

REVIEWING CONTROL AND ADMINISTRATION OF BETHESDA AND EMMARENTIA GELDENHUYS SCHOOLS, 1935-1974.

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Abstract

The transplantation of the church from the West into South Africa through the work of missionary societies brought with it the establishment of schools, which were regarded by their founders as valuable instruments of evangelisation among Africans. The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) also adopted this approach and made sure that its ventures at Bethesda Normal and Emmarentia Geldenhuys schools were a success. This became evident in the control and administration of both institutions. The intention of this article is to examine how this control and administration was maintained through the church and the state until the disestablishment of both institutions in 1964 and 1974 respectively (to the disadvantage of African communities and South Africa generally).

1 INTRODUCTION

The DRC came into existence on 02 March 1932 at Vrededorp in the then Transvaal (Pretorius 1949:17; Spoelstra et al 1973:210). Through the mission wing of the Dutch Reformed Church Mission in South Africa (DRCMSA), the Bethesda and Emmarentia Geldenhuys schools came into existence (Matsaung 1981:18). The DRCMSA controlled these institutions until 1956, when the control of these schools was transferred to the Department of Bantu Education. Before then, all mission schools were registered and received government grants, which implied a measure of control and administration by the state over such schools and training colleges. Government registration and funding meant that, the state determined the curriculum, paid the teachers and appointed managers to oversee the smooth running of these schools (Kgatla 1992:135). The Department of Bantu Education could approve or disapprove the appointment, promotion or dismissal of teachers and the expulsion of students (Seloana 1997:83). This meant that the Department could suspend its grant temporarily or terminate it for good when it deemed this necessary. It is against this background that, in this article, I want to examine how Bethesda and Emmarentia Geldenhuys were managed by both the church and the state during the period from 1964 to 1974. I will focus on how these institutions were controlled and administered in the period mentioned. However, in order to get a full picture of these two institutions, I will also endeavor to examine the background of their founders, namely, the Reverend C L Brink and the Reverend G H J van Rensburg.

1.1 Reverend C L Brink and Bethesda Normaalskool

The Reverend Christian Ludwig Brink was born on the 29 December 1891 at Calitzdorp in the Cape in 1915. He completed his missionary training at Wellington Missionary Institute. His first mission work was at Zoar mission station in the Cape. He also worked in Portuguese East Africa at Chiputu and Benga. In 1919 he married Miss Albertha van Zyl, a qualified 'kindergarten' teacher. He came back to South Africa in 1922. In 1923 he was ordained as a missionary of Bethesda. Within the first eight years of his service, 388 people were baptised and 378 were accepted as members of the congregation. In the communities around Bethesda mission station there were eleven registered primary schools and one private school. In these schools there were 24 teachers and 1 200 children (Beach & Niebuhr 1973:197). By 1948 the congregation had grown to 1 300 members and 3000 souls (siele). There were already 6 000 Africans on the station and 6 000 in the neighbouring villages of Bethesda. There were six evangelists and 19 schools (with 39 teachers and 2000 children) and two clinics (Crafford 1982:198). It was during Brink's ministry that the need for establishing a training institution, especially for evangelists, became evident. In 1891 Brink recommended to the Synodical Mission Commission (SMC) that Bethesda should become a training centre for both evangelists and teachers (Mphahlele 1978:59). In 1930, a group of African teachers from Bethesda mission station and from the neighbouring areas felt the need to establish a training institute. These teachers then established a teachers' association. They also decided "om met die oprigting van die nuwe kerkgebou op Bethesda te help, sodat die oue as 'n Normaalskool ingerig kon word" (they decided to assist in the erection of a new church building so that the old one could be turned into a normal college).

By 1928, the Reverend Brink had made a plea ('pleidooi gelewer') for the establishment of such an institution (Report of Sinodale Sendingkommissie 964:14). In 1932 he succeeded in bringing together 28 standard VI candidates at Bethesda from the neighbouring villages. By the end of the year, these candidates managed to write the public examination - 14 of them passed. This motivated the SMC to establish a training college at Bethesda and give Brink the go-ahead to build a teachers' training college at Bethesda. The first four years, 1932-1935 were extremely difficult (Behr 1988:48). The Reverend and Mrs Brink started to build the college. African teachers, parents and students lent him their support in the building of Bethesda Normal College. Fortunately, the residents of Bethesda also helped by manufacturing 20 000 bricks free of charge. Gravel, stones and sand were transported using a borrowed wagon drawn by donkeys.

After the completion of the new church building, the old one and the consistory were turned into a training college. Students went home fortnightly to fetch food for themselves. The Reverend Brink and his wife had to teach at this training college for three years and eighteen months without either of them receiving any salary. The establishment of Bethesda was regarded by the Reverend J A Steenkamp (Albertyn et al 1947: 67) as the planting of a "small seed ('saadjie') which would germinate and one day become a tree under whose shadow the Natives would sit" ('in die skaduwee waarvan die Naturelle sal kan sit').

The college, the Northern Circuit of the church (Noordelike Ring) asked the Dutch Reformed Church, mission of Transvaal, to give the Training College a formal name. Its temporary name was Stefanus Hofmeyer Opleiding Instituut (Stefanus Hofmeyer Training Institute) (Crafford 1982:56). But the 'NGSK van Transvaal' decided to name the college officially as Bethesda-Hofmeyer Gedenkskool (Bethesda-Hofmeyer Memorial College). The Reverend Brink preferred the name Bethesda Normaalskool (Bethesda Normal College) and the college finally became known as such. When the college became a government school in 1956, it became known as Bethesda Staats Bantoeskool (Bethesda State Bantu College). All the above was on the initiative of the Reverend C Brink, who had a vision to bring teacher training and, thus empowerment, to Black communities in the then Transvaal. His success showed that he was committed to both the development and education of the people of South Africa.

1.2 The Reverend G H J van Rensburg and Emmarentia Geldenhuyskool

The Reverend Gerrit Hendrik Jansen van Rensburg was born on the 22 August 1882 in the district of Winburg in the Cape. He received his missionary training at the Boeven Zending Institute at Worcester for three years. In 1907, he attended the Wellington Mission Institute where, at the end of 1909, he completed his studies. His first missionary congregation was at Ermelo and the second at Winburg Dutch Reformed Church. After receiving an invitation to become a missionary at Waterberg district, he and his wife Dirkie Cornelia (De Wet) arrived in Warmbaths on the 28th February 1919. In this area there were already eight established mission posts. Within a period of two years, Van Rensburg had added five new posts. In about 1930 there were 22 primary schools with more than 200 children and 37 teachers (Seloana 1997:32; Steytler 1940:55). Van Rensburg was also known as a Dutch predikant (the Dutch pastor) because he was very much against the Anglicisation policy of the time and wanted to promote Afrikaans instead of English. The important thing about him, however, is that shortly after his arrival in Warmbaths he established a monument that he himself would never forget: Die Emmarentia Geldenhuyskool (Emmarentia Geldenhuys School).

At Warmbaths he met a certain coloured man, Mr Ene Miles, in whose house he initially conducted church services. Shortly afterwards, he built a mud church (modderkerk) which he also used as a farm school. In 1921 the primary school, which offered education up to Standard VI, was registered. The Reverend Van Rensburg soon realised the need for higher education and a training college at Warmbaths. He then started training teachers on the premises of the primary school. With the assistance of the Department of Education in 1935, he established a secondary school right next to the primary school. The school got no financial assistance from either the government or the church. By the end of 1935 it was reported that the secondary school at Warmbaths and the Normal College at Bethesda were in 'full swing' and that both institutions had been registered (Grobler 1962:65; Malunga 1986:56). The secondary school was named 'Native secondary school of the Dutch Reformed Church'. The school grew rapidly and its number of students increased. The Department of Education then advised the DRC to acquire a

plot somewhere else for secondary school education (Venter 1986:1). The Reverend Van Rensburg found Dalmanutha farm which was a section of the original farm Buysdorp (about 6 km north of Warmbaths) with a size of 329 morgens (Kekana 1987:1). However, Van Rensburg's intention to establish a secondary school for native students in Warmbaths met with opposition from the Warmbaths Farmers' Association. The Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) was also reluctant to support the venture, on the grounds of insufficient funding. It was only after the farmers' Association had withdrawn its objections and the DRMC had agreed to support the project that, in 1939, building started. The students themselves physically helped to build the school. As in the case of Bethesda, the students at Warmbaths had to go home fortnightly to fetch food for themselves. The building was completed within two years.

The school was officially opened on the 9th May 1941 and officially named the 'Emmarentia Geldenhuys Naturelle Sekondêreskool' (Emmeriatia Geldenhuys Native Secondary School). At the opening ceremony the main speakers were Dr W M Nicol, the then moderator of the DRC in the Transvaal Synod, and Dr W W Eiselen, the Chief Inspector of Native Education (Kekana 1987: 89). The principal of the school, the Reverend (later Dr) C H Badenhorst commented as follows: "Die honde blaf maar die karavaan gaan voort" (the dogs bark but the caravan moves on).

In view of the tireless work involved in establishing and maintaining the two institutions, and having discussed the backgrounds of their two founders, I will now endeavour to review the control and administration of both institutions during the period 1935 to 1974.

2 THE CONTROL AND ADMINISTRATION OF BETHESDA AND EMMARENTIA GELDENHUYS SCHOOLS: AN HISTORICAL REVIEW

2.1 The Board of Management

The DRCMSA used its Senior Mission Committee (SMC) to appoint a Board of Management to control and administer the colleges on its behalf. In essence the process of transformation in South Africa was strongly influenced by the churches and religious leaders, and in many ways is a story that inspires hope (Hofmeyr 2004:22). The first Board of Management was constituted on the 17 April 1935, and consisted mainly of representatives of the SMC, the DRCMSA, Business, Education and the Mission Secretariat. In 1936, the principal, the inspector of schools and the Reverend Brink were included on the Board. The duties of the Board were to run, control, manage and administer the college and to advise the principal on administrative and professional matters. The Board appointed principals and teachers and was also responsible for upgrading the buildings. Meetings were held twice a year. A Board sat for three years and, after this, a new one was elected and approved by the SMC. It was, of course, necessary to have such a Board if these institutions were to run smoothly, but the Board went outside its mandate and fought for the recognition of Afrikaans to be the medium of instruction rather than English (Minutes 02 February 1946). The Board failed

to realise that, at the time the two institutions were created specifically to cater for Northern Sotho speaking groups whose language should also have been recognised. It was only after 1994 that African languages received the same level of recognition as Afrikaans and English.

2.2 The Executive Board

The second instrument of control, in addition to the Board of Management, was the Executive Board, which was constituted from members of the Board of Management. Its members were the chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary and the principal. Its duties were to carry out and execute the instructions of the Board of Management. The Executive Board appointed matrons, boarding masters and attended to disciplinary matters and maintained the buildings. Any matter beyond its powers was referred to Board of Management. It is obvious that the Executive Board functioned as the executor of the Board of Management. Its existence helped in the smooth running of both institutions.

2.3 Board of Control

At Emmarentia Geldenhuys, the Board of Control was used as the governing body whereas, at Bethesda, the superintendent performed the delegated duties. Its duties were, *inter alia*, the erection and maintenance of all buildings, the supply of accommodation, food and water, looking after students from hostels, collecting of boarding fees, book-keeping, including the cancellation of bad debts, and expelling students from hostels. It also had the power to appoint and dismiss teachers and expelling students, subject to the approval of the Department of Education. A critical review of this Board reveals that it was not representative of all the stakeholders of the two institutions. Teachers and students were not represented on this Board, although it dealt with matters that affected them directly. Even parents and non-teaching staff were not represented on the Board. This Board would certainly not meet the criteria of the current South African Schools Act for School Governing Bodies (South African Schools Act, 84 of 1996).

2.4 The Advisory Council

This consisted of the inspector of schools as the chairperson, the Native commissioner of Pietersburg (now Polokwane) as the vice-chairperson, the principal as secretary and the local minister representing the DRCMSA (Maree 1966:45). In 1957 the Administrative Organiser of Bantu Education was included on the Advisory Council. Its duties included advising the principal on the establishment and advertisement of new posts, additional classrooms and the appointment of staff. In 1960 its name changed to Board of Control and in 1963 it included the vice-principal; in 1964, it took over the control of hostels and was made responsible for the discipline of teachers. In 1968 its duties included screening students for admission. A review of the Minutes of Bethesda Beheerraad, 19 August 1963, clearly indicates that parents, teachers and students were excluded from this Council. Marais (1986:2) makes the point that no black person was allowed to attend meetings of the Council, although it dealt with matters that affected their lives. The fact

is, if the principle of representativity was followed, the Council would have had enough representatives.

2.5 The superintendent and the principal

In both institutions the superintendent, as a founder member, became very much influential. For example, in 1935 the first meeting of the governing body was convened by the superintendent. His duties included handling official correspondence, control of finances, building maintenance and appointment of staff. While at Bethesda the functions of the principal and the superintendent were separate (1932-1938), at Emmarentia Geldenhuys the principal was the superintendent (Matsaung 1983:17). This caused confusion until, in 1957, the principal retired. Again, it shows that, in essence, the process of transformation in South Africa was strongly influenced by churches and religious leaders (Hofmeyr 2004:22). A review of the situation suggests that it would have been better to separate the functions of superintendent from those of the administrator, given that these functions overlapped. Furthermore, doing this would have made both institutions far more efficient.

2.6 The vice-principal

The Advisory Council created this instrument at Bethesda in 1956, and attached the following duties to the office of vice-principal: control and practice of teaching, the weekly control and supervision of class-registers and quarterly returns, the procurement of prescribed books, and the organisation of sports and debate (Moriye 2004:116). An observation that can be made here is that, whereas at Bethesda a vice principal was appointed, at Emmarentia Geldenhuys there was no vice principal appointed to relieve the principal of certain duties. There is obviously an inconsistency here.

2.7 The staff (assistant teachers)

Assistant teachers were employed to supervise student boarders, especially their evening studies. Many staff members resided with their students at the hostels and paid a lodging fee of £1.00 per month. Accommodation was built for the staff in 1950, in both institutions, with separate facilities for blacks and whites. This approach obviously did not enable a polarised people, characterised by strong feelings of hatred, fear, and distrust to find one another and to live together in one country (Hofmeyr 2004:24). As far as administration is concerned, at Bethesda staff meetings were held regularly while, at Emmarentia Geldenhuys meetings were held when the need arose. Minutes were taken in all meetings minutes. What is particularly noteworthy is that at both Bethesda and Emmarentia Geldenhuys, African staff members were not allowed to attend staff meetings although matters on the agenda directly influenced them. Seloana (1997:90) reports that, even during morning devotions, African staff members had to stand with the students in the hall and, like the students, hear all the announcements for the first time. This form of humiliation was aimed solely at supporting the policy of separate development.

2.8 Boarding staff

At Bethesda the superintendent supervised the boys' hostel while his wife supervised the girls' hostel. Boarding staff included the boarding master and matron. At Emmarentia Geldenhuys the same procedure was followed except that, in 1941, the principal had to reside at the school. Again, it should be noted that, as early as the 1930s at Bethesda, the salaries of the boarding master and matron were paid by the Department of Education and their duty was to regulate and administer the lives of the boarders. However, as time went on, the two institutions decided to use African staff members as boarding masters and matrons. In Bethesda this system continued until 1946. In 1947, white staff members were also employed as boarding masters and matrons. Using boarding staff members in the hostels was generally a good thing, but not when it was done for the purpose of using black teachers without paying them any form of remuneration.

2.9 Chief prefects and prefects

Chief and ordinary prefects were appointed by the superintendent in consultation with the staff. But later, prefects were selected by the boarding master and matron, with the approval of the superintendent. The prefects maintained order and discipline in the hostels, and at the end of the year, received awards for their work. The prefect system was good in itself, but it became problematic when some of them turned out to be spies for the school authorities.

2.10 Selection commission

The Board of Management stated that: "first preference must be given to the members of our church" (Seloana 1997:95). The inspector of schools was an *ex officio* of this commission. The preference approach also affected the

issuing of bursaries to students. In 1944 the Church Circuit (Ring) of Witwatersrand decided that all ministers' and Evangelists' children at Stoffberg Gedenkskool and Bethesda would be charged reduced lodging fees, then DRMC students, and only then would other needy students be considered. This approach clearly shows that the aim of the mission schools was not only education, but also conversion to a particular denomination.

