

### 3 THREE WHITE PIONEERS

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Before I begin my discussion of six South African Christian missionary pioneers, there is an important matter which needs to be cleared up. All six pioneers were men. That does not mean that women did not also play a very important pioneering role, or that I deny the role women played. The problem which prevented me from including women in this section is that very little has been written about the pioneer women. In order to evaluate women's contribution I would therefore have had to do primary historical research, which is not my aim with this study. My aim is to evaluate existing historical material specifically from the perspective of the *missio politica oecumenica*. It must be pointed out, though, that it is no mere coincidence that nearly nothing is written about the role of pioneer women, despite their undoubted contribution. In various areas of Africa, the pioneer women are still alive in the memory and oral tradition of the people - to mention just one example, the famous pioneer missionary among the blind in Zambia, Ms Ella Botes, known far and wide as Botie of Magwero. Apart from some hagiography about such women, aimed mainly at drumming up support on the 'home front', very little serious historical analysis of their role exists. Obviously this reflects the patriarchal domination of the church, and serves in itself to indicate an area of concern for the liberating mission of the church.

The three White pioneers I am going to discuss all three belong to the nineteenth century. The history of organised Protestant mission in South Africa, though, can be said to have started in a rather tentative way with the history of the colonial occupation of the Cape through the landing of Jan van Riebeeck in 1652. A very brief historical introduction therefore seems to be necessary to close the gap before I begin my detailed discussion of the three pioneers.

In line with the philosophy and practice of that time, Van Riebeeck's prayer upon landing at the Cape was the typical contemporary

mixture of commerce and Christianity. In it, Van Riebeeck prayed for the (commercial) success of the Colony, inter alia so that 'the true Reformed faith can be spread among these wild and brutal people' (the San and Khoi-Khoi, the original inhabitants of the Cape Peninsula). Quite early on, therefore, there were a few sporadic and unorganised attempts to spread the faith among the Khoi-Khoi, but they basically came to nothing.

Fairly soon after its inception, the Cape began to be seen (by some of the early colonists) not only as a halfway station on the route to India, but as a permanent settlement. With the growth of the Colony, religion and education also began to be placed on a more permanent footing. Mission therefore also began to be practised in a more organised way, especially after the arrival of the first Moravian missionary, Georg Schmidt, in 1737. At that time the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) was the state church, and this church did not recognise Schmidt's ordination as a minister. When he himself baptised his first five Khoi-Khoi converts, therefore, the church reacted sharply and negatively. As a result Schmidt returned to Europe.

In the DRC itself, though, new missionary enthusiasm began to flow as a result of the ministry of two young ministers, Rev. H. van Lier and Rev. M. C. Vos. One result of their ministry was a better attitude towards mission societies, so that it became possible again for the Moravians to return to the Cape in 1792. In 1795, though, the Cape Colony was occupied by British forces, thus bringing to an end the era of Dutch occupation (although the Colony was briefly returned to Dutch control from 1803 to 1806). The new colonial authority brought changes to the power structures of church and mission, especially in its relation to the state. In 1799 the first LMS missionaries landed. One of their first missionaries, Dr. J. T. van der Kemp, was destined to have a strong influence on the relationship between church and state and especially on the relationships between Black and White. This relationship was beginning to get more and more problematic as more and more colonists (especially hunters and stock farmers) settled deeper in the interior, bringing them into conflict with the African tribes on the ownership of land.

Great dissatisfaction was caused among the Dutch settlers on the northeastern frontier of the Colony (the present Eastern Cape) by the

emancipation of the slaves by the British government. On top of that the LMS missionaries intensified their campaign for equality before the law for White and Black (especially the Khoi-Khoi) - something that went against the grain of the colonists with their increasingly racist way of life. Thus the foundation was laid for an attitude of mistrust between (Dutch-Afrikaans) colonists and (mainly British) missionaries. Among these mistrusted and disliked missionaries, John Philip took pride of place. It is with him that I begin my study of White missionary pioneers from the perspective of the *missio politica oecumenica*.

### 3.2 JOHN PHILIP, 1775-1851

John Philip was born in 1775 into the Scottish working class. In his early years he was a worker in the weaving industry. Scotland was at that stage developing dynamically. When Philip felt himself called to the ministry, he was sent to London to be trained as a minister in the Congregational Church. After completing his studies, he became minister to a congregation in Aberdeen. While ministering there, he became strongly aware of a call to go to the 'mission field'. He therefore presented himself to the LMS, and was accepted by them. His first missionary appointment was as superintendent of the LMS in the Cape Colony, where he arrived in 1819.

To understand Philip's thinking and actions, one must always keep in mind his Scottish descent. At that time Scotland was going through an exciting and dynamic period of its history. Philip was especially deeply influenced by Scottish evangelicalism, and one must always keep this in mind in attempting to evaluate his labours (Ross 1986:4-5). Characteristic of this evangelicalism, and characteristic also of Philip's life, was the desire for evangelisation. That is why he was so strongly interested in the evangelisation of Southern Africa. So, for example, it was due to his influence that a whole number of mission societies came to do mission work in Southern Africa. Philip also always emphasised the spiritual foundation of mission work, together with the need for education and industrial development (Van der Merwe 1936:102). According to Ross (1986:219) Philip always regarded the preaching of the gospel as the number one priority of mission work, although he also considered the development of civilisation very important. It was therefore on the basis of his evangelical convictions

that Philip became involved in the life of the community around him. About his attempts to improve the quality of life for South African Blacks he himself stated:

Let the advocates of religion and humanity use their efforts to put a period to the slavery of the Aborigines within the colony of the Cape of Good Hope, and they will, by that single act, do more for the promulgation of the gospel in South Africa, than all the funds of the London Missionary Society could effect while things continue in that colony as they now are (Philip 1828, vol. I:xxix).

In reality Philip was a typical missionary of the imperialist and colonial era. With typical paternalism he believed that British rule would bring justice and equal opportunity to the (Black) population of the colonies. This is how he himself judged on the role of mission in the colonial era:

While our missionaries, beyond the borders of the colony of the Cape of Good Hope, are everywhere scattering the seeds of civilization, social order, and happiness, they are, by the most unexceptionable means, extending British interests, British influence, and the British empire. Whenever the missionary places his standard among a savage tribe, their prejudices against the colonial government give way; their dependence upon the colony is increased by the creation of artificial wants; confidence is restored; intercourse with the colony is established; industry, trade, and agriculture spring up; and every genuine convert from among them made to the Christian religion becomes the ally and friend of the colonial government (Philip 1828, vol. I:ix-x).

His loyalty towards the colonial authorities was clearly illustrated during the border war of 1834. He instructed all the LMS missionaries to call upon their congregations to remain faithful to the colonial government, even to serve in the colonial army.

At the same time Philip became an outstanding champion of the rights of the Black colonial peoples. He was especially a strong advocate for equality before the law for Blacks (especially the Khoi-Khoi) and Whites. For this reason he was a strong supporter of Ordinance 50, in terms of which equal status before the law was provided for the Khoi-Khoi, at the same time abolishing the requirement that they should carry passes at all times. It was especially his support for Ordinance 50 which made Philip public enemy number one in the eyes of the colonists. He was equally not a very great favourite of the colonial authorities, with whom he had many running battles about the rights of

Black people. However, Philip never campaigned for Black rights because he was fundamentally *against* the White population, but because he believed that the key to the solution of the problem of bad race relations, especially in the border areas, was a just solution to the question of land rights. He was a total realist and did not oppose White intrusion *per se* (the earlier quotations clearly prove this), but because he believed it should be possible for the Black tribes to be able to retain their identity and internal unity. Therefore he opposed an uncontrolled intrusion which would eventually, he believed, leave the land like a checkerboard with small Black and White blocks (Macmillan 1959:124-125).

From first to last Philip's themes were land and livelihood, sometimes the state of the law, but always *life* and the means of living it. His most severe and persistent censure even of the frontier Boers related to their rapacious and uneconomical use of land; his evidence hurt, when it did, because it was hard-headed and, above all, comprehensive ... In its simplest terms, Philip's plea was that if the Xhosa were ever to be tolerable neighbours they must themselves be able to live tolerably (Macmillan 1936:332-333).

It seems fair to conclude, then, that Philip firmly believed in the civilising and Christianising mission of the British empire by means of colonialism. There was, however, a fundamental paradox in his views, because he could not approve of the constant expansion of White land - a fundamental dimension of colonialism.

Something else which had an important influence on Philip's views on mission was his firm belief in capitalism, especially as it was expressed in the theories of his countryman Adam Smith. Philip believed that capitalism would bring prosperity to the whole community (Ross 1986:96). He was therefore a firm believer in the typical nineteenth-century coupling of commerce and Christianity. It was for this reason that he wanted the colonised people to be drawn more and more as consumers into the Western (capitalist) economic system. Macmillan (1959:115) comes to the conclusion therefore that no other missionary saw as clearly as Philip that there was a need 'to think of these backward peoples not merely as a convenience, "animated tools", but rather as potential *consumers*, who would be better for consuming more'. This economical foundation of Philip's views about mission is very important - and its influence should not be underestimated. It

most certainly facilitated for him the entanglement between mission and colonialism, with all the accompanying negative consequences. In my final paragraph on Philip I shall return to this influence of capitalism on his life and work.

A word needs to be said about Philip's views on the unity of the church. Mention is often made of the strong ecumenical impulse which came from the 'mission fields' to the 'mother churches' at home. Galbraith (1963:89) points out that in actual fact there was a great degree of rivalry among the various churches and mission societies in their mission work. Indeed, writing about the situation in the Cape Colony, Macmillan (1963:89) states:

The rivalry between the London and Wesleyan societies could not be explained in ... doctrinal terms, but their conflict was intense. They were like rival imperialist states fighting over colonial territories.

Philip, unfortunately, did not bring to an end this rivalry, but rather became involved in it to such an extent that 'the conflicts between Philip and the Wesleyans were conducted with an intensity comparable to his battles with the Cape government and the settlers' (Galbraith 1963:85-86; cf. also Boucher 1966:84). Having said all this, honesty requires of me to point out that Philip's relationship to the Wesleyans was the exception, not the rule. Indeed, Philip was influential in getting the Paris Mission, the Rhenish Mission and the American Board Mission to come to Southern Africa. Throughout his life and service as superintendent of the LMS in the Cape, Philip retained a close association with all these societies. The ecumenical dimension of the Christian mission was therefore important to him.

How should one evaluate Philip's contribution from the perspective of the *missio politica oecumenica*? In general one can say that he was a typical nineteenth-century colonial missionary, with the typical cultural arrogance and paternalism which characterised his time and his race. According to Gailey (1962:421-422),

Philip was a Tory who had come to his post with certain preconceptions about the role of a mission society. Key among these was that such an organization should not interfere in politics. In pursuance of this, Philip early adopted a favourable attitude towards the Colonial officials.

This probably conflicts with the widely held view, especially among White South Africans, that Philip was a rabid political activist, but I think it conveys a truer picture, especially as far as his early years are concerned. He believed that the British colonial structure was the best system for the advancement of the colonised peoples. Philip was, however, a sensitive man and he soon became aware of the colonial reality of oppression, especially of the Khoi-Khoi. True to his evangelical convictions, he actively resisted this oppression and sought to bring it to an end. This change in favour of the Khoi-Khoi gives evidence of a man sensitive to his context, and especially to the poor and oppressed in that context. Thus Philip became deeply involved in colonial politics.

Yet, having said this, I feel the need arises immediately to qualify this statement. Philip became aware of some of the evils perpetrated in the name of a system in which he had earlier believed, and he rebelled against them. But his rebellion did not go far enough. It seems to me that the key reason for this is the fact that Philip did not realise the strong interrelation between colonialism, capitalism and racism; in the nineteenth century they always came together, a kind of imperialistic 'package deal'. Philip rejected racism, but remained to be a firm believer in colonialism and capitalism, not realising that his high ideals would inevitably be shattered on this hard rock at the core of the whole imperialist system. And that is the main reason why I eventually come to an ambivalent conclusion about his contribution to the *missio politica oecumenica* in South Africa. He was a firm proponent of the necessary unity of the Christian missionary effort, but his position lacked ideological clarity. This is true especially as far as the influence of colonialism through its link with capitalism and its role in the alienation of land is concerned. Yet his firm resistance to the racist oppression of Black people did lay a foundation upon which the South African church can build a century later. In so doing, the church needs to be aware that the forces of political power and class are intertwined with that of racism. Any attempt by the Christian community in South Africa to root out racism should deal firmly and consistently with all three. If this does not happen, the attempt is doomed to failure - as Philip's history illustrates.

### 3.3 BISHOP COLENZO, 1814-1883

John William Colenso was born in England in 1814. After finishing school he became a teacher and later a tutor in Mathematics. He was deeply religious and belonged to the group we call 'evangelicals' today. He had an abiding interest in all spiritual and theological matters and in 1846 decided to become a priest in the Anglican Church. During this period he became involved with the (Anglican) Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), one of the mission societies in the Anglican Church. In 1852 the Bishop of Cape Town invited him to become Bishop of Natal. Colenso undertook an exploratory journey to Natal, before setting out in 1855 with his party of forty people. While still on board ship they started learning Zulu.

Colenso did not regard himself simply as bishop of the White Anglicans of Natal. He rather regarded himself primarily as a missionary bishop in the typical contemporary sense of the word, in other words as shepherd to the Black 'pagans' who had to be evangelised. He therefore immediately started building a mission station outside Pietermaritzburg. The experience of preaching the gospel to Black people in the colonial context had a profound influence on Colenso's theological thinking. More and more he clashed with his fellow colonists because of their racist views; as a result many White Anglicans wanted to have nothing to do with him. The result was that Colenso absorbed himself more and more in his missionary activity. His mission station, Ekukhanyeni (the place of light), developed rapidly, he studied Zulu, and with his Zulu helper, William Ngidi, he soon began translating the Bible into Zulu.

It was a question William Ngidi asked about the Bible (namely about the veracity of stories such as those about Noah) which caused Colenso to re-evaluate his own views on Scripture (Guy 1983:90). He started an intensive study of the first six books of the Old Testament. The results of this research were published eventually in a study of seven volumes, *The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua critically examined* (the first volume was published in 1862). This publication caused a furore in ecclesiastical as well as non-ecclesiastical circles. Colenso made use of the results of the historical-critical method in Biblical scholarship which had been developed since the beginning of the nine-

teenth century in Germany. His opponents accused him of abandoning the literal inspiration, and together with that the trustworthiness of the Bible, especially because he questioned the historicity of the Old Testament. As a result of all this the SPG withdrew their support from Colenso, while his fellow bishops prohibited him from preaching in their dioceses. A charge of heresy was also brought against him with his metropolitan, Bishop Gray in Cape Town. In December 1863 Colenso was found guilty of heresy; he had four months in which to abandon his 'heretical views' - otherwise he would be deposed as bishop. Because Colenso could not and would not repudiate his views, he was deposed by Bishop Gray four months later. Colenso disputed Gray's action in court and in 1865 the court ruled that Gray had acted *ultra vires*. Colenso was thereby reinstated as Bishop of Natal. This was the beginning of an unpleasant struggle between Colenso and the Anglican Church, as he tried to maintain his position as Bishop of Natal in the face of opposition from the rest of the church. Ultimately this resulted in a split between the Anglican Church (the Church of the Province of South Africa) and the Church of England (Colenso's supporters). It is a pity that Colenso is mainly remembered for this split rather than for his unique theological contribution.

