

# THE PREHISTORY OF THE FEDERAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA: A STUDY IN ECUMENICAL ANCESTRY

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## *Abstract*

From the time of the arrival of the first missionaries in South Africa, there was a need to prepare local agents to pursue the work of mission. Each of the English speaking churches formed and pursued its own stream. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these streams at times followed their own course and sometimes converged, only to diverge again. It was a combination of political circumstances and ecumenical vision that caused these churches to establish the Federal Theological Seminary of southern Africa in 1963. This article traces the flow of the Presbyterian, Congregational, Methodist and Anglican streams towards this ecumenical experiment in convergence. More detailed attention is given to the Lovedale Missionary Institution because of its strong ecumenical approach, its pre-eminence as an educational centre and because issues were raised there which were later faced by other theological colleges.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The birth of the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa (Fedsem) was the result of the coming together of a number of English-speaking denominational streams which had grown out of the particular ministerial needs of the churches concerned as they grew and developed in the unique context of South Africa from the early nineteenth century. At times, they converged and then separated, but in 1963 the finest experiment in ecumenical theological education

was established in the entire African continent. It is important to trace the source of these streams to understand the significance of Fedsem.

## 2 THE PRESBYTERIAN STREAM

**The early history of theological education in the Presbyterian tradition is closely tied to the growth and development of the Lovedale Missionary Institution:**

The theological school established at Lovedale in 1872 was the only institution of its kind in the Cape that attempted to train African students for service in white as well as black congregations (Switzer 1993:124).

**It was clear from the beginning of mission work at Lovedale in 1841 that expatriate missionaries could not cope with the volume of work necessary to convert the peoples of the southern tip of the African continent and further afield:**

Ordained African clergy were central to the reorientation of traditional Xhosa societies ... they became active agents in the propagation of western culture and Christianity. It is certain that the dissemination of these religious and cultural alterations could not have proceeded on anything like the scale that it did without the mobilization of the energies and enthusiasm of so many Africans (Mills 1975:vii, 2).

So leadership skills had to be developed among the local people for various types of ministry, but the ultimate aim was to convert black people to Christianity.

From the inception of mission work at Lovedale, the task of preparing expounders of the gospel was prefigured. At the opening ceremony of the Lovedale Seminary on 21<sup>st</sup> July 1841, Rev W R Thomson preached on the text: "And he ordained twelve, that they should be

with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach” (Mk 3:14). This was to be achieved by the preparation of teachers, evangelists, mission agents and pastors. The first principal, Rev William Govan (1841-1870) was fully committed to the training of ministers. The object of the Institution was clear from the outset:

The more specific design of it is, to train a well qualified native agency, to which the work of education, other maintenance and propagation of the gospel may soon, and to as great an extent as possible, be committed (Cory MS 8726, *Home and Foreign Record*, FCoS, 1854).

Govan based his work on four principles. Education at Lovedale was to be interdenominational, racially integrated, of a high academic standard and the focus was on the need for conversion (which was synonymous with education). However, the fulfilment of Govan’s vision was curtailed by the frequent Wars of Dispossession and the ‘cattle-killing’ which took place in the Eastern Cape until the late-1850s. His ability to discern leadership potential was realised and confirmed by his decision to take the young Tiyo Soga to Scotland where he trained as a minister of the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Shepherd (1971:18) comments appropriately: “Tiyo Soga became the first thoroughly educated and ordained missionary to his own race, and in his all-too-brief career did magnificent work.”

Govan’s approach to leadership training was that black people should be trained to the same level as white candidates and that they should, therefore, be able to function on the same level as a result of this racial integration. Consequently, he introduced a classical course which was a replica of the one offered in Scotland at that time. They would then become role models for others who might follow, as well as to those who might occupy other orders of ministry, that is, evangelists, mission agents, teachers and pastors. This led to a direct clash with his successor, James Stewart (1870-1905) and eventually to his resignation.

Stewart favoured a general education for the majority of the people, with an emphasis on teachers and preachers. Although he struggled with the idea that blacks could attain the same levels as whites, he

made provision for “any others who might wish something else” (Stewart 1906:29). That something else was ordination, a matter that was to lead in time to serious breaches within the Scottish and other missions. Stewart’s sincerely held view was that black people were ‘infants’ and would require guidance for many years before being able to compete on an equal footing with white people:

In the advance of the African races there is one danger ahead. It is the over-confidence and satisfaction with themselves displayed by so many of those who have been partially educated; and the entirely wrong impression, many of them seem to entertain, that it is possible for them to reach in one or two generations the level which other races have taken long centuries to reach. From this fallacious conclusion they are apt to claim an equality, for which *as a race* they are not yet prepared (Stewart 1906:370).

He held that his view represented the *essential* aim of education, while Govan’s represented the *accidental* one. Therefore, leadership exercised by black evangelists and teachers would be exercised under the ‘guidance’ of white missionaries. The Foreign Mission Committee of the Free Church of Scotland supported Stewart’s views and Govan resigned.

While Stewart favoured a broader approach to education than Govan, their aims essentially coincided. His educational programme was fourfold: “To train young men who had a strong spiritual and intellectual capacity as preachers” (White 1987:4), to train black school teachers, to offer vocational training and a general education. Stewart continued to operate with Govan’s principles of non-denominationalism, racial integration, high standards and conversion (A Smith, Appendix to LMI Jubilee Report, 1891:iii). Its ecumenical stance was clear: “It may not be generally known how widespread and unsectarian its operations are” for “Lovedale’s doors stand wide open, and nothing shuts out any, white or coloured, boys or girls, full grown men or little children” (Lovedale Missionary Institution [LMI] Report 1885:5). The denominational composition of the student body at Lovedale was demonstrated in a Congregational Union of South

Africa report on ministers (1884). It referred to ministers of the Congregational Union, the Free Church Mission and the United Presbyterian Church Mission, but did not include details of Anglicans and Methodists (LMI Report 1884:6). From time to time, candidates of the Dutch Reformed Church were also trained at Lovedale (eg LMI Report 1894:19). As the result of Stewart's initiative, the Congregationalists appointed a tutor in 1885 in the person of Rev T Durant Philip. Apart from the fact that there were few training institutions at this time, Lovedale's already excellent reputation may have been a significant factor in drawing churches to train their ministers there.

With regard to standards, the biblical languages continued to be mandatory for theological students (LMI Report 1878:6), despite Stewart's low estimate of their value: "even this small amount of classical learning is forced upon us against our wish and better" (LMI Report 1883:5). For him, English was now the 'classical' language. The Free Church and many blacks disagreed with Stewart. Black students considered the deprivation of classical and biblical languages to be a sign of their inferior status and of racism. Stewart considered the three-year literary course to be equivalent to a BA degree. This was virtually the imposition of the course which Scottish ministers followed in their training. In this way, he maintained the standards set by Govan despite his apparent differences in educational philosophy. However, both shared the same general aim which was "the evangelisation of the heathen and the building up of a Native Christian Church" (LMI Report 1892:3) through education. Stewart was to achieve this aim, though not in the manner he quite expected (see below). High standards may also have been a contributory factor in the constant low numbers of candidates who enrolled for theological courses. In 1877, there were eleven candidates, of whom only five completed the year (LMI Report 1877:8). Prior to the suspension of the course, concern was expressed about the low numbers of candidates (LMI Report 1902:19).

The year 1892 witnessed the introduction of a reorganised theological course. