DE-COLONISING HISTORY: ON BEING A CHURCH ON THE BORDERS OF SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

This article is a report on experiences of black ministers while managing congregations situated on the borders of South Africa. One such congregation is the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) found in the area of Musina. The report is also about the missionary enterprise of the Dutch Reformed Church in the erstwhile Northern Transvaal in the years 1864 to 1961 and subsequent years (1962-1976) up to the arrival and ordination of a black minister in approximately 1977 to 2005. The paper will also show how the church made an input into the development of the Africans through education. It will also show how the church works in a community and that it has a role to play in history. The research question is, therefore, relevant: What is the role of the church in the process of de-colonising history? Although many books have been written about the church in the area, the researcher realised the need to report on the contribution made by URCSA in Musina society up to the present. Using the heuristic method of acquiring primary and secondary source material and the hermeneutic method of inspecting source material critically while interpreting and evaluating various sources scientifically. the information gathered synthesised scientifically.

1 INTRODUCTION

The current Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) has its origin in the 16th century with the arrivalin 1952 of Jan van

Rebeeck at the Cape in South Africa. The transplantation of 'Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde of Herformde Kerk' from Netherlands to South Africa, in later centuries, resulted in the birth of the family of the 'NG Kerke', namely, NG Kerk (for whites), NG Sending Kerk (for coloureds), Reformed Church of Africa (for Indians) and the NG Kerk in Afrika (for Africans). At the Umgababa Synod the NG Kerk resolved that to "... separate church affiliations for the various population groups is the policy of the Dutch Reformed church ..." (cf Synod Agenda & Acts 1979:34; Matsaung 1983:11) However, the concept of the family was retained (Matsaung 1981:8). Out of this family was born, in 1994, the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa from the combination of NG Sending Kerk and the NG Kerk in Afrika. For the purpose of this study the name that will be used is the URCSA and the research sub-questions which guided the study were the following: What is Musina? How did it come into being? What is interesting about this period? What were the major events in that period? Who were the major figures of the time? Who was leading the community? Who was leading the church? Who was colonising? Who was de-colonising? What is interesting about this? What were the main accomplishments in this period? An adequate response to the above questions will help to shed light on the phenomenon of colonisation and de-colonisation of history while reflecting on the role of the church in the process. In essence, the process of transformation in South Africa was strongly influenced by the churches and religious leaders and it remains in many ways a story of good hope (Hofmeyr 2004:22). The report will, therefore, elucidate the story of Musina, its population, notions of colonisation and decolonisation, the arrival of the Gospel in the area, missionary enterprise of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), the role and place of URCSA in the area during the period of missionaries and pastors. church and community relations, delving into conclusion.

2 THE STORY OF MUSINA

In the 18th century an African black tribe came from the South and settled in the then Transvaal next to the Limpopo river. Their leader was Ndasalakufa Musina. They were the Mathwanapa tribe (Baleya) who discovered the copper mine in Phalaborwa and left the area when the whites took over. Before their arrival here the area was

known as Sebola world but the Sebolas were staying at Tswaiing (Southpan). Then this area became known as Musina's world. Ndasala had two sisters: Makgabane and Tshabopsa. His son was Masilo. Ndasala stayed behind Seokolela Mountain (behind the current Musina magistrate offices). At Maselele mountain were Ba-Birwa. At Balawe Mountain the Venda people stayed. Later at Dongola the white soldiers stayed. The families of Zwamukale and Sengena also stayed in the Musina area. In this area Ndasakufa Musina and his people extracted 'a red-brown metal' and called it 'musina'. Musina means 'bederwer' (corrupter/rot/decayer) because it was observed that if the metal was melted with iron it softened the 'legering' (alloy = mixture of metals, especially metals of low value mixed with a metal of high value) becoming 'pure iron' (cf Bosman, Van der Merwe & Hiemstra 1980:412). This Musina was in reality a 'copper'. Copper could corrupt iron so that it could be worked easily. Out of musina, Ndasakufa and his people made different articles and sold them. These included ploughs, arms, neck and leg rings, assegais, bows and arrows, et cetera. These would be sold in exchange for goats, sheep, cattle and ivory. They used 'meuba', something like 'mpaola' to burn musina.

On a certain day their mine collapsed (udilikile) and many workers were buried alive. One of the workers was Ndasala's son, Masilo and a certain worker, Rathathane. On this day Ndasala was not at work. When the tragic news reached him, he was shocked and collapsed on his chair and died. He was buried at Musina on the Eastern side of the current National road (N1).

After Ndasala's death, his nephew (his sister's son) Makushu took over the leadership of the copper mine. Makushu married Ndasala's daughter (married ga Malome).

Makushu's second wife was a Venda and through her he adopted Venda culture and tradition. Makushu's son, Radzilane left the Harper area in 1979 to stay at ga-Makushu (a new name for the place) in the Venda homeland. Radzilane's sons: Maropeng and Tshera(sera) stayed at Nancefield (Sovetso). Their sister is Maria. In due course many of Ndasala's people left Musina for Botswana, Tswaiing, Zimbabwe and parts of Venda.

When the whites arrived in Musina, they joined Makushu and worked with him. As Makushu was very old and had no proper equipment and skills for extracting musina/copper, the whites bought the mine from him at £20.00 and they had the necessary knowledge of geology and machines to process copper and to export it. This difference brought in a worldview which would in time to come have far-reaching practical implications.

The name Musina was transformed into 'Messina' by whites who could not pronounce it well. It is now the name of the whole area and the name of the former copper town in the far north of Limpopo province of South Africa.

The whites arrived at Musina in 1901 when John Pascoe Grenfell crossed into Limpopo to familiarise himself with the copper works made by Africans. In 1902 he obtained the legal and financial arrangements to establish a company and members of his expedition were Webber, a land surveyor, two soldiers, James Harper and James Campbell with an engineer, Everard Digby, as leader. At the Sand River on the farm Bergenrode they discovered a million tons of copper. On 11 March 1904 the discovery certificate was issued to Grenfell, and became known as the birth certificate of Messina. Thereafter Grenfell left for London and in January 1905 the 'Messina' (Transvaal) Develoment Company Limited (MTD)' was established with a capital sum of R200 000. In 1906 the company had 20 whites and 200 black workers in its service. On 4 May 1914 the first train coming from the South arrived at copper mine. Musina's nearest harbour is Maputo, 560km per railway line, and through this harbour the company shipped its pure 'copperware' with trademark 'MTD' to Europe and elsewhere. Besides copper, other minerals discovered in the area are: magnets, diamonds, steel-coal, graphite and iron ores.

3 POPULATION AND GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION OF MUSINA

In 1979 Musina's population was 5 000 whites and 25 000 Africans. Today (2005) the total population is 65 000. Musina is 595,4m above sea level, is the northernmost town in South Africa and is 12 km from the Zimbabwean border. It is along the N1 road to the North as is the

railway line Pretoria-Beit-Bridge passing through the towns of Modimolle, Polokwane, Mogareng (connecting Maputo) and Makhado. The current Musina encompasses a vast area of farms, army bases, five townships and a town along the borders of South Africa bordering the countries already mentioned. This is the area in which the Gospel of Jesus Christ arrived in 1910. Matt 24:14 is highly applicable here: "And this gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." Because of the copper mine, many people from different parts of the world came to Musina to work, and many came being Christians already.

In this area all races are found, like: the Sothos, Vendas, Malawians, Shonas, Xhosas, Zulus, Ndebeles, Afrikaners, English, Jews, Indians, coloureds, to name but a few. Some of the visible religions found in the area are: Islam, Bhudhism, Judaism, Christianity, and African Traditional religion. It was in this area that, in 1901 with the arrival of Europeans, *colonisation* unclothed itself:

- Their MTD Limited Company certificate was regarded as the birth of Messina.
- They took over the copper mine from Makushu at £20-00.
- They named all the places in Musina after themselves, such as Harper, Campbell, Artonvilla, Nancefield, Bergview, Grenfell stadium, Klopper stadium, and the same applied to streets and other places of historical importance.
- The Europeans changed Musina into Messina and named the town Messina.

In an attempt to confuse issues Nienaber (1972:294) once stated: "The question arises whether Messina is derived from Messina in Italy, a place at one time associated with copper mining" (cf Robertson 1980:180). The above clearly depicts a blatant distortion of history, an attempt to conceal the truth about the reality of Musina in South Africa.

- Applying Apartheid laws, they divided life between blacks and whites based on racial laws such as the black (or Natives) Land Act, No 27 of 1913, the Group Areas Act, No 30 of 1950, the Population Registration Act, No 55 of 1950 and the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, No 55 of 1949.
- The white churches in Musina also embraced and perpetuated Apartheid theology.

Viewed from this perspective, the above, in brief, were the historical circumstances that led the whites to gain complete political control over a country where the African indigenous people were relegated to the status of social pariahs (cf Ntloedibe 1995:31-32). This was the strongest feature of colonialism in South Africa.

4 THE ARRIVAL OF THE GOSPEL IN THE AREA

In response to the command of Jesus Christ "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mat 28:19-20), in 1910 to 1914 the Swiss Mission under Mr Jonathan Mpokota arrived in Musina from Elim to do missionary work. The second church to arrive was the Anglican Church facilitated by Mr Stefanus Maropeng. The third was the Dutch Reformed Church in 1918 when members from Kranspoort who were working in the mine desired to have their own church. In 1919 Rev J W Danneel came to dedicate their first building made of poles with Phineas Ngwako Manthata as their church elder. The current fourth building of the URCSA was dedicated in 1954. The first Evangelist to work for this church in Musina was Calvin (Kalebe) Mocheke. He was succeeded by Evangelist Segolela. Evangelist MacDonald Chibwana from Malawi arrived during this period and was later succeeded by Ariel Mletah who later replaced Mr Makari in Harper ward. Rev Daneel was succeeded by Rev Van Coller who in subsequent years was succeeded by Rev L C van der Merwe during whose period the uprising in Kranspoort occurred. It is reported that in 1961 the URCSA in Musina was in a position to become a

congregation on its own. The result was that on 16 June 1962 Musina was ceded from Kranspoort and became a congregation on its own.

5 THE MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE OF THE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH (NGK)

At the Synod meeting held in the Cape on 13 November 1857, a decision was taken to do missionary work in the then Transvaal (cf Pretorius 1949:14). For this venture, two missionaries. Rev Alexander Mackidd from Scotland and Rev Henri Gonin from Switzerland accompanied by Rev Andrew Murray (in 1862) arrived in what was then the Transvaal. On the invitation of Michael Buys (the leader of the coloured community in Soutpansberg), Mackidd arrived at Goedgedacht (Cronje 1982:3) on the 13th May 1863 where in 1864 he was offered a farm by Mr Cornelius Lottering, a member of the DRC (cf Seloana 1997:24). On 24 January 1864 McKidd and his family moved to a new mission station on the farm Kranspoort which he bought from Lottering. The farm had an abundant supply of water from the mountain. Kranspoort became a springboard from where missionaries such as SJG Hofmeyr, SP Helm, JW Daneel, W M A van Coller and L C van der Merwe spread the Gospel to the far-flung areas (cf Maree 1962:65; Maree 1966:65; Seloana 1997:25). It was from the mission work at Kransport that the URCSA in Musina was born in 1962.

6 THE ROLE AND PLACE OF THE URCSA IN THE PROCESS OF DE-COLONISATION

The URCSA in Musina has been a cross-border congregation. Its boundaries stretched from Shashi River in the West, to Waterpoort, to Bylkop, to Mphepu location and Sibasa reserve in the East then alongside the Limpopo River overlapping into Zimbabwe to form the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe until 1980 after the Zimbabwean independence.

As indicated earlier on, the URCSA in Musina became a congregation on its own in 1962. Its name was the 'NG Sending Kerk' with 250 members and 11 church elders. It was only in 1994 that the church Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) was born. The process of de-colonisation has been both a challenge and a danger to the church (Beyerhaus 1987:43). However, in order to understand its involvement in the process of de-colonisation, one should notice that the church, by its actions and influence pointed out that a new society can hardly be born if the pains and frustrations of the past are not attended to (cf Hofmeyr 2004:23). To this end, reliable information indicated that:

- Musina was discovered in the 18th century by the Mathwanapa tribe (Baleya) under the leadership of Ndasalakufa Musina with the Sebolas at Tswaiing (Soutpan).
- At the time the copper mine was founded and started by Ndasalakufa and his people in the 18th century.
- Regarding place names, only one primary school in the area is named after Makushu. The secondary school is named 'Musina Secondary School' but not after Musina as a surname but copper as a metal. De-colonisation in this area is imperative.
- In 2003, Musina Municipality named the area 'Musina' and this ultimately became the name of the town.
- With the arrival of De Beers Venetia mine in the area after 1994, blacks started staying in town.
- The churches in Musina are still divided along racial lines; only few have repented. In essence, many souls and minds of indigenous people are still colonised.

Indeed, the church of Jesus Christ influenced the de-colonisation of Musina in many ways, in different situations and at different levels. The process of de-colonisation gave rise to the followsing:

- The Swiss Mission started a formal school (teaching people to read and write) in their church building.
- The Anglican Church started with catechism which was a Christian education.
- The Dutch Reformed Mission Church in Kranspoort offered education to children from Musina. In later years, they established the first formal public school in Musina.
- With the arrival of different churches in Musina, indigenous leadership was developed when members were elected into positions of leadership as church elders and deacons.
- In 1971 the colonial government removed the aged people from Musina to Lenyenye near Tzaneen. The church, under the leadership of Rev van der Merwe, protested against the move and brought them back. This trauma is still voiced by many of them.
- In 1984 indigenous people from Musina were to be removed to a remote area called Magizand (40kms from Musina). The church influenced a passive resistance and the move was later abandoned.

However, the church in this area still faces challenges of reconciling and uniting Musina society across ethnic and racial lines. It is therefore necessary to understand that the notion of de-colonisation emanates from the level of suspicion that data was constructed with the purpose of distorting the truth and that now the real facts are discovered and truth needs to be restored. In a sense colonialism has been associated with European nations. This means that the colonial nations dictate terms to the residents of the colonised areas, by exerting control over every field of socio-cultural polical and economic activity. Thus they also exploit the natural resources of colonised lands (http://www.pinkmonkey.com/studyguides). Decolonisation is the process by which a colony gains its independence from a colonial power, a process opposite to colonisation. Decolonisation could be achieved by attaining independence, integrating with the administrating power or another state or

establishing association status (Shillington 1995:135). In the strict sense it is distinct from a break-up of traditional empires and in modern academic discourse the period of decolonising generally refers to independence from European colonial rule. Therefore decolonisation is about re-doing, re-writing history, re-direction, re-orientation, re-focusing, learning and re-learning about the history of people, their environment, culture, custom and tradition. It is about saying farewell to innocence (Boesak 1977:28). In this study, it refers to the true facts about the discovery of Musina and some selected personalities who, in the scope of this study, made a contribution, some to the colonisation and others to the de-colonisation of the area. It is about Renaissance. It is in this area and in this process that the church had to intervene with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

7 MISSIONARIES AND PASTORS IN DIFFERENT PERIODS

7.1 Missionaries

7.1.1 Rev G D Wessels (1963-1964)

Rev Wessels was inducted in the NG Sendingkerk in 1963. He was a hard worker whose relationship with other people was highly praised. He suffered a heart-attack and thus his stay in the congregation was shortened when in 1964 he passed away. He worked with Evangelists M Kgobe, A Mletah and S Moloantoa.

7.1.2 Rev P G Rossouw (1665-1969)

Rev P G Rossouw was inducted as a minister in the congregation on the 27 August 1965. It is reported that during his period the synodical levies, Sunday school, Catechism, CVV and MBB flourished. He divided the congregation into wards. In 1969 he accepted a call to another congregation and bade farewell to the congregation. His work in the congregation was contemporaneous with that of Evangelists Moloantoa, Mletah and Mashike.

7.1.3 Rev I M van der Merwe (1971-1976)

Rev Van der Merwe worked with Evangelists Mletah & Mashike, lay preachers Magwira, Konyane and Muthebuli. He was inducted in the congregation on the 30 January 1971. During his period the parsonages were built in Tshipise and Harper wards. Congregation boundaries were also enlarged to include large parts of Venda. In 1976 he accepted a call to the DRC in Marken and bade the congregation farewell.

7.2 Pastors

7.2.1 Rev L E Matsaung (1977-2005+)

Rev L E Matsaung was inducted in the congregation on the 6 March 1977 as the first black minister. His time period was characterised by many events with increasing awareness of de-colonisation of history in Musina and the role of the church in the same. The high moments of this period can be understood if read in the context of contemporary church and community relations in the area.

8 CHURCH AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

8.1 On socio-economic level

During this period the church held bazaars and used the money to offer meals to the poor in the community. Employers were also approached with a request to offer jobs to the unemployed. The success rate was minimal but at least something was done. All this not only created hope, but also the possibility of living in faith (cf Hofmeyr 2004:23). Again, it showed that the task of the church is to rediscover and preach good news to all; this includes the poor and the oppressed.

8.2 On educational level

The formal education in Musina was started by the Swiss Mission church. "This was expanded by the NG Sendingkerk from Kranspoort up to Musina in the years ... And this was in keeping with the decision of the Dordrecht Synod of 1618 to 1619" (cf Hinchliff 1971:8; Moripe 2004:109) which focused on the role of parents, teachers, the Church

and the state in the education of the child (Pretorius 1949:13) and to uphold the principles of Calvinism. As a result, in the 1930s and 1940s the DRC could maintain supervision over the teaching and education of the children so that the spirit of Christian National Education was promoted (cf Van Rensburg 1949:22; Kgatla 1992:133). The NGKA established about fifteen (15) primary farm schools in the area, and two (2) in Nancefield Township while taking care of others through its members who had been in the majority as principals and staff. On 5 December 1965 the church council started negotiating with the Department of Education for a secondary school in Musina. This was achieved in 1979. The current Bonwa-Udi primary school was born from a combination of Bonwa-meetse and Udi primary schools. This was viewed as an achievement in the process of de-colonising history, by many stakeholders in Musina. The church was also instrumental in offering bursaries to many of the children of Musina across denominational boundaries. Many of them, on completion of their studies, came back to plough their efforts back into their community while others found jobs elsewhere. In March 2005, two public schools; Beit-Bridge Primary and Renaissance Secondary were built in the area, having been initiated by the congregation.

8.3 On health level

In 1987 the health situation in Musina deteriorated below the standard level. The matron at MTD hospital at the time approached the congregation for assistance. The congregation approached SACC in Johannesburg for help. In a few days oxygen bottles, incubators, syringes, medicines and other health equipment arrived at the hospital. In 2003, the Limpopo Council of Churches (LCC) through its sister body in Polokwane approached the Department of Health for residential doctors and later two arrived who also served the local clinic.

8.4 On religious level

There has been a strong working relationship with other denominations in the area. In 1984 a ministers fraternal was formed, drawing from different denominations. This body facilitated the

existence of the Messina Advice office (MAO) which in turn facilitated the coming of unions, major political parties and other social organisations in the area before and after 1994. In 2003 the LCC was formed and worked hand in hand with the Messina Council of Churches. Through its projects it was involved in the nurturing of the spiritual life of its members and their liberation from the bondage of sin (cf Tutu 1983:76).

8.5 On political level

Due to its understanding of contemporary and current political dynamics in the country and therefore closer relationship with major political parties, the church in Musina has long been accused by the former regime of being an ANC front and its pastor of being a terrorist minister. In 1991 he was detained together with other members of the church under emergency regulations and removed from Musina to Duiwelskloof (Modjadjiskloof) prison. This was during the Messina Action Committee's heightened struggle and boycott of white businesses in town, demanding the removal of community council which was an establishment of the white regime. A deeper understanding revealed that the situation was influenced by racism and politics in South Africa (cf Ross 1986:98). It was only after 1994 that many residents in Musina confessed that now they understand that the church was about de-colonising history rather than pure political partying. A clear picture was fully realised by the Rustenburg conference (Hofmeyr 2004:23) in November 1990, which revealed that the churches in South Africa have a great responsibility to combat the effects of Apartheid. In fact, the path to reconciliation is a difficult one but it enables the people of a polarised nation with deep feelings of hatred, fear, and distrust to find one another and to live together in one country.

9 CONCLUSION

The study focused on a historical incident of the role and place of URCSA in the process of de-colonising history. In an attempt to answer questions asked, the study described the location of Musina with its founding story. The phenomena of colonisation and decolonisation were also explained culminating in showing what the role

of the church has been in the process. Further research in this area is highly recommended.

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 The following interviewees, listed below, agreed that their names should appear in the study with the dates on which they were interviewed. The interviews were conducted in different years, starting in 1982 and ending in 2004.

Manthata, Alpheus: 12 March 1982 Chipu, M Eaglet: 12 March 1982 Chipu, Dikeledi V: 13 March 1982 Sibanda, N Regina: 18 April 1982

Manthata, Flora: 19 April 1982 Mocheke, Mina: 15 May 1982 Magwira, E Thomas: 14 May 1982 Saka, Sesi Christina: 15 April 2004

Madinginye, Sengita J: 16 April 2004