at Ngquza Hill with the intention of discussing their problems. They demanded the withdrawal of the hated system of the Bantu Authorities Act, the representation of all South Africans in the Republic’s Parliament, relief from increased taxes and the abolition of the pass system. Before these problems were tabled before the people, a military force had occupied Ngquza Hill. The peaceful meeting was turned into a massacre of innocent people, when police shot victims, tear-gassed them and beat them with batons. Eleven people were killed, many of them were shot in the backs of their heads; and more than 48 casualties were hospitalized and arrested. The Paramount Chief, Botha Sigcau, was blamed for the massacre because he was seen as supporting the government, and this led to the uprising in Pondoland from 1960 to 1963.

This event happened three months after the Sharpeville shooting of the 21st March 1960. More than 200 casualties were reported and 69 unarmed protesters were shot dead outside the police station. The ANC and PAC, the liberation movements of the day, were banned and a state of emergency was declared. The Nationalist government suspected the African National Congress of being behind the revolt in Pondoland. The ringleaders of the Pondo Revolt were
Mthethunzima Ganyile, Anderson Ganyile, Solomon Madikizela and Theophulus Ntshangela. They listed the Acts that were to be protested against as follows: The Bantu Authorities Act of 1951, the Bantu Education Act of 1953, the Pass Law System of 1952, as well as rehabilitation and betterment schemes. These Acts were imposed by the National Party through Paramount Chief Botha Sigcau. All were detrimental to the future of the Pondo people.

Church leaders such as Beyers Naude, Ben Marais and Bartholomeus Keet of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), Archbishop Geoffrey Clayton and Archbishop Desmond Tutu of the Anglican Church, Rev Charles Villa-Vicencio of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Allan Boesak of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) and others played a major role in confronting and challenging the Nationalist government, which justified apartheid as grounded on Scripture. Not all church leaders opposed this policy: the Dutch Reformed Church was the bedrock of apartheid, along with other Afrikaans speaking churches. This dissertation will serve as a tool to determine the involvement of the church regarding the Pondo Revolt in South Africa from 1960 to 1963.
KEYWORDS

History; Church History; Pondo Revolt 1960 to 1963; Nationalist Government; The Church; Bantu Authorities Act of 1951; Bunga; Paramount Chief; Chief.
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For this study I spoke to many people in Pondoland: men and women were interviewed formally, each session lasting for more than an hour. Most of the people interviewed were illiterate, but were willing to share their experience and knowledge with me regarding the 1960 to 1963 incidents in Pondoland. I owe thanks to Clement Gxabu who claimed to be one of the victims of Nqquza Hill: he gave the broader picture of what really happened in Pondoland. I thank Chief Ngwebizilwane Sigcau of Hewu who narrated the stance of the royal family, and a number of elderly people to whom I talked.

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I also want to record my appreciation for the challenge by Rev Kevin Williams who was my history lecturer at Rhodes University; in 1998 he challenged us to take church history very seriously as he foresaw a shortage of historians in the near future. In the same breath I want to thank Professor Lizo Jafta who was a visiting lecturer in 1996 at John Wesley College at Kilnerton for his insight: he also challenged us as Methodist ministers to write about the Pondo Revolt. I also want to thank Rev Alan Bester who nurtured me during my first year as a probationer minister at Faerie Glen Methodist Church. I would be ungrateful if I failed to express my sincere thanks to my editor Mr David N.R. Levy and my supervisor Dr Mokhele J.S. Madise for his technical advice, humbleness and
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PREFACE

I was born on the 1\textsuperscript{st} October 1963 at Atteridgeville in Pretoria. My mother died when I was three years old. I was brought up, in an uneducated family, by my aunts and uncles, which had much impact on my life. I only started school at age twelve and owing to this, the principal insisted that I should start in Sub “B” (Grade two). I managed to cope, though I was teased by my fellow students for being the tallest and oldest in class, I was encouraged by my class teacher Mrs. Dikgale to be strong and not to give up, and through her motherly advice I was able to survive. I thank her for the love she gave me when I needed it most.

From an early age I managed to fend for myself, and through God’s grace I was able to complete matric through distance learning. In 1992 I registered for a management course with Atteridgeville Technical College and when I was doing the N4 in March 1994, I was employed by Sanlam. I candidated for the ministry in the Methodist church at the end of the same year. I was accepted into the full time ministry and I tendered my resignation to Sanlam. On the 30\textsuperscript{th} December 1994 I was married to Mamonaledi Mary-Ann Morare, who has been my pillar of strength. God blessed us with three children: two girls, Nokudekwalapha Mbalentle (9) and Nomxolisi Naledi (18 months) and one boy, Nkosinathi Olifile (6).

