

DOING CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AT THE EDGES IN SOUTH AFRICA: A REVIEW OF THE WORK OF BONGANI MAZIBUKO AS A CHRISTIAN EDUCATOR AND MISSIOLOGIST

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Abstract

Bongani Alison Mazibuko (1932-1997) left an infamous though very significant legacy to Christian education in South Africa.¹ He was the first black person to be awarded a PhD in missiology and one of the earliest black theologians to be appointed at the University of South Africa (Unisa) as a lecturer in the Department of Missiology (Saayman 1997: 253). Mazibuko was also the founder of the Umlazi Theological Training Project (UTTP), through which he taught Christian education and missiology to township church leaders (both clergy and lay). He argued that Christian education must adapt to the African context. He also argued that the pastor's role is to enable or facilitate ministry in the local church by empowering the laity through education. He made a significant contribution to the relationship between mission education and liberation. Although he appreciated the positive contribution of missionary education to African people, he was highly critical of its tendency to disregard African culture and experience. Although a call to do theology from an African perspective had been sounded by a number of theologians, no one had specifically tried to contextualise Christian education in the African context. He also warned against a Christian

education that, in fact, aims at domestication, and called for an approach that brings about liberation and transformation. In this respect, Mazibuko was a pioneer who sought to put the discipline of Christian education on the agenda of the Christian church as it sought ways of doing mission in a democratic country. This study seeks to examine his contribution to Christian education and missiology in an African context.

1 INTRODUCTION

I first heard of Bongani Mazibuko in the late 1980s in Soweto, where he had been serving as an interim pastor at Meadowlands while he was working for the South African Council of Churches. I subsequently met him in Estcourt in 1996 at a Men's Guild Convention of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA). In 1997, I attended his funeral at KwaMashu in Durban. At his funeral speakers spoke of his love for the church, his academic achievements but, most importantly, of his commitment to Christian education. By the time he died in 1997, Mazibuko had established himself as a theologian in the area of missiology and Christian education. He had also worked for the South African Council of Churches and for the Methodist Church's Christian Education Department as a director. He was an influential figure in educational and ecclesiastical circles.

His commitment to education as a source of liberation and empowerment caused him to regard the black church as a site of struggle for the liberation of black people. Having been influenced by Paulo Freire, the Brazilian proponent of liberation education and author of *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (1970), Mazibuko saw education as a source of liberation and hence

regarded the church as needing to use this approach in its educational activities. Mazibuko's theological approaches to and pronouncements in theological education led to controversy. Freire's teaching first impacted on him when he was doing his Master's in Christian education at the University of Tennessee in the United States of America. At the time, Paulo Freire was in America working at Harvard University and his method of education was starting to influence a number of people who were interested in adult education, and Mazibuko was one of these people. Like Freire, Mazibuko argued that the domesticator uses methods such as advertising, mass media, television, radio, newspapers, sources of production and school textbooks. He argued that the oppressed are bombarded with images of their oppressors from childhood, until they adopt these images as their models. Mazibuko drew on Freire's understanding of the problem of cultural invasion. He said that:

Cultural invasion, which serves the ends of conquest and the preservation of oppression, always involves a parochial view of reality, a static perception of the world, and the imposition of one worldview upon another. It implies the 'superiority' of the invader and the 'inferiority' of those who are invaded, as well as the imposition of values by the former, who possess the latter and are afraid of losing them. (Mazibuko 2003:251)

In his quest for a liberating education Mazibuko argued: "What we need is a kind of education which would allow us to reach back to traditional African Humanism as well as go forward towards complete self-actualization" (Gerloff 2003:141). He encouraged students to do theology from a cross-cultural perspective, and he tried to practise that in his own pilgrimage as a theological educator (Gerloff 2003:105). His commitment and knowledge of African culture and theology became

useful at the University of Durban-Westville (UDW), as he became involved in programmes that sought to bring about Afro-centric methodologies of teaching.² Underlying all his work was a quest for education that takes into account African culture and the African experience of oppression.

My aim in this paper is to offer an analysis of Mazibuko's contribution to Christian education in an African context. I understand Christian education as:

The educational activities of the Christian community, involving the Christian story, its past, present and future, enabling the learning community to engage the Christian story in its context with the aim for individual, ecclesial and social transformation. (Kumalo 2004:59)

This we will do by looking at the Umlazi Theological Project, a project Mazibuko developed in 1995 (Gerloff 2003:xiii).³ One of the important focus areas in this project was Christian education which was the main theme underlying the curriculum in 1996 (Gerloff 2003:275).

This study examines the impact of Mazibuko's life and writings on missiology and Christian education in South Africa. The first section discusses his emergence as a Christian educator and scholar; the second section examines his influence on missiology, African humanism and Christian education; the third section analyses the extent to which he shaped the Christian education; and the fourth section looks at how his Christian education crossed barriers.

2 THE MAKING OF A 'CHRISTIAN EDUCATOR': BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES OF BONGANI ALISON MAZIBUKO

The purpose of this study is not to give a detailed biography of Bongani Mazibuko, but to discuss his work and contribution to Christian education. Any biographical details I give are aimed at helping us to locate him and his contribution in context and to understand his contribution. I did not have the privilege of interviewing Bongani Mazibuko, but I was able to get a glimpse of his life through reading *Mission is crossing frontiers*, a collection of essays in his honour edited by Roswith Gerloff.⁴ I also interviewed his wife Sebenzile at Empangeni, his best friend Bishop Lymon Dlangalala, and the Reverend Wesley Mabuza, five of his former students and two colleagues. The ages of the people I interviewed range from forty-five to seventy. The majority of these people live in the province of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, in Pietermaritzburg, Durban, Umlazi, and Empangeni. Most of the interviewees had fond memories of Mazibuko as a teacher, friend and pastor. More information about him emerged during the interviews, and to verify its authenticity I consulted written sources which he and others had authored.

Bongani Alison Mazibuko was born of Methodist parents at Driefontein in Ladysmith on 14 December 1932.⁵ His father Benjamin was a preacher in the local Methodist church and his mother Mabel a devoted member of the Women's Manyano and leader in the church. His parents were of peasant stock; his father was a migrant worker in the mines and his mother was a housewife. Mazibuko tells stories of how he read the Bible for his father at a very early age. For him Christian education started in the home. He did his primary education at Watershed Primary School in Ladysmith until he passed Standard 7. From there he went to the then highly regarded Indaleni Methodist

institution in Richmond for his teacher's education from 1952 to 1954.⁶ He dropped out of the College as a result of a serious illness that nearly claimed his life. It was during this illness that he made a covenant with God: if God spared him, he would offer his life up to God by entering the ministry (Gerloff 2003: 41).⁷ After recovering from his illness he went to Eshowe for his secondary education, where he passed Standard 9. From there he went to Umphumulo Lutheran Institution where he obtained his T3 (teaching) qualification in 1958. In 1959, he went to Swaziland to teach at the Nazarene Teacher's Training College. It was here that his educational skills, specifically his interests in curriculum studies, methodology of teaching and educational psychology, were sharpened. In 1962 he entered the ministry in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA). He was appointed to be a probation minister at Edendale Methodist Circuit in 1964.⁸ He lived at Taylors Halt, a rural community just outside Edendale in Pietermaritzburg South Africa.

In 1965 the church sent him to a seminary to study for the ministry: the Federal Theological Seminary at Alice. In 1968 he was ordained in the Methodist Church after which he was sent to the Mahlabathini Circuit in Zululand. It was whilst still in Mahlabathini that Mazibuko won a scholarship to study at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, Switzerland from 1970 to 1971. At Bossey he met Hans-Ruedi Weber, who had a tremendous influence on him. He came back in 1972. In 1974, Mazibuko was appointed to the secretariat of the Church Unity Commission. Within this body, he helped to form the Church Unity Commission of Churches, which includes Methodists, Presbyterian, Congregational, Lutheran and Anglicans.

In 1975, he gained a scholarship to the United States of America (USA) to study at the Scarritt College and Peabody College in Nashville Tennessee for a Master's degree in Christian Education. He came back in 1977 and was sent by

the church to do circuit work in Zululand. It was during this time that he met and befriended the late Bishop Alpheus Zulu who was the Anglican bishop of Zululand with whom he worked in the areas of education. In 1979, he was appointed as General Secretary of the Christian Education and Youth Department of the MCSA, which he served until 1981. It was while he was in this position that he personally encountered racism from certain sections of the church. He applied to be allowed to go and study in England for his PhD, but the church refused him permission to do this. This led to a heated debate in the MCSA, because the church felt Mazibuko was not serving the church adequately. However, Mazibuko was determined to go and study and this, too, became another battle that he had to fight. He went without the permission of the church and also without the necessary finances to study. Indeed, he had to beg for a ticket to fly to Birmingham, promising to pay the airline for the ticket after he had finished his studies. Looking back on the incident, Gerloff says that:

Only Mazibuko could do something like that, as crazy as it may sound, he had deep faith in God. He understood that the fight with the church was not with God, so God was on his side. He left without the necessary papers and finances, but he was right because he finished his PhD. (Interview 11 July 2005)⁹