2.11 Discipline, punishment and strikes

Discipline at Bethesda was stricter than it was at Emmarentia Geldenhuys. At Bethesda, African teachers could be suspended or dismissed. Four types of punishment applied: manual work, corporal punishment, suspension and dismissal. The nature of various types of offences at both institutions were as follows: beer drinking, pregnancy, theft, fraud, immorality, arriving late, telling lies, strikes, fighting, initiation practices, disobedience, dodging, assault, unruly behaviour, etc. Despite strict discipline, student misconduct increased. In 1940 and 1946 strikes took place due to students refusing to be treated as an animal care team. The second strike took place on the 4 June 1957 owing to the students' refusal to accept 'dompass'. The third occurred on the 21 May 1973 as a result of Mr Theron, the then principal of Bethesda, referring to his students as 'bobbejane' (baboons) and accused them of stinking. These utterances shocked all the white staff members of the college to the extent that 21 May 1973 is described in the Bethesda logbook as: "n Dag ... waarvan geen Blanke in diens van Bantoe Onderwys kan hou nie" (Bethesda Logbook, 1973, 21 May, 76-181) ('a day on which no white in the service of Bantu education will ever wish to remember'). Emmarentia Geldenhuys also experienced strikes as a result of students refusing to celebrate Republic Day, after which students were expelled from 29 May 1991 until 5 June 1991. This was a blatant demonstration of farewell to innocence (Boesak 1977: 30). The authorities failed to realise that necessary steps aimed at reconciliation and forgiveness needed to be taken and Mr Theron was never reprimanded. For these lasting divisions, which were perpetuated through the Education system the Broederbond has much to answer for (Wilkins & Strydom 1978:253-254), because it was the Broederbond who helped to create the apartheid system in South Africa. The authorities also failed to realise that a new society cannot be built if the pains and frustrations of the past are not attended to (Hofmeyr 2004:23). There is a need to create not only hope, but also the possibility of living in faith.

2.12 Administrative staff members

As early as 1939, the inspector of schools advised the church to employ the secretary or the clerk to assist the superintendent with office work. In 1956 the Department of Education offered to pay for the posts of African assistant clerk and cleaner at Bethesda. The duty of the clerk was to type notes on stencils and make duplicates of the notes, including school notes and circulars, the school timetable, exam papers, schedules and the library catalogue. At Emmarentia Geldenhuys, however, there was no permanent clerical post and the principal continued to bear what was an increasingly heavy burden.

2.13 Buildings, equipment and finance

The buildings at both Bethesda and Emmarentia Geldenhuys were erected by the DRMC. In 1932, the students' parents built huts as temporary structures; in 1942, school buildings were erected by the Board of Management. In 1951 separate dining-rooms for boys and girls were built. In 1955 houses for African teachers were built. After Dalmanutha farm was bought in 1939, the buildings for Emmarentia Geldenhuys were erected. Many buildings were erected before 1940, but in 1944 the school was finally completed. At Emmarentia Geldenhuys, unlike Bethesda, there was a central dining-hall for both sexes. The main sources of income were: the SMC (church), the Department of Education (government), school fees, donations and proceeds from the farms. From the records of both schools it is clear that good book-keeping and thorough auditing of the financial books were the order of the day.

3 CONCLUSION

The Reverend Brink's attempts to start a training college at Bethesda came when the Dutch Reformed Church was 280 years old. It is also interesting to note that Mr Steytler, the then principal of Bethesda Normaalskool, once commented as follows: "Ons kerk is so agter in onderwysgeleenthede dat ander genootskappe ons ver vooruit is" ('Our church is so behind with educational opportunities that other societies are far ahead of us'). It is very clear that the establishment of both Bethesda Normaalskool and Emmarentia Geldenhuyskool in 1932 and 1935 respectively was a clear indication that the Dutch Reformed Church had by then entered into the educational sphere of missionary enterprise in the Transvaal. The success of the Bethesda training college owes much to the work of its founder, the Reverend Brink, for it was he who tirelessly struggled to establish this institution. It was the Reverend Brink who was able to convince the SMC that the right place for the establishment of this type of training college was at Bethesda.

Similarly, the existence of Emmarentia Geldenhuy School is the work of its founder, the Reverend Van Rensburg. His fight against the Southern Waterburg Farmers' Association (SWFA) and his ability to win over the SMC resulted in the establishment of Emmarentia Geldenhuys School.

All in all, it was through the perseverance, commitment and determination of both the Reverend Brink and the Reverend Van Rensburg that the two institutions became the centre of teaching and learning in their communities.

Bethesda and Emmarentia Geldenhuys schools were founded, controlled and administered by the DRMCSA through the Synodical Mission Commission. In 1935 the state also began to play a part in their control and administration. The Board of Management and the Board of Control were established at both Bethesda and Emmarentia Geldenhuys schools respectively to deal with professional and administrative matters at these schools. These instruments of control and administration should have been representative of all stakeholders at both institutions. This study recommends that further research be conducted in this area, given South Africa's extremely interesting history of the relationship between the church and the state in education.

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