In considering Colenso's views on mission, the first interesting aspect is the Scriptural passage which for him was central to mission. At the ordination of a missionary priest Colenso preached on Luke 2:13-14: 'Suddenly a great army of heaven's angels appeared with the angel, singing praises to God: "Glory to God in the highest heaven! And peace on earth to men with whom he is pleased!"' This verse, said Colenso, is 'the very watchword of a Christian missionary and the very essence of the gospel' (in Edgecombe 1982:29). At this time, the vast majority of missionaries based mission almost exclusively on the so-called Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). In a very original way, Colenso based mission on the praise which we owe God. Apart from this spark of originality, though, Colenso held the typical nineteenth-century views, especially on the relationship between church and colonial authority in christianising and civilising the 'natives'. Actually he held the typical colonial (Constantinian) view on the relationship between church and state, mission and governmental authority (cf. Edgecombe 1982:16). Furthermore he regarded the English people as the people specially elected for this task:

Christians of other nations have, doubtless, their share in this mighty enterprise (mission); but we, sons and daughters of England, have a far higher calling than others, the first and foremost post of duty. For who can doubt, that, if our country has been suffered and strengthened, in the Providence of God, to girdle the earth with her might ... it is in order that God's name may be glorified, and the Gospel of His Son proclaimed, by our means, and the lands, which our warriors have conquered, become the fair possessions of the Prince of Peace (Colenso in Edgcombe 1982:38-39).

Throughout his life Colenso placed a high premium on the British sense for justice and truth. Actually one can say that he regarded his task as a missionary bishop as the responsibility to further British rule so that justice and truth could be spread in the 'heathen lands'. Because he held this view, Colenso was so deeply shocked by the British war with the Zulu (1879). 'For the war, in destroying twelve thousand lives, had also destroyed the meaning in Colenso's life. The fact that the invasion had been initiated and prosecuted by Britain, negated the basic principles upon which his political, moral and religious existence was founded' (Guy 1983:286). This is the background against which the sermon should be understood which Colenso preached on the day of repentance and prayer which was called after the British defeat at Isandhlwana. The colonial authorities hoped that the day would be used to rally support for their efforts to subdue the Zulu. Colenso used the opportunity, however, to enumerate all the political blunders by the authorities which had led to the disaster. He called his hearers not to some vague sense of repentance, but to concrete changes in their deeds. 'I will not prostitute my sacred office by speaking peace to you when there is no peace - by hiding the sins which we are bound to confess, and telling you of faults which are not the real burden that weighs us down' (in Guy 1983:275). It is difficult today to form a true impression of Colenso's moral courage and evangelical conviction to go so completely against the grain of his fellow colonists at such an occasion. Again one has to emphasise that his political involvement stemmed from his conviction that the gospel itself enjoined him to do this. It was a great shock for Colenso to discover that the British colonial authorities did not share his convictions.

In the history of the last ten years of Colenso's life we see an intelligent and articulate man, drawing on nineteenth century liberal ideals, suddenly made aware that he was living in the midst of brutality and terror, brought into existence, not by the barbarians, but by the civilisers - his own contemporaries, peers and friends. It is the

tension created by Colenso's invocation of high liberal ideals against the realities of colonialism and imperialism which provides the dramatic context of Colenso's last decade (Guy 1983:194).

How is one to evaluate Colenso's contribution to the *missio politica oecumenica* in South Africa? The first impression is an ambivalent one. On the one hand he was the typical Victorian missionary, full of the self-assurance that his British culture and system of government were self-evidently the best and therefore needed to be transplanted to the colonies - indeed, as I have pointed out, he believed it his *mission* to aid this transplantation. Yet he proved to be extraordinarily sensitive to traditional African religion, saying it should not be 'coarsely and violently rooted up', as it contained many seeds of 'true religion' (Edgecombe 1982:xvi). Furthermore he expected Zulu thinkers and theologians to make a lasting contribution to the universal church (Edgecombe 1982:223-224). The same ambivalence becomes apparent in his relationships with colonial authorities. He thanked God for colonialists such as Governor Grey and Theophilus Shepstone, but eventually came to abhor what these colonialists did to the Zulu nation.

Yet I feel such an easy judgment of ambivalence to be simplistic and inadequate - I would be begging the question if that was my final judgment. Perhaps Colenso's differing (even opposing) points of view are not due to ambivalence, but rather to his integrity. He came out to Natal as an ordinary nineteenth-century paternalistic missionary, with the typical liberal ideals about the relationship between the races. But his close and sincere contact with Zulu culture, as well as his personal experience of what was done to Black people in the name of colonialism, caused a serious change in his position, a change typical of a person of great integrity. His views on the value of African culture and tradition reflected openness and sincerity, while his opposition to the colonial authorities in several cases (e.g. in the unjust and inhuman treatment of Langalibalele - cf. Guy 1983:205-213) gives evidence of a pronounced sense of justice as well as great courage. Indeed, in today's terms I would say it gives evidence of a person aware of his mission of humanising life, also political life. His struggle with the Anglican authorities for the greater portion of his ministry in Natal so took up his time and energies that Colenso did and said little about relations with other churches. We know that he had an open and inclusive approach,

but apart from that, on the basis of available sources, we can really not claim that Colenso was an ecumenical figure.

It is time for the South African church to look past Colenso's role in the schism within the Anglican Church, and to build rather on his theological insights in the political and ecumenical mission of South African Christians. One of these insights, which is remarkable if we consider the context in which Colenso lived, is that the South African church should be African, not partly westernised. Also important is Colenso's discovery that the declared liberal values of the colonists were ultimately inadequate to bring about freedom and justice, indeed full human personhood, to the colonised people. In saying this I am not saying that Colenso was a saint without any shortcomings. Obviously he had many - some of which I pointed out above. What I am saying is that Colenso left us a valuable theological heritage which we can reclaim for our liberating mission today.

#### 3.4 ANDREW MURRAY, 1828-1917

Andrew Murray jun. was born in 1828, a son of the Rev. Andrew Murray sen. of Graaff-Reinet, one of the band of pioneering Scottish Presbyterian ministers who were brought to the Cape Colony as part of Lord Somerset's strategy of anglicisation (there was also a shortage of Dutch ministers at the time). After school in Scotland, he (Andrew Murray jun.) went to the Netherlands in 1845 for his theological education. The theological scene in the Netherlands at that time was characterised by rationalism, although the revival (Reveil) also originated at that time. Murray chose revival over rationalism. Among the theological students the ideas of the revival were promoted especially by the student association *Sechor Dabar* (Search the Word) of which association Murray became a member. According to Du Toit, the members of *Sechor Dabar* consciously 'tended to insulate themselves from secular and liberal influences at the Dutch universities' (in Butler *et al.* 1987:50). This is completely in line with Murray's pietistic orientation and helped cement his conservative theological approach. He completed his studies in 1848, and returned to South Africa. His first congregation was outside the borders of the Cape Colony, viz. in Bloemfontein, where he ministered to the Voortrekkers in 1849. His

congregation included the whole central and northern Orange Free State, as well as parts of the Transvaal Republic.