I started my ministry at Faerie Glen Methodist Church in Pretoria in 1995 and the following year (1996) I attended Kilnerton College; in 1997 I went to Rhodes University for two years (1997-1998) and in 1999 to 2000 I was stationed at Brooksnek in the Clarkbury District in Eastern Cape. In 2001 I completed my honours degree through the University of South Africa (Unisa). During 2001 to 2003 I was stationed in the Blikana Circuit in Kimberley, Namibia and Bloemfontein District. In 2002 I registered for a Masters degree in Church History with Unisa. Currently I am stationed at Bothaville in the Northern Free State and
Lesotho District; I am a circuit superintendent and my intention is to complete my Masters Degree at the end of 2005.
ABBREVIATIONS

2. Cottesloe Consultation (CC).
3. Chief Magistrate Transkei (CMT).
5. Dutch East India Company (DEIC).
6. Dutch Reformed Church (DRC).
7. Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC).
8. Junior (Jr).
10. Native Representative Council (NRC).
15. Transkei Territorial Authority (TTA).
16. United Transkei Territorial General Council (UTTGC).
16. World Council of Churches (WCC).
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the role of the church during the Pondo revolt from 1960 to 1963. The task of the church is to proclaim the gospel of Christ by preaching sanctification, salvation and justification. If the church fails to proclaim Christ as the only liberator, then it has failed in fulfilling its obligation as the body of Christ. The duty of the church is to liberate people from the bondage of slavery and oppression; as Christ once said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to set free the oppressed” (cf Luke 4:18).

Bishop Tutu (1983:85), in his address at Pretoria University in March 1981, explains the obligation of the church as follows:

The Church is constantly tempted to be conformed to the world, to want influence that comes from power, prestige and privilege, and it forgets all the while that its Lord and Master was born in a stable, that the message of the angels about His birth was announced first not to the high and mighty but to the simple rustic shepherds. The Church forgets that His solidarity was with the poor, the downtrodden, the sinners, the despised ones, the outcasts, the prostitutes, the very scum of society…

Bishop Tutu implies that the obligation of the Church is to balance the equation of societies, by siding with the marginalized, and to confront the status quo if need be. People like Allan Boesak, who did so, wrote a letter to the then Minister of Justice, Mr. A Schlebusch, reminding him that the church and politics are two inseparable entities. Therefore, it was the obligation of any ministers of the Word to proclaim Christ as the only liberator as long as the State and the Dutch Reformed Church misused Scripture (cf Villa-Vicencio, 1986:235 – letter from Allan Boesak to the Minister of Justice)
If we all agree that the church is the body of Christ, we should proudly say that the church is above politics and the state, and that its responsibility is to see to it that people are treated as human beings created in the image of God, despite their gender, race or colour. Villa-Vicencio (1986:211) discusses the obligation of the church that was demonstrated in the Cottesloe Consultation Statement in 1961 as follows:

The Church of Jesus Christ, by its nature and calling, is deeply concerned with the welfare of all people, both as individuals and as members of social groups. It is called to minister to human need in whatever circumstances and forms it appears, and to insist that all be done with justice. In its social witness the Church must take cognizance of all attitudes, forces, politics and laws which affect the life of a people; but the Church must proclaim that the final criterion of all social and political action is the principle of Scripture regarding the realization of all men [sic] of a life worthy of their God-given vocation.

The statement held that the church, by virtue of being the body of Christ, is obliged to be a mouthpiece of people. Therefore, it has a right to confront any political or non-political organization that misuses its power. Unfortunately, when the Nationalist government came to power in 1948 it distorted Scriptural doctrines to its own advantage. The year 1948 brought about a drastic change in the socio-economic and political history of South Africa. Hofmeyr and Pillay (1994:251) quoted Albert Luthuli’s fear about the Nationalist government when it came into power:

We should be grateful to the National Party Government for unambiguously making it plain that in the interest of perpetuating white domination they will stop at nothing in their determination to realize their goal of keeping non-whites in a state of perpetual servitude.

Albert Luthuli meant that all the policies that had been implemented by the United Party to deprive Black people of their rights would be constitutionalized by the Nationalist government. Hence 1948 was the beginning of the major struggle between blacks and whites. Acts relating to Population Registration, Mixed Marriages, Group Areas, Separate Amenities, Bantu Education, Immorality and many other Acts created instability in South Africa. The churches, particularly the mainline churches, had no choice but to stand by their principles and to declare
all these Acts as un-christian and against the law of God. The Dutch Reformed Church was dominated mainly by white Afrikaans-speaking people who misused Scripture to justify these Acts and the policy of Apartheid.