In 1983 he completed his PhD dissertation entitled *Mission in education/Education in mission* at the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom. Later on, Peter Lang publishers published the dissertation. Mazibuko returned to South Africa in 1985 and was appointed senior director for Church and Mission at the South African Council of Churches (SACC). It was whilst working for the SACC that he was asked to pastor a congregation in Meadowlands, Soweto, under the superintendence of the Reverend Joseph Sithebe.¹⁰ From 1987 to 1989 he was a senior lecturer in missiology at Unisa. He was

one of the first black people to be appointed as a lecturer at the Department of Missiology at the University of South Africa, during which time he worked with the famous theologian David Bosch. This proved to be a very difficult period for Mazibuko because he had ventured into a field that had been dominated by whites and he was viewed with suspicion by his fellow black activists (Maluleke 2003: 281).¹¹

Then, in 1990, he went to teach at the University of Zululand as a Professor and Head of the Department of Missiology, Practical Theology and Science of Religion. In 1993, he went to work at the University of Durban Westville as Professor and Head of the Department of Church History and Missiology. At Westville he was elected as Vice-dean of the Faculty of Theology and subsequently (in 1996) became Dean. During 1996, Westville was undergoing the difficult process of transformation, from being an Indian institution to becoming a multi-racial institution. Being someone who was always concerned about people and who pushed boundaries, these changes and their accompanying tensions brought a lot of stress and painful moments to Mazibuko, and they are partly to blame for his death in 1997.

3 TAKING CHRISTIAN EDUCATION TO THE PEOPLE: THE UMLAZI THEOLOGICAL TRAINING PROJECT (UTTP)

Whilst he was at the University of Durban-Westville in 1995, Mazibuko started the Umlazi Project on Non-formal Theological Education, the main aim of which was the facilitation of teaching and learning opportunities for black pastors in the township of Umlazi. All the pastors resided in township and virtually all of them came from African Initiated Churches AICs (Gerloff 2003:248).¹² Before this, none of them had the

opportunity to obtain any sort of formal theological education.¹³ It was through this project that Mazibuko pursued his goal of doing theological education from an African perspective, with the poor and the marginalised. This project was, in fact, a case study in community-based, transformative theological education.¹⁴ The project was based in Umlazi, a large black township outside the city of Durban. Its aims were to train clergy and lay leaders "who had little or no opportunity to engage in formal theological education, particularly those from the AICs" (Gerloff 2003:49).

A few points make the project unique. Firstly, in 1995, there were very few programmes established by formal theological institutions who had crossed boundaries to do theology with the poor and the marginalised people. This project was preceded by two projects that began at the University of KwaZulu Natal: the Institute of the Study of the Bible (the focus here was on reading the Bible with the poor communities surrounding Pietermaritzburg). The second project was the Worker Ministry project, which sought to do a theology of work in the townships. Neither of these projects concerned themselves with Christian Education, but with the Bible and a theology of work. Secondly, the UTP concerned itself with theological cross-fertilisation by bringing together people of different theological backgrounds and levels of training to share their knowledge and experiences. Thirdly, this project also had a particular interest in the process and methodologies of doing Christian education, by critiquing the methods that were used by mainline churches and formal institutions of learning such as the UDW. Fourthly, it also sought to provide skills training in resolving or mediating conflicts rooted in ethnic, racial, gender or political stereotypes (Gerloff 2003:250). This was very important since South Africa had just become a democracy, and the church had to deal with issues of reconciliation, nation building, gender stereotyping and other discriminatory practices that had been a norm in South Africa.

Mazibuko's project therefore became an important vehicle for preparing the church for its mission in a democratic society (through Christian education).

It is also important to note that, in 1995, when he developed the UTPP there was a vacuum in the theological arena. The *Kairos* document had come and gone (in the mid 1980s). The road to Damascus had, in effect, been overtaken by the events of 1990. Then there was the theology of Reconstruction advocated by Charles Villa-Vicencio, a theology which had a very brief life span. Although in other parts of the world African theology had gained momentum in South Africa it was still emerging. Christian education had not been well developed in South Africa. In fact even those who offered it, that is, the TEEC and the University of Natal, had very few students and its focus was on children's church or Sunday school. Mazibuko can be regarded as one of the early pioneers who pushed the boundaries by focussing on Christian Adult education and, over and above that, approaching this education from an African theological perspective.

Christian education has been understood from a narrow perspective, as a subject that is concerned with nurturing the Christian faith. Criticality has not been understood as one of its issues. However, one of Mazibuko's main focuses when doing Christian education was "to identify and analyze the content and methodologies of indigenous theologies in Southern Africa" (Gerloff 2003:251).

4 HIS INFLUENCE ON THE STUDY OF MISSION: AFRICAN HUMANISM AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

In UTPP's Christian education programme Mazibuko taught a number of topics, such as Missiology, Africanisation, Educational Methodology and Liberatory Education.

Mazibuko's more forceful writings and teachings deal with African liberation, which he saw as needing to be incorporated into theological education. He found his own niche by focusing on the relationship between mission and education, and their implication for Zulu culture. This was a different approach from the popular one that had been adopted by other South African theologians such as Tinyiko Maluleke, Takatso Mofokeng, Mothlabi Mogkethi and Bonganjalo Goba, all of whom gained national and international recognition; as a result, Mazibuko remained relatively unknown, especially in South Africa.¹⁵ He observed that missionaries had destroyed African culture, but he sought to analyse and understand the tools of oppression that they used. He observed that education, be it theological or secular, had been used as a tool in the disenfranchisement of the African people. His focus was therefore on finding an alternative Christian education, one that liberated rather than domesticated.

As a result of this awareness, Mazibuko argued that mission must be transformed from one that imposes itself on communities to one that incarnates and takes on the form of those communities. As a result mission becomes a 'servant' rather than a master or mistress of cultures. In defining mission, Mazibuko understood mission as "the church crossing frontiers in the form of a servant" (Mazibuko's unpublished paper).¹⁶ But for mission to take on liberatory characteristics, it needs to work on its methodologies.

He argued that western missionaries did not even try to understand African culture and as a result they had "contributed to the deculturalisation, despiritualisation and dehumanisation of the African personality" (Mazibuko 1987:47). In this respect Mazibuko is oblivious of the fact that there were missionaries who had tried to understand African culture, such as Bengkt Sundkler (and others).¹⁷ As a result of this failure to

understand African culture, the missionary enterprise was not liberatory but oppressive. Mazibuko argued that if missionaries had studied the African worldview, they could have provided a harmonious link between the Judeo-Christian and the African worlds.¹⁸ Mazibuko proposed that mission must lead to the liberation of culture and people, by actively taking into consideration the experiences and cultures of the people who are the recipients of mission. He argued that the traditional African worldview, together with its beliefs, practices and ceremonies, was very pervasive and could have helped the church in its educational activities had it taken them seriously from the beginning (Mazibuko 1987:48). The aim of Christian education is not only to influence African culture, but to be influenced by African culture; the influence has to be mutual, because African culture has to influence the praxis of Christian education. For this to happen, African people had to begin to see God as revealed in their own context. He told Gerloff:

Now if God is going to be authentic in terms of my own understanding, he [sic] must appear in the image of the father I know. This means, if you are white, you see the white side of God. I see the black side of God because I am black. As long as we both know this is our father, this is my father, it does not matter, because colour is subjective to culture and depends on your perspectives. Significant is who God is! What is more, God is requesting me to affirm the person's perspectives of seeing God, and not to declare: you must use my own lenses. (Gerloff 2003:5)

In his view Mazibuko believed that Christian educators had a great role to play in the liberation of African culture. "They need to transmit culture, train people for specialised roles, and simultaneously be a force of continuity and change."¹⁹ In his quest for a liberating education, he suggested that what we need is a kind of missiology, which "would allow us to reach

back to traditional African humanism as well as go forward towards complete self-actualization".²⁰

Mazibuko was also critical of certain academic schools in this era, blaming them for functioning in support of the colonial regimes that had eroded African culture. Coming from a South African context, Mazibuko noted the political nature of education, be it secular or religious. He stated that most official or formal education is meant to transmit the values, norms, myths and ideologies which support the ruling class. In the case of education in South Africa Mazibuko argued that it was meant to support "the white established social stratification".²¹ Mazibuko's quest for an African approach to Christian education was expressed in his writings where he places particular emphasis on language as a medium of communication and mutual recognition. He argued that:

People must feel empowered and enabled to express themselves in the vernacular, instead of suffering the domestication imposed on them by the Afrikaner language and culture. Equally they must do away with the legacy of the Empire, which pushed English down our throats as if it were God's own language. (Gerloff 2003:142)

Here he raises an important and critical issue that theologians have been struggling with for a long time. The question of doing theology in indigenous languages needs to be addressed.²² He was concerned that there still are difficulties for African people receiving theological education in their own mother tongues and saw this as the perpetuation of oppression. As a response to this problem the teaching and learning situation at the UTP was conducted in the Zulu language since all the learners were Zulu speaking people. Being a Zulu speaker himself, Mazibuko enabled a process where people could do theology in their own language, using

their own symbols and imaginations. He went further to challenge his students at UDW that, even when doing research, they must focus on their own African theologians such as John Mbiti, Bediako and others instead of always writing about Karl Barth or some other western theologian. He decried the fact that Africans would remain consumers of a theology imported from other contexts, and that their God will thus always be a foreign one (interview with Lymon Dlangalala 22 June 2005).

5 HIS CONTRIBUTION TO THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION: TOWARDS A CHRISTIAN EDUCATION THAT IS RELEVANT TO THE AFRICAN CHURCH

Mazibuko proposed that if Christian education was to liberate oppressed people, it needed to take their contexts seriously both in curriculum development and in methodologies. He noted that taking contexts seriously implies asking questions about a specific context during the teaching and learning situation. This means starting from the context, or even making context part of the curriculum. Education that is rooted in context seeks to explore the “connection with the ‘known’ world of formal theological education, whilst at the same time having the freedom to explore ‘unknown’ worlds of enquiry based on the expressed needs and concern of the participants” (Gerloff 2003:251). He argued that:

The methods and the content of learning are relevant to the needs of the black township culture, in a larger social context dominated mainly by white Euro-centric worldviews and values. (Gerloff 2003:263)

Education that is rooted in context is one that engages the participants in those elements of the area of study at hand that are most relevant to their situations, while being attentive to

the type of questions and problems raised by participants.²³ It also assumes that teachers bring the orientation of their respective disciplines to bear upon the problems brought to them by the participants whilst, at the same time, the participants increase their theological knowledge. The participants must also be encouraged to enrich the theological disciplines by presenting the problems and challenges they are confronted with from their own ministries. Put simply, the learning sessions are essentially an experiment in the exchange of theoretical and practical-formal and common/ordinary knowledge and experience.²⁴

6 LEARNING FROM BELOW

Mazibuko approached Christian education from the perspective of an educator. This was because Mazibuko had been trained extensively in education.²⁵ Gerloff says that:

As a result of his approach to education from an educationists' point of view, Mazibuko believed that a theological educator and a pastor is nothing more than a facilitator, one who enables people to move step by step until they are fully grown. (Interview 22 July 2005)

Mazibuko notes "if knowledge is to emerge from below, teaching is not a case of imparting knowledge on previously ignorant recipients, but of assisting them to build their own" (Gerloff 2003:263). It follows from there that the learning and teaching events are a constant exchange in which both the student and teachers are partners, subjects rather than objects. It is also important to note that critical thinking comes as a result of teachers who act as animators, enablers, and facilitators during the teaching and learning situation. This is not possible if the teacher understands his or her role as imposing information on unknowledgeable students. In other words, for

critical thinking to occur in education, the teacher must see himself or herself as a facilitator of the teaching and learning process. This includes the role of an educator as a decolonising agent. Mazibuko went on to say that "for the educator to become a decolonising agent he/she needs to undergo a process of re-education" (Mazibuko 1987:67). The purpose of re-education is to help the teacher to learn a new approach to education, one that is facilitatory and liberating. This proposes and shapes the role that must be played, if educators in the church want to educate for liberation instead of domestication.

Mazibuko was convinced that the poor and marginalised had a lot to teach the non-poor and the teacher.²⁶ The educated desperately need to listen to those who are regarded as without knowledge. Nasson Zwane, who was a minister at Mazibuko's home church at Ladysmith, emphasises his commitment to learning from ordinary people. Zwane observed:

Mazibuko came to my church and did workshops on different topics, especially on African culture and the church. What I observed was that he did not give much input, but rather raised a lot of questions that encouraged people to make the input themselves. He insisted on the recording of people's responses to his questions and he took those recorded inputs with him. I do not know what he did with them, but I was aware that he took them very seriously. (Interview with Rev Nasson Zwane 19 May 2005)

The above shows Mazibuko had a commitment to learning from the downtrodden and the deprived. He therefore noted that one of the most important principles held by the UTP was that "learning and teaching are a constant exchange in which

both students and teachers are partners; subjects rather than objects of the process" (Gerloff 2003:248).

One of the most significant characteristics of the Umlazi Project was that it was explicitly opposed to being referred to as a 'school'. Indeed, the project is referred to as an example of de-schooling. Mazibuko explains education as a process of de-schooling by saying:

Education can only be 'de-schooled' to become a liberating instrument if it is forged *with* not *for* the oppressed in their struggle to regain their humanity. (Gerloff 2003:268)

He saw the Umlazi Project as a de-schooling project, because it sought to become a liberating instrument of education. It sought to:

foster a greater appreciation amongst all participants, 'students' and 'teachers' alike of the radical, transformative teaching of the Gospels, with a particular focus on how Jesus appealed to an alternative tradition of wisdom and how such appeals might impact on concrete experiences of ministry today. (Mazibuko 1987:71)

A de-schooling educational project is one that encourages and provides participants with opportunities as "conscious reflective subjects, to learn about, to perceive and to modify their relationships with the world".²⁷

He continues:

The educational systems of many societies largely alienate and manipulate the individuals they ostensibly serve. Within the framework of the

philosophy of conscientization, however, participants set out to radically change the schooling system while, at the same time, seeking to change larger society.²⁸