In 1859 Andrew Murray was called to Worcester in the Cape Colony. With his return to the Colony, at that stage still the centre of Afrikaner culture, he started playing a more important role in the life and work of the Dutch Reformed Church. In 1864 he was called to Cape Town, and in 1871 to Wellington. During these years he came to be associated indissolubly with a series of inter-church conferences and revival movements which were destined to have a strong influence on the ecclesiastical scene in South Africa. Inside the DRC he exerted strong influence especially as secretary of the Ministers' Mission Association. So, for example, he was the real inspiration behind the decision of the DRC to start missionary work in Malawi, Zimbabwe and the Northern Transvaal. He was also one of the first Dutch Reformed theologians to occupy himself with systematic theological reflection on mission. The fruit of this reflection was his book *Die sleutel tot die Sendingvraagstuk* (The key to the mission problem), published in 1902.

Murray was a typical pietist in his understanding of mission. It comes as no surprise therefore that the Moravians are the first and foremost group he held up as an example to all other churches and mission societies in *The key to the mission problem*. In typical pietist fashion he also emphasised the personal aspect of mission very strongly. The mission problem, he said, is a personal problem: strive therefore for a deepening of the spiritual life of every individual, and dedication to mission will follow automatically, as the whole missionary task is a personal task (Murray 1944:99, 217). Another typical pietistic emphasis he lay was that on evangelisation as the main task of mission. Indeed, for him mission *was* evangelisation, especially understood as 'the evangelisation of the world in this generation' (as the Edinburgh conference was to articulate it in 1910), inspired by the love of Christ for lost souls. The Holy Spirit would provide the power in answer to fervent prayer - another important emphasis in mission for Murray. He was so totally engrossed in mission as personal evangelisation that he did not even refer to the so-called 'ancillary services' (schools, hospitals, etc.) in *The key to the mission problem*. For him, as I have already pointed out, mission *was* evangelisation, the winning of souls for the Lamb (Von Zinzendorf).

The political impact of Murray's ministry must be understood against the background of the 'liberalism struggle' within the DRC in the 1860s. This formed part of what Du Toit calls the broader "Cape Afrikaners" failed liberal moment'. About this era he says:

For a while the liberals seemed to be winning all the main battles, yet when the dust of the synodical disputes, theological controversies, and court actions began to settle after 1870, it became clear that the liberal tendency was a spent force. The real, lasting, victors were the 'orthodox' party, who would henceforth put their stamp on the mainstream of DRC piety and religious culture (Du Toit in Butler *et al.* 1987:36).

One of the main spokespersons for the 'conservative party' was Andrew Murray. The DRC was at that stage very much part of the broader political debate flourishing at the Cape, especially focused on the debate about responsible government. This was basically a debate about representative institutions both in church (DRC) and state. The doctrinal conflicts, especially between 'liberals' and 'conservatives', were therefore embedded in the wider social, economic and political structures ( Du Toit in Butler *et al.* 1987:52-58).

With the advent of Murray a whole new generation of conservative church-people came to the fore, destined to change 'traditional patterns of DRC practices and religious sensibility almost beyond recognition' (Du Toit in Butler *et al.* 1987:59). Murray indeed established himself as a leader of this new group of well-educated young men, both theologians and 'lay people' who 'were not rooted in traditional rural communities or restricted to localized resources; they were highly mobile, skilled organizers and enthusiastic conference-goers, trying to reach a wider audience' (p. 59). Seen against this background, the inter-church revivalistic conferences inspired by Murray gain new meaning. Taking into account Murray's position of leadership in this conservative group during these formative years, one can better understand Durand's statement (in Villa-Vicencio & De Gruchy 1985:40-45) that 'the Scottish or Murray evangelical tradition' contributed decisively to the growth of Afrikaner civil religion, which came to play such a foundational role in the shaping of Afrikaner thinking on social and racial issues, later making possible the growth of apartheid theology.

Andrew Murray is widely regarded as an ecumenical figure of great importance in the South African church. Several factors play a

role in this regard, among them the series of inter-church conferences in Worcester while he was ministering there. It is undoubtedly true that the unity of Christians was of great importance for Murray. He saw unity as one of the important conditions for the church to receive that power of the Holy Spirit which would enable it to carry out the Great Commission. The unity brought about by true Christian love, empowers every Christian; in this way everybody gains more power by way of the co-operation of the whole body. This love, in a reciprocal way, empowers women and men in the unity of the body (Murray 1944:130-131). As could be expected, Murray co-operated in ecumenical endeavours of his time, for example the Evangelical Alliance and the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. In this respect he remarked, 'Would it not be wonderful and a blessing if the whole church could gather for a week at the feet of its Lord, to consecrate itself to this one task - the extension of the kingdom by way of mission?' (1944:190; my translation).

In the light of Murray's emphasis on unity it is interesting to note that he wanted to limit the first Worcester conference (1860) to White members of the DRC. Thus he wrote to his brother:

In Europe the individual action of the various churches has been too strongly developed, and united labour is what is necessary to complete their efficiency. With our church the need, I think, is a stronger individual development ... We need to conquer the difficulties of our isolation and of the slow action of our church courts ... But I must confess I do not see much that will result from a Conference of English-speaking missionaries and ourselves. Our people are still so separated from the English on one side and the natives on the other, that you will find harmonious action to any great extent an impossibility. You know what a friend of the [Evangelical] Alliance I am, but I do think that a first meeting like that at Worcester would issue in higher results, if confined at present to the friends of our church (in Du Plessis 1919:185).

In the light of what I have already said about Murray's views on the unity of the church, we need not regard these words as a repudiation of those views. It was, however, for a pragmatic or functional reason (it would 'work' better) that he wanted to limit the conference to DRC members. It is interesting to note his remark about distance from both English and 'natives'. At the least this seems to imply that Murray was aware of the fact that unity between Whites only would not be enough; unity also with Black Christians would have to be sought.

Andrew Murray had a lasting influence on the South African church in general and the DRC in particular. It is especially his personal piety and devoted prayer life which is still held up as an example for South African Christians from various denominational traditions. What is not so clearly and so often emphasised is that Murray's pietistic understanding of the Christian faith served to pave the way for Afrikaner civil religion, which was later to become rampant (cf. Villa-Vicencio & De Gruchy 1985:40, 42-43). On the one hand, therefore, he had a negative influence on the *missio politica oecumenica* in South Africa. As I have stated, mission for Murray was evangelisation, and he would probably have denied its political dimension altogether - the typical pietist position. Yet on the other hand Murray's ministry was intensely political, as it helped create the theological climate within which the foundations of Afrikaner civil religion and its heretic twin, apartheid, could be established. This he did without becoming overtly politically involved, but exactly because of his supposedly 'neutral' position. Such a supposed neutrality is impossible; for, as I have already pointed out in chapter 1, 'there is no pure ecclesiastical neutrality, just as there is no apolitical theology; there are only those who are conscious of their political assumptions and consequences and those who are not' (Sölle 1974:xiv). Most probably Murray would not willingly have supported apartheid. His history illustrates, though, how dangerous it can be, theologically as well as socially, not to be conscious of the political dimension of our Christian mission.

The abdication of the political dimension of mission (implicitly or explicitly) is a very dangerous option to take for yet another reason. In essence such an option means that Christians write off *this* world and are looking only for a way in which to survive until the time comes for all of them to enter heavenly bliss. The implication is that the world, which is after all a particular object of God's love, is so evil that there is no real possibility of realising the reign of Christ in the here and now also ('Your will be done *on earth* as it is in heaven!'). Despite Andrew Murray's enormous influence on the people and the church of South Africa, especially on that part of the church which identifies itself as evangelical, his is thus not the way to exercise the *missio politica oecumenica* in our day. Even in his thinking on the unity of Christians I cannot follow him, as his was basically an apolitical, pietistic unity, an

'innocent' inner-churchly 'togetherness', and thus not the kind of unity I described in chapter 1.