The main strategies of apartheid were to divide and rule, and the people who were mainly affected by these policies were black. Those in the reserves, in particular, experienced something that was abnormal in their socio-economic and political history. In the early 1950s schemes such as Rehabilitation and Betterment were introduced and Acts such as the Bantu Authorities Act were thorns in the flesh of most people who lived in the reserves. 1960 was regarded as a major year of unrest because black people were fighting for their dignity and land. The Pondo revolt of 1960 took place because of the unjust policies that were imposed by the Nationalist government.

Chapter one will deal specifically with the historical background of the Pondo people in the pre-colonial and colonial eras. It will discuss the socio-economic and political history of the Pondo people. During those two eras the social life of the Pondo people was totally different. In the pre-colonial era they enjoyed freedom of trade, movement etc. They possessed land for grazing and ploughing, and they owned as many cattle as they could, without any restrictions. Their democratic policy was that the land belonged to those who lived in it, and it was controlled by the king though the actual allocation of the land was made by the people (cf. Mayer, 1980:82).

Many were very wealthy because they possessed plenty of land to plough and for pasture. Their lives depended entirely on the land and very few people, if any, worked at the mines in Johannesburg or on sugar plantation in Durban. Family life was intact because migrant labour was scarce. Pondos observed their religious rites and they believed in Qamata (Supreme Being), the creator of the universe. They were politically orientated because they knew that the land was their source of income, and they were not prepared to share it with their
neighbours such as amaXesibe, abaThemba, amaBhaca and amaZulu, let alone the settlers. Pondos were people who respected authority and honoured their chiefs and headmen.

After the annexation of 1894 by Britain the socio-economic and political history of the Pondo people changed drastically. They were no longer ruled by their kings, but were subjected to the British Empire, which crippled the Pondos psychologically, emotionally and physically. They were dispossessed of their land; they were forced to cull their livestock and required to own only a certain portion of land for grazing and ploughing. This forced the Pondo men to leave their families and travel to Durban and Johannesburg in search of work. Mthethunzima Ganyile (Personal Interview, 27th September 2003, Bizana), who played a major role in instigating the revolt in Eastern Pondoland, particularly in Bizana, commented as follows about the issue of culling (this quotation is verbatim, translated from Xhosa):

One of the major causes that led us to revolt against the Nationalist government was the fact that we were only allowed to have ten cattle. If they were more than that the government would confiscate the extra ones without any negotiations with the owners. Breeding of pigs and donkeys was also not allowed. People were given small portions of land for grazing and ploughing. People’s homesteads were brought together so that they should be congested. That cruel notion of the Nationalist government destroyed the whole of Pondoland psychologically, emotionally and economically, our wealth was physically taken out of our hands, nothing has ever destroyed us Pondos in our entire lives like that.

Despite all these odds, the missionaries who came with the British settlers played an important role for the Pondo people by introducing Christianity and education. The problems, however, grew worse in Pondoland when the Nationalist government came into power in 1948.

Chapter two looks extensively at the causes of the Pondo revolt, considers 1960 as a year of black resistance and demonstrates that the Pondo revolt was influenced by the politics of the day. When one considers the political events that
took place in the late 1950s and early 1960s, one is able to say that a major transition occurred as far as the history of South Africa was concerned. In May 1961 South Africa was declared a Republic and a majority of white South Africans were delighted by the decision. On the other hand, the blacks were oppressed and strove to restore their dignity and to regain their land. The political struggle in South Africa resulted in unrest in reserves such as Pondoland. But the whole of the African continent, and other parts of the world which experienced slavery, oppression and racism, regarded 1960 as the year when they would achieve their political goals.

Chapter three will focus on the central core of the Pondo revolt from 1960 to 1963. The Bunga or United Transkei Territorial General Council (UTTGC) constituted one of the major elements that led to the Pondo revolt because most of the Xhosa people were unhappy about the discussions and drastic decisions that were taken on their behalf by the Bunga, but without consulting them. The Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 was the core issue that led to the Pondo revolt because it undermined the dignity of the Pondos by implementing and imposing policies and schemes, such as Rehabilitation and Betterment, that were detrimental to the socio-economic and political framework of the Pondo people. Tax and Dipping were thorns in the flesh of the Pondo people. The Pass Law system of 1952 deprived the Pondo people of freedom of movement in urban areas, while the Bantu Education Act of 1953 introduced inferior education for black children.

Chapter four concerns the cause of the actual revolt amongst the Pondo people, and the role of the church during the revolt. It also discusses the aftermath of the Pondo revolt. And chapter five, the conclusion, demonstrates the development of thoughts, ideas, suggestions regarding the Pondo revolt as well as warnings about what took place there. It also admonishes the church and the state not to repeat the same mistake in the future.