The de-schooled theological project encourages critical analysis that incorporates insights from both the social sciences and the theological disciplines. It goes on to provide opportunities for participants, as conscious reflective subjects, to learn about how to perceive and to modify their relationships with the world. The focus in this project is on empowering the participants with skills to face their world. De-schooling is both theological and educational. Another reason for de-schooling comes from the realisation that Christian education has always been Euro-centric. Like most Euro-centric ways of theologising, according to Mazibuko, Christian education has been:

approaching problems from a 'vertical' or 'top-down' thinking. What we need is a 'horizontal' approach, a sitting alongside and listening to each other, learning from and informing together rather than teachers looking down vertically upon their students.²⁹

In response to this problem Mazibuko emphasises models of education that allow dialogue and the creation of a space for learners to be who they are in the process of learning.

7 CHRISTIAN EDUCATION THAT CROSSES FRONTIERS

7.1 Racial lines

Mazibuko observed that racism was the biggest problem faced by both the Church and society. He developed a vision for a theological school that would enable people to do theology together, that would empower them to cross these barriers. The UTPP was the fulfilment of a dream that Mazibuko had had for some time, of developing a Christian educational programme that would provide theological education across racial and ethnic lines.

I have a dream of a theological school, which is neither a ghetto of the black nor an imposition of the white experience, but a turntable between historic and charismatic Christianity, the First and the Third worlds, European and Black theology ... White structures are not so rigid that they cannot be changed. Black experiences are not so bitter that they cannot be turned into positive contributions. The process of mutual salvation and liberation must begin. (Gerloff 2003:21)³⁰

For him part of the mission of the church was to fight racism, which manifested itself through "tribal conflicts" and "divides between black and white as generated by structures of domination and subordination or by racist ideologies which turn blacks into non-persons robbing them of their humanity".³¹ The effects of racism went further in its influence on the church, because it had to deal with a Christianity divided into two, western and African, which resulted, ultimately, in a fragmented theological (Christian) education.³² Mazibuko's initiative through the Umlazi Project of inviting people from all racial backgrounds was an attempt to deal with this problem.

7.2 Multi-faith bridges

Christian education in South Africa has been done strictly from denominational perspectives. To think that Christian education can be done across multi-religious lines has been unthinkable. During his last year as head and dean of the Faculty of Theology at UDW, Mazibuko was faced with the challenge of a department in decline. He began the work of transforming the faculty of theology to a department of religion and culture, which meant that the faculty incorporated other disciplines and his aim was to move Christian theology away from the centre, making it equal with other, non-Christian disciplines. This was in line with the changes that were taking place in the country at the time, which included a movement to change South Africa from being a Christian country into a secular state, where all religions had equal recognition. Mazibuko did not finish the work, because he died two years before the final establishment of the Department of Religion and Culture (a woman was appointed as director of this Department). Knowing Mazibuko's understanding of missiology and Christian education, I have no doubt that he would have accepted these changes and would have stood up in favour of an African woman director. In fact, he was on the panel that interviewed Isabel Phiri, the woman who later became the director of the department.³³

Bonganjalo, one of Mazibuko's contemporaries, commented by saying "one of Mazibuko's gifts was recognising the experiential significance of the lives of ordinary people and the need of dialogue with African living communities".³⁴ G C Osthuisen, who was his mentor at Fort Hare, simply says that Mazibuko was a "lover of people (*no matter what their color, race, creed and denomination were*)".³⁵

8 THE COST OF DOING CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AT THE CUTTING EDGES:

MAZIBUKO'S ACADEMIC AND MINISTERIAL FOES

Mazibuko's gifts and his tendency to live and do theology at the "cutting edges" did not escape the notice of either his colleagues in the church or in the academic world. His way of doing things created both friends and enemies. Gerloff (2003:5) notes that his friends commented lovingly that: "he never stayed put" or "he always pushed himself beyond his limitations".³⁶ However, his theology meant that some people viewed him with ambiguity. Lymon Dlangalala notes that Mazibuko was "never really well understood". Some of his colleagues in the church viewed him with jealousy and, indeed, some ministers "hated him and tried to belittle him".³⁷ When he applied for permission to study in the UK in 1981, the Methodist church refused and he went without their permission; that created a lot of tension between him and the leadership of the church.³⁸ The fact that he was not in full-time circuit ministry, like other Methodist ministers, also made his position in the church uncomfortable.

Another group of enemies were those theologians who supported the apartheid government. Nico Botha tells of an incident in a conference in the Netherlands, which Mazibuko attended at the suggestion of David Bosch. During the conference, Mazibuko was rejected and sidelined, and treated as an intruder because some academics from the University of Pretoria were opposed to his presence at the conference (Gerloff 2003:103).³⁹ Those who came into contact with him during his last days at the University of Durban-Westville (UDW) have noted that, in his work (both as a lecturer and Dean of the Faculty) he made enemies and friends alike. Michael Mnyandu explains this by referring to the racial tensions at the UDW: Mazibuko was "willing that all people, irrespective of creed or decent, be part of the University".⁴⁰ This

attitude also created another group of opponents; those who wanted to maintain the status quo of keeping the university an exclusively Indian University. Adding to this was the fact that Mazibuko sought to understand the situations of both white and black, Indians and Africans, students and lecturers, and accepted all of them. He always tried to walk on the thin line that brought commonality among divided people. Mazibuko refused to see barriers between people, for he had grown much bigger than the racial, ethnic and educational limitations that surrounded him. Bonganjalo Goba described Mazibuko by saying: "He was a very complex person. As a result he was not understood by a lot of people, thus he became a very lonely person."⁴¹

This was a tough position to be in, in South Africa during such volatile times. The question that may be asked is: what was the source of his complexity? His complexity stems from his theology of crossing frontiers, and the way he chose to practise theology – always doing theology on the edges of both the church and South African society. His theology was one that emphasised unity for people and the crossing of all barriers, be they social, educational, cultural and religious.

9 CONCLUSION

In conclusion I would like to note a few critical points that have been raised in this paper as we explored Mazibuko's approach to Christian Education through the UTP.

First, the church needed to assist in the liberation of black people, people who had been oppressed through authoritarian education. The church had to promote liberation education if it was to rescue the oppressed. Mazibuko was also convinced that the poor and the marginalised had a lot to teach the non-poor and the powerful. He viewed the

education process as a building of partners in the sharing of knowledge.

Second, a church that embarks on a liberating mission creates space where people can experience dynamic love, sharing, and mutual growth through acceptance and participation. In Mazibuko's language, the church becomes utilised as "an institution of hope and fulfillment".⁴² Linked to that is the fact that methods of Christian education must lead to a process of change and liberation.

Third, African culture and its positive tenets must be able to contribute to the discipline of Christian education discourse if that discourse is to be relevant and owned by the African people. This raises the question of language and the symbols used during theological discourse. It also poses a challenge to all churches (mainline and charismatic) in South Africa, most of whose theological education is still trapped in western language and western symbols.

Mazibuko's insights are important for the church in South Africa as it seeks to make a contribution to the building and maintenance of a democratic society. For the church to make this contribution it needs to embark on the project of doing Christian education at the cutting edge.

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ENDNOTES

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- 1 He did not publish many academic books or articles. By nature Mazibuko was a very quiet and humble man.
 - 2 Professor Pitika Ntuli notes this in an interview with Gerloff at UDW, in *Mission is crossing frontiers*, 30.
 - 3 Gerloff, *Mission is crossing frontiers*, xiii.
 - 4 Details in footnote number 3.
 - 5 Dlangalala, L A 2003. *Passion to teach*, in Gerloff, R (ed), *Mission is crossing frontiers: Essays in honor of B A Mazibuko*, 41. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster.
 - 6 Indaleni was a highly respected Methodist institution, which started from a Primary School and gradually developed into a Teachers College. It has produced a remarkable number of educationists, priests and politicians, notably Chief Albert Luthuli who was educated at Endaleni. It was the pride of the Methodist church in Natal.
 - 7 Dlangalala, 'A passion for teaching', in *Mission is crossing frontier*, 41.
 - 8 Circuit is a Methodist term for a number of congregations under the pastoral and administrative leadership of one pastor.
 - 9 Interview, Pietermaritzburg 22 July 2005; see also 'Learning to fly', and 'Education is liberation: Fly now and pay later', 8 and 154. Gerloff also remembers an incident where Mazibuko drove her to Swaziland, but he had forgotten his passport, when he got to the border-post, he negotiated with the officials to allow him to go through in terms of his mission.
 - 10 Rev Sithebe remembers Mazibuko as a humble minister, an ardent scholar and a theologian of note. The author in Edendale, Pietermaritzburg in June 2005, interviewed Rev Sithebe.
 - 11 Maluleke, T 2003. A Black Missiologist: A Contradiction in Terms, in Gerloff, R (ed), *Mission is crossing frontiers*, 280-303. Maluleke notes that Mazibuko was in a difficult position as a first black missiologist, both from the perspectives of black people who were critical of missiology, and of white people who were mostly Afrikaners, although Mazibuko tried to learn Afrikaans; see Gerloff, 302, no. 2.
 - 12 Mazibuko, B 2003. The Umlazi project as a case study in liberating theological education, in Gerloff, *Mission is crossing frontiers*, 248-279; see also Ndlati, T 2003. Bridging the gap between Christianity and African culture, 103-116; and Johnson, L 2003. Liberating learning, 382-413.
 - 13 Some of the churches represented include the Holy Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion, the African Faith Mission, the Africa Evangelical Church, the Zulu Congregational Church in South Africa, and the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa.
 - 14 Mazibuko, A & Johnson-Hill, J. The Umlazi project as a case study in liberating theological education, *Journal of Constructive Theology*, 3(1), 49-76.
 - 15 Whilst doing this research, I came across South African theologians who kept asking "who is this Bongani Mazibuko, why don't we know him, what contribution did he make?" One of the reasons for writing this paper is so that he may be known and appreciated for his contribution to theological education in South Africa.
 - 16 Mazibuko, in Gerloff *Mission is crossing frontiers*, 3. For details on how Bosch understood this definition see, Bosch, D. 1980. *Witness to the world*, 248. Atlanta: John Knox.
 - 17 Bengkt Sundkler did extensive research on the interface between African culture and Christianity. This is published in his classical work known as *Zulu Zion and some Swazi Zionists*. London: Oxford University Press, 1976; and also *Bantu prophets in South Africa*. London: The International African Institute, 1961.
 - 18 Ibid.
 - 19 Mazibuko, 'Education is Liberation' in *Mission is crossing frontiers*, 145.
 - 20 Ibid, 143.
 - 21 Ibid, 142.
 - 22 People like Sam Tshehla and Kwame Bediako have been calling for the need for theology to be done in the African people's indigenous languages. The Department of Education in South Africa has passed a policy that places indigenous languages on the same status as English and Afrikaans. Now children can do any of these languages in schools.
 - 23 Ibid, 252.
 - 24 Ibid, 253.
 - 25 Roswith Gerloff, interview, 21 June 2005. She pointed to the fact that this was specific 'gift' he brought to the programme of the Centre for Black and White Christian Partnership in Birmingham, UK.
 - 26 In affirming the ability of the poor to contribute in the teaching and learning process, Mazibuko is not alone. He joins other theorists of this view such as Gerald West in *The academy of the poor*. Sheffield: Sheffield University Press 1999; see also Kennedy & Evans, 1987, in *Pedagogies of the non-poor*. Mary Knoll: Orbis.
 - 27 Ibid, 269.
 - 28 Ibid, 262.
 - 29 Ibid, 274.

- 30 Gerloff, R 1980. Learning in partnership: Third report. London: British Council of Churches, 24; and back cover; quoted in Mazibuko, B & Johnson-Hill, J 1997. The Umlazi project as a case study: Liberating Theological Education, *Journal of Constructive Theology*, 31; reprinted in *Mission is Crossing Frontiers*, 251.
- 31 Mazibuko, Education is liberation, 155.
- 32 Gerloff, 'Learning to fly', essay in memory of B A Mazibuko, *Mission is crossing frontiers*, 1-2: Ministry has to do with a pastor crossing frontiers.
- 33 Ibid, 1. The Faculty of Theology was closed in 1999 in favor of a Centre for Religion and Culture, for which he laid the foundation. He was on the panel that interviewed Prof Isabel Phiri who would later be employed as the director of the department of Religion and Culture. See also Phiri, I. Transformation in South African Universities: The Case of Female Academics in Leadership Positions in Theological Institutions, in Gerloff, R 2003, *Mission is crossing frontiers*, 414-432.
- 34 Ibid, 6.
- 35 Ibid, *Italics mine*.
- 36 Gerloff, 'Learning to fly', 5. In an interview with Gerloff, Bonganjalo Goba also noted Mazibuko's tendency to live on the edge as a source of controversy.
- 37 Gerloff, *ibid*, 6. Dlangalala confirmed this in my interview with him in Pietermaritzburg on 6 June 2005.
- 38 Dlangalala, L – interview on 21 June 2005, Pietermaritzburg. Mrs Sebenzile Mazibuko (Bongani's wife) told me that once, when Mazibuko had left for Birmingham without permission, some leaders of the church used to come to her and beg her to tell him to come back. They also wrote letters to him and the British Methodist Conference asking them to send him back because his family was suffering because of his absence. Mrs Mazibuko refused to be used by the church.
- 39 Botha, N 2003. Creation of missiological knowledge, in Gerloff, *Mission is crossing frontiers: Essays in honor of B A Mazibuko*, 103-116.
- 40 Michael Mnyandu, a friend and student of Mazibuko, in an interview with Gerloff, 'Learning to fly', 31.
- 41 Ibid, 6.
- 42 Ibid, 147. Mazibuko identifies himself with Eric Lincoln in his assessment of the Black church among Africans suffering in the Diaspora.