## 4 THREE BLACK PIONEERS

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

A general comment I want to make before starting my discussion of Black Christian pioneers in South Africa is that Black Christians played a very important role in the establishment of Christianity in Southern Africa, as they did in the rest of Africa. Because much of the history concerning Black pioneers is transmitted orally in an African language, White people everywhere, also in South Africa, are often not aware of the important contribution Black Christians made. I want to cite just one example: in a very thorough study of the Pedi, Delius points out the important role played by Black pioneers in the growth of the church among them. Their contribution was so important that King Sekhukhune accused one of them in these words: 'Jacob, it is actually your fault that all my people believe. You brought belief here from the old colony [the Cape Colony]. The missionaries are nowhere near as responsible as you' (in Delius 1983:121). Although I started this review of mission history in South Africa by discussing the contribution of three White pioneers (because they are first chronologically), it does not mean that I want to disparage the contribution of Black pioneers, or that I add them simply as some sort of an afterthought. Black mission pioneers made an invaluable contribution to the establishing of Christianity in South Africa. The time is long past that the history of Christian mission in South Africa can be regarded as basically an all-White concern. In developing and redefining the *missio politica oecumenica* of the South African church, the heritage of Black pioneers also must be reclaimed.

### 4.2 NTSIKANA, C. 1780 - C. 1821

Ntsikana was born about 1780 as a member of an important Xhosa clan. His father was a councillor of the Xhosa king, Ngqika. As councillor he represented his area and came into daily contact with the king. Ntsikana had a traditional Xhosa upbringing. It is not clear whether he had any contact with White missionaries, although there is an oral tradition that as a child he heard a sermon of the well-known missionary

Dr Van der Kemp. It seems therefore that his exposure to White missionaries was minimal. By the year 1815, when he was already a married man, Ntsikana converted to Christianity. Despite the possibility that he had heard Van der Kemp, missionaries apparently played no role in Ntsikana's conversion (Hodgson 1985:129-136).

Ntsikana started an evangelising ministry immediately after his conversion. He started by holding two daily meetings for all the people living at his homestead. At these meetings there were singing, praying and preaching. Especially singing played an important role in his ministry. We know today of at least four hymns which he composed and which were the first Christian hymns in Xhosa. In his preaching he focused strongly on 'this thing that entered him, this thing that hated sin' (Hodgson 1985:158). It is important to note that at the beginning of his ministry Ntsikana did not have a Bible (nor could he read it if he had one). Yet he placed great emphasis on 'the word of God', which for him was a word God directly revealed to him (Ntsikana). More important than his preaching, however, were his hymns, and especially his so-called 'Great Hymn'. In this Great Hymn Ntsikana acted as the traditional eulogist who sings the praises of his new king, namely God himself. Ntsikana very successfully used well-known traditional concepts, which he filled with a new content to lead his people into the new faith. This was indeed a notable achievement, especially if we keep in mind his lack of contact with any Christian tradition, and his illiteracy. As this was such a remarkable achievement, I want to quote the text of the hymn in its earliest published form:

He who is our mantle of comfort,  
The giver of life, ancient on high,  
He is the Creator of the Heavens,  
And the ever burning stars:  
God is mighty in the heavens,  
and whirls the stars around in the sky.  
We call on him in his dwelling-place,  
That he may be our mighty leader,  
For he makes the blind to see:  
We adore him as the only good,  
For he alone is a sure defence,  
He alone is a trusty shield, He alone is our bush of refuge:  
Even HE - the giver of life on high,  
Who is the Creator of the heavens (in Hodgson 1985:249).

As is clear from the above, and as I pointed out in passing, the characteristic of Ntsikana's special ability to bring about change was his ability to fill old concepts and images with new content. In this way he succeeded in maintaining the connection with traditional Xhosa religion, while at the same time he made the transition to the new religion easier.

Although it was primarily a new form of religious association, the ties of clan and lineage among the disciples satisfied the need for a corporate sense of belonging and integration within Xhosa society as a whole, rather than as a group apart like the mission station people. Through Ntsikana they expressed their new beliefs and practices as part of the Xhosa world, living among Xhosa in a Xhosa way (Hodgson 1985:222).

Where it was necessary, Ntsikana did not hesitate to introduce completely new things. An example of such new things were his daily services. Unlike the practice in traditional Xhosa religion, they knelt in prayer and addressed God directly, rather than through the ancestors. Thus he introduced a new regular act of worship in a new ritual context (Hodgson 1985:140).

As far as his relationship with his tribe was concerned, and especially his political role in the tribe, Ntsikana remained a councillor of Ngqika. He kept on providing the king with political advice, as for example in the war of Amalinde (1818) when he counselled Ngqika not to go to war against the other Xhosa leaders. This advice was rejected by the other councillors. They felt that the source of his advice was a new, strange God, not the traditional God. Furthermore, Ntsikana's pacifism ran counter to Xhosa tradition (Hodgson 1985:204-206). This was an accurate assessment, for Ntsikana's political involvement *did* indeed flow from his new faith. For this reason Hodgson (1985:166) writes:

The Xhosa response to the white advance is generally seen in terms of two opposing 'strategies for survival'. The one is for resistance and is epitomized by the leadership of Ndlambe with Nxele as his adviser. The other is for collaboration as followed by Ngqika and Ntsikana is supposed to have given him full support. But we shall see that though Ntsikana accepted the white man's religion, he counselled Ngqika against asking the British for aid in deciding the struggle for power with Ndlambe. Those who would see him purely as a political innovator, articulating the need for change, do not do justice to his Christian conviction and the price he paid for his witness in the form of persecution and suffering at the hands of both black and white.

Ntsikana did not have much to say about the unity of all believers. One can say, however, that his conception of the Christian faith carried in itself the seed of universality. In one of his hymns, for instance, he says: 'You [God] are the one who gathers flocks together which reject one another.' Hodgson says about his Great Hymn: 'In the Great Hymn there is a transition from particularism to universalism ... God is now understood as being the uniter of all people everywhere through Christ so that reconciliation becomes universal' (1985:276). Ntsikana's universalism differed sharply from a tribalistic particularism and one seems justified in stating that, at least on the theoretical level, he laid the foundation for unity among African Christians.

Ntsikana can therefore be regarded as an authentic African prophet. 'African prophets go directly to the people and inspire religious and political movements ... prophets are often sources of creative religious change' (Ray in Hodgson 1985:171). It was especially his claim that God had revealed himself to him (Ntsikana) that was very attractive to the Xhosa, as it assumes a direct relationship with the Supreme Being.

His appeal is precisely because he seems so unrelated to Vanderkemp and is revered as one sent directly by God as a prophet to the black people. It is this that united his following from the start (Hodgson 1985:183-184).

Although I claim that Ntsikana can be considered one of the Black pioneers in establishing Christianity in South Africa, his name is not well known, even in the Black South African church. Where it is known at all, it will probably be as the composer of the Great Hymn, which is still sung in the South African church today. Although his name may not be so well known, Hodgson (1985:334) argues that he serves as symbol of 'evolutionary change which [goes] hand in hand with the development of a non-violent Xhosa nationalism' to this day. His tradition was initially carried further by a group of Xhosa Christians who became members of the congregation of the LMS missionary John Brownlee. Although they belonged to Brownlee's congregation, they regarded themselves as having a separate identity, namely as 'the congregation of the God of Ntsikana' (Hodgson 1985:337). During the twentieth century Ntsikana's memory was kept alive in various ways, amongst others by the formation of the Ntsikana Memorial Association. This association especially attempted to have Ntsikana serve as a symbol for wider African unity. A very interesting link was established

a few years later by the fact that a number of Black leaders came to hold posts simultaneously in the Ntsikana Memorial Association and in the (South) African National Congress (ANC). According to Hodgson (1985:415), 'the non-violent teaching of Ntsikana almost certainly had its effect on ANC policy'.<sup>1</sup> Apart from his non-violence, his value as a symbol of supra-tribal African unity was also utilised by the ANC.

Another way in which the influence of Ntsikana was kept alive was through the church. In 1911 the Ntsikana Memorial Church was founded. It split from the mission church, the United Free Church. This church wanted consciously to follow in the footsteps of Ntsikana. According to Hodgson (1985:428) this recovery of the Ntsikana tradition

... can be seen as a major step in the reintegration of Christianity in the African past. The consequence was an African family church. The same symbols were at work as in nationalism, but quite different aspects were emphasized within the pietistic rather than within the nationalistic context.

In these two ways, via the nationalistic ideal and the church, Ntsikana's memory and influence were kept alive until the 1950s, when they started declining. Despite the decline, though, Ntsikana was and still is of seminal importance as a Christian pioneer, as through him 'the African people can find unity in all the complexity of their diversity' (Hodgson 1985:448).

How are we to evaluate Ntsikana's contribution from the perspective of the *missio politica oecumenica*? The first remark is really quite self-evident: according to his traditional, holistic African world-view, Ntsikana apparently did not see any contradiction between political involvement and Christian faith. His new-found faith became for him the well-spring of his political actions. That is one of the reasons why his heritage could be so easily integrated with the growing African nationalism. Of course the danger exists that such an application of faith can lead to the development of some form of an African civil religion. In

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1 One should be careful of pressing Ntsikana's influence too far, though. At that time the ANC basically held liberal middle-class values, so that Ntsikana's non-violence would have fitted neatly with their own interests. It might therefore also have been the ANC making use of Ntsikana, rather than simply Ntsikana influencing the ANC.

order to prevent that from happening, the Ntsikana tradition will have to exist in self-critical dialogue with other South African Christian traditions. If we apply his heritage in this way, it can help us today to fulfil the political dimension of our mission in South Africa.

I pointed out above that Ntsikana himself did not say much about the unity among Christian believers. We have also noticed, though, that the Ntsikana tradition was used extensively to further the ideal of (especially) African unity. Since the fifties of this century his tradition has been in decline. It is especially since the fifties that the Nationalist party government imposed its ideal of ethnic separation on all the South African people (Black and White had long been separated, but now attempts were made even to separate the Black ethnic groups from each other). African nationalist organisations, like for example the ANC, have rejected this ethnic separation from the beginning. With all the instruments of power at its disposal, however, the regime imposed its will on South African society, and undoubtedly succeeded in making many people think exclusively in ethnic categories (as is evidenced for instance in the measure of success the regime enjoyed with its homelands policy). We can say therefore that the need for symbols which can facilitate unity in the face of our nearly overwhelming diversity is as urgent as in the days of Ntsikana. It is high time therefore that all the South African 'tribes', as well as and in particular the White 'tribe', should recover the Ntsikana tradition as one symbol of a supra-tribal unity, a symbol in which both the rich African as well as the rich Christian tradition plays a constitutive part.

### **4.3 TIYO SOGA, 1829-1871**

Tiyo Soga was born in 1829. His father was a leading councillor of Ngqika (as was Ntsikana) and one can therefore conclude that he probably was influenced by Ntsikana. Tiyo Soga went to a mission school and later, for more advanced education, to Lovedale, which at that time was not yet a purely Black school, but multiracial. During the war of 1846 he fled with the Scottish (Presbyterian) missionaries and was then taken to Scotland by a teacher at Lovedale, Mr Govan. While in Scotland he was baptised in 1848 before returning to South Africa later in the same year. Soga then became a teacher in the Eastern Cape, until he fled with the Scottish missionaries again during the 1850

war. In 1851 he returned to Scotland to study for the ministry, inter alia at the University of Glasgow. In 1856 he was ordained in the Presbyterian Church - the first Black South African to be ordained as a minister. In 1857 he married a Scottish woman, Janet Burnside, before returning to South Africa. Back in the Eastern Cape he served as missionary at Mgwali (1857-1868) and Tutura from 1868 till his untimely death in 1871.

Soga's service as a missionary must be evaluated against the background of the entanglement between mission and colonialism. This entanglement placed missionaries (both Black and White) in an almost untenably ambivalent position. The colonial authority expected of them to be precursors of governmental authority and sources of information on the Black population. For this very reason the missionaries were distrusted by the Blacks, whose trust they had to win for a successful mission. Added to this was the tension created by the border wars in the Eastern Cape. It was especially the commando system which created problems, as the Black tribes often ascribed the depredations of punitive commandos to the influence of missionaries. In this respect the mission stations were regarded as outposts of White authority. It was against this tense and complicated background that Tiyo Soga started his mission work among the Xhosa.

Soga's mission methods were typical of the generally accepted approach of that time. They consisted mainly of preaching and rudimentary teaching (aimed particularly at literacy, so that people could read the Bible). In order to achieve this goal he made use of Black catechists and evangelists, who mostly had only had a very rudimentary education themselves. Next to preaching and teaching, Soga wanted to supply medical care (apparently with the typical Pietist motivation of that time, namely to facilitate evangelisation):

The healing art is an admirable adjunct to the more direct ministry of the gospel. It is often astonishing to me that the Church did not till recently take up this idea, so admirably illustrated in the life of the Lord Jesus. In the Galeka country, as everywhere else in the habitable globe, melancholy cases of suffering humanity are to be met with very frequently. By our efforts in prescribing for, and relieving these sufferings, we get access into the hearts of not a few (Soga in Williams 1983:134).

In one important respect Soga's approach did however differ from that of his fellow (White) missionaries. By 1840 most missionaries were

convinced that their mission work would only be successful if the structure of the traditional Xhosa society and culture could be broken down. (I referred to this in chapter 2.) The authority of the tribal leaders and traditional customs therefore had to be destroyed. Against this background most missionaries welcomed the catastrophic consequences of the Great Cattle Killing (1856-1857),<sup>2</sup> as it nearly destroyed completely the tribal structure and customs of the Xhosa. Soga, though, could see no ultimate salvation for the Christian gospel in the destruction of the fibre of Xhosa life - although also here he was in an ambivalent position, which becomes clear in the following quotation:

However, he [Soga] saw divine purpose in the catastrophe. Affliction was good for the soul [note the typical Pietist sentiment]; the scattering of the tribes would bring them into contact with Christianity, both in the Colony and at mission stations in Caffraria, to which they would flock (Williams 1978:60).

Soga's ambivalent position with regard to Xhosa traditions and customs is revealed even more clearly in an event that took place at Mgwali. A group of boys on the station had themselves circumcised, painted themselves White and isolated themselves for a period - all in accordance with Xhosa tradition. It was a great disappointment to Soga, who interpreted it as a return to traditional religion. For this reason he expelled the boys from the station. This caused great dissatisfaction with their parents, two of whom were elders in the church.

The defiance boded ill for Soga and Chalmers (his fellow missionary at Mgwali). They therefore appealed for help to Charles Brownlee, the Ngqika Commissioner [thereby confirming missionary dependence on the strong arm of government]. They pointed out that 'whilst the principles of our Church were opposed to all Government interference betwixt ministers and their people, yet as the conduct of these lads [sic] was a public nuisance, a violation of all order, and a disturbance of the

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2 The Great Cattle Killing took place when the Xhosa, apparently as the result of a prophecy by a young girl, Nongqawuse, killed their livestock and destroyed their crops. As a result, all Whites would be swept from their (Xhosa) land for ever. Great controversy surrounds the interpretation of this event, and many historians (and others) question the truth of the story as it has been handed down. As I am mainly interested in the consequences of the event here, I only state the fact that such a killing took place. I do not opt for any one of the different interpretations, as I cannot here engage in the research such an option presupposes.

peace of this station, we feel compelled to call in [your] assistance to put an end to this lawlessness' (Williams 1978:84-85).

As I have already remarked, this incident pointed up Soga's ambivalent position. It seems, indeed, as if the incident was meant to embarrass Soga, who was himself not circumcised (and therefore still considered a child according to traditional custom). Whatever the motive, it does emphasise Soga's difficult position. This incident also shows that he apparently maintained the typically Pietist 'neutral' view on governmental authority, which is in effect a support of and a reliance upon the status quo. Furthermore it is interesting that Soga and Chalmers evaded the ritual and religious motivation of the boys' act by typifying it as 'lawlessness' instead. I make these observations not to put Soga in a bad light, but to highlight the tremendously ambivalent position in which he as a Black missionary was placed by the entanglement of mission and colonialism.

This brings us to probably the most important dimension of Soga's life and work: his contribution to the origin and growth of an African nationalism. When one raises this subject, it is necessary to keep in mind his marriage to a Scottish lady. As a Black man with a White wife in the colour-conscious imperialist society, he made contact daily with racism. Inevitably this had to influence his view of Black nationalism. It is equally important to keep in mind that his training in Scotland made him part of the new educated Black elite in the Colony and established him firmly as a member of the middle class.<sup>3</sup> This fact also would influence his view of African nationalism.

To begin with our consideration of Soga's contribution to African nationalism, we can mention his advice to his children when he sent them off to school in Scotland. He told them to

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3 With *middle class* I refer to the intermediate class between the rich (owners of capital) and the poor (labourers). It consists mainly of salaried technical, administrative and professional employees who are necessary to mediate between capital and labour; in other words, they do not themselves control capital, but are dependent on their salaries or wages for survival. Although there are differences within the middle class, in general one can say that they also share a specific social and cultural lifestyle. See Johnson 1982 for a fuller definition.

... take your place in the world as *colored*, not as white men, as *Kafirs* not as Englishmen ... For your own sakes never appear ashamed that your father was a Kafir, and that you inherit some African blood (Soga in Williams 1983:6).

However, he *did* send his children away from Africa, out of the African environment, to Scotland. If he felt so strongly about their African heritage, why did he send them out of Africa to be educated? In this connection he said:

In our various colonial towns, there are Government aided schools, which may be attended by the children of all, black and white, without distinction; but it is a question whether the higher class of schools in these towns may be attended by colored children, even though their parents are respectable [sic]. I do not wish to be the first to raise this delicate question about my children, as it might lead to a controversy which might injure their prospects for life. God has enabled me to live down these prejudices so far as they concerned myself; but I would never think of subjecting young natives to an ordeal such as I have passed through (Soga in Williams 1978:87-88).

If we compare these two statements, what do we have here - a political coward, or a consummate political realist in the context of contemporary colonial society? I think that in the light of all that he said and did, we cannot condemn Soga without further ado for his apparent ambivalence. His dedication to the Black cause is too evident, for example, in his view on the place of Blacks in Africa. In this respect he believed that God had given Africa to the descendants of Ham. God himself would therefore establish and maintain Blacks in Africa, also in the southern portion of the continent; *nothing* would break this link between *all* Black people and Africa. In thinking thus, Soga demonstrated

... the great physical extent of Africa and the huge numbers of its Black inhabitants; he also pointed out that there were many Blacks in the Americas. This was the first evidence of *Africa-consciousness* on the part of a Black in southern Africa, and is Tiyo Soga's unique contribution to the origins of Black nationalism. Indeed, it seems that this is the first manifestation of this aspect of Black consciousness anywhere on the continent ... *Africa-consciousness* must be regarded as a basic ingredient of Black consciousness, and later nationalist thought, throughout the continent (Williams 1978:97).

According to this point of view the articulated Black Consciousness of the 1960s and later therefore had its origins and roots in the nineteenth century, in a process in which Tiyo Soga played an essential role (Williams 1978:ix).

It is in the light of Soga's Africa-consciousness that I want to say something about his view regarding unity in mission. This Africa-consciousness, which exceeded all tribal barriers, can be viewed as foundational in Soga's thinking on unity among Christians. It comes as no surprise that Soga was never sectarian (in the sense of divisive) in his approach. Indeed, Williams (1978:114) points out that Soga was probably the only minister of his time who preached in congregations of all the Protestant denominations of his time. His encompassing Africa-consciousness therefore carried in itself the seeds of the unity of the African church.

It is clear from the above that Tiyo Soga contributed in a foundational manner to the origin and growth of later Black Consciousness, which was to play (and still plays) an important role in African nationalism and Black politics. It is equally clear that this contribution sprang from his concern about the quality of life of his own people in the unequal and oppressive colonial context of his time. As such this first ordained Black minister can be regarded as the forerunner of a large number of Black Christians who would later come to play an important role in the development of African nationalism. It seems clear to me also that Soga made this contribution exactly because he wanted to be consciously Christian and African at the same time. Although his position in the colonial society of his day often caused him severe problems, so that sometimes he had to be ambivalent about important matters, and although in many respects he held the basically ('apolitical') Pietistic views of his time, Soga did contribute to the socio-political welfare of his people. Certainly he revealed no fundamental dichotomy between his faith and his social and political involvement. Furthermore his supra-tribal Africa-consciousness provides us with a solid foundation on which to strive for the unity of the African church. The very fact that it was at the same time *supra-tribal* as well as *African* indicates that for Soga the political and ecumenical dimensions of his faith belonged together.

It can be argued, then, that Soga left a legacy which is important today in the development of Black Consciousness and even Pan-Africanism. This dimension of Soga's contribution flowed from his concern about the quality of life of his people in the oppressive colonial context. Because of this basic concern for people, Soga served as a

symbol of unity already in his lifetime. As a loyal Presbyterian minister until his death, Soga can be seen as the role model of generations of African church people to come after him, people who were (and are) both consciously Christian and consciously African.

#### 4.4 NEHEMIAH TILE - DIED 1891

We know very little about Nehemiah Tile's early life, especially about his birth and youth. Our records of him start really when he started work as an evangelist with the Wesleyan mission in the 1870s. Having worked some years as an evangelist, he was sent to Healdtown College for theological training. With him at Healdtown was another man destined to play a leading role in the Ethiopian movement, James Dwane. From 1879 he served as a probationer in Thembuland. While in this position, he clashed with his superintendent, Rev. T. Chubb, with the result that he left the Wesleyan Church in 1883 (cf. Balia 1985: 76) to start the Thembu Church. He was head of the Thembu Church until his death in 1891 (Saunders 1970:553-563).

The years of Tile's ministry coincided with a period of great importance in the Transkei's history. The Cape colonial authorities regarded the annexation of the Transkei as of great economic importance to the Cape; 'the income from hut taxation was to pay for the new roads and bridges, cheap labour could be provided for the Colony while much timber of quality was available' (Pretorius 1988:32). Once more the entanglement of mission and colonialism was therefore exerting great influence on the course of events. The Xhosa did not simply acquiesce in the annexation of their territory. It resulted in two frontier wars, that of 1877/78 and 1880/81. Tile's ministry must therefore be evaluated against this turbulent background.

Tile's Thembu Church was the first of the later series of African Independent Churches and as such is of great importance. It seems as if two things especially played an important role in Tile's secession. On the one hand he was very sympathetic to the national aspirations of the Thembu, while on the other hand he was dissatisfied with the degree of White control in the mission (Wesleyan) church. Tile, who was regarded as a very able preacher and a diligent worker by the missionaries, therefore started propaganda for an indigenous church free

from White domination. Once the break had taken place, he established his Thembu Church with the Thembu king Ngangelizwe as head (Lea s.a. 24; Sundkler 1961:38). To express the link between king, people and church, Tile composed a prayer which was to be sung everywhere in the Thembu Church. In this prayer he asks for God's blessing on the Thembu king, his son and the whole Thembu people. In the words of Saunders (1970:562):

Tile's church stressed Christian allegiance to the paramount, and endowed him with a certain sanctity, which enhanced his traditional role and helped to buttress his authority, weakened by missionary activity and the economic and political change accompanying white penetration into the area.

There can be little doubt that Tile's activities as a Thembu nationalist played the leading role in his secession from the Wesleyan Church (cf. Kamphausen 1976:94-95). It seems also as if the church acted in conjunction with the Cape Department of Native Affairs. In any case, the church produced a whole series of accusations against Tile, inter alia that he was causing enmity towards the magistrates in Thembuland and that he addressed a political meeting on a Sunday. After Tile's secession, his influence in Thembu affairs increased rather than decreased. These activities of his are of great importance, as they introduced a new era of protest. By this time it was clear that Black military resistance to White conquest had failed. Tile introduced a new form of protest by petitioning the colonial authorities. This created a new channel for the expression of religious and political protest (Odendaal 1984:24).

His church, then, was more than just a religious phenomenon. The political protest movement sought to escape from the reality of colonial rule. But only in the church, where all men were equal and black could control as well as white, was a total withdrawal from white rule possible. So the Thembu church should be seen in the context of the long history of African reaction to white penetration ... The founding of the Thembu church marked the trial of a new method, the use of a Christian framework within which to express African equality in an age of white control (Saunders 1970:569; cf. also Kamphausen 1976:107).

An important aspect of Tile's political involvement, which also had important missionary consequences, was his strong attachment to the Thembu king and the traditional power structure. The new Black elite of teachers, ministers, etc., which started exerting their influence by the 1870s, generally favoured the inclusion of Caffraria in a multi-

racial Cape society. Tile, on the contrary, wanted to have an independent tribal structure under the leadership of the traditional king. In this respect his prayer, to which I have already referred, can be said to be a new expression of Black Consciousness (Kamphausen 1976:102). In opposition to most White missionaries, he therefore wished to cooperate with the traditional power structures and to fortify them against White encroachment. Two consecutive Thembu kings employed his educational and political skills in an effort to maintain their independence from the Cape. However, 'the goal of chiefly independence, it soon became apparent, was one impossible to attain, and it rapidly faded away, though the idea of an independent Black state was to reappear as a practical programme in the Transkei some 70 years later' (Saunders 1970:569).

As is clear from what I have said above, the Thembu Church, like later Ethiopian-type Independent Churches, pursued a clear political agenda under Tile's leadership (cf. also Kamphausen 1976:88-89). This would eventually lead to another important aspect, namely that the Thembu Church would rise above its originally narrow ethnic base to exert a much wider attraction among Black people. Tile himself later gave evidence that he did not consider ethnic or tribal considerations of greater importance than a common Blackness. 'Thus Tile told Veldtman Bikitsha, so the headman reported later, that the church had as its object "a political move to free the Native from European control, and for the ultimate supremacy of the Coloured races throughout South Africa"' (Saunders 1970:567). The fundamental principle of later Black nationalists in South Africa, namely that White power had to be resisted by Black unity, thus finds its basis here with Tile (cf. Odendaal 1984:24; also Kamphausen 1976:108). That the Thembu Church set itself such a clear political agenda need not surprise us. In a basically illiterate society, the pulpit is an important tool in political conscientisation. Through the political involvement of the Thembu Church the foundation was therefore laid for churches in South Africa to become involved in the politics of African nationalism. 'And the element of African assertion in early religious independency, which first expresses itself in Tile's church, was to form a major ideological component of African nationalism' (Saunders 1970:39). While his church started out as a Thembu Church, Tile's thinking eventually rose above tribe-centred

particularism. Both in the light of his own achievements, as well as in the light of the later importance of Ethiopian Independent Churches, therefore, Tile is of foundational significance for church and mission in South Africa (Balia 1985:86).

In direct contrast to Tiyo Soga's ambivalence towards African traditional religious and tribal structures, Tile clearly regarded them in a positive light. So, for example, he was said to have contributed an ox towards the circumcision celebration of Dalindyebo, son of Ngangelizwe (Kamphausen 1976:105). Like Soga, however, he contributed in a very important way to the origin and growth of later Black Consciousness, which was to play an important role in African nationalism and Black politics. It seems clear that for Tile this involvement sprang from his understanding of the demands and promises of the gospel. Of special importance was Tile's conscientising role in his community - a role the Black churches are called to play increasingly in our day.

Another aspect of Tile's importance for us today is obviously his role as the leader of the first African Independent Church. When one considers the fact that between 20 per cent and 30 per cent of the Black population of South Africa today belong to the African Independent Churches, the importance of this pioneer founder of an Independent church is self-evident. Many commentators regard the Independent churches as basically fissiparous and sectarian, in other words that they have a negative effect on the unity of the church. On the basis of twenty years of empirical research on Shona Independent Churches, Daneel however disputes this view. According to him, there are positive signs of ecumenism within these churches:

The *Old* (i.e. African) society, with its drive for an intimate sense of belonging in a geographically restricted area, is made *New* in the Independent Church context through the recognition that within the process of fragmentation of Church groups - as with the hiving off of villages - the new 'dunhu' (i.e. the 'family of Christian Churches' founded in God) remains a constant and stabilizing factor. It is in this sense that I referred to Shona or African society as containing the 'seeds of ecumenism' (Daneel 1988:412).

If one considers what I said earlier about Tile's supra-tribal Africa-consciousness in the light of Daneel's findings, it becomes clear that

one can indeed say that Tile's contribution contained seeds of ecumenism on which the South African church can build today.

As far as the political and ecumenical dimensions of Christian mission in South Africa are concerned, Tile therefore made an important contribution. His emphasis on holistic African traditional religion and culture enabled him to keep his Christian faith and his political commitment together integrally. Of special significance is also Tile's conscientising role in his community - a role many Black pastors and priests would have to play later when organised political activity was made impossible by restrictions and states of emergency.

#### 4.5 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, let us consider all three Black pioneers. In a sense one can say that each one of them is representative of a specific group in the South African churches today. Ntsikana can be considered representative of the millions of 'ordinary lay' members who are responsible for such a large part of the growth of the Christian church in Africa today. Tiyo Soga can be considered representative of the thousands of ordained African ministers who labour faithfully and contribute towards the Africanisation of the church. And Nehemiah Tile can be considered the 'father and mother' of the influential group of African Independent Churches, who are indigenising the Christian gospel in a meaningful way. What is clear in the contribution of all three of them is that they did not regard their socio-political involvement as some sort of unnecessary adjunct, but as an essential dimension of their Christian existence. This undoubtedly was influenced by a holistic African world-view. It is also interesting to note that all three these early South African Christians gave evidence of a universalism in their outlook which transcended the traditional tribal particularism. The unity of the church was therefore for them at least a strong ideal to strive for. As far as the *missio politica oecumenica* of the church is concerned, they therefore made a useful contribution and left the South African church a valuable heritage on which it can build in the troubled times it is experiencing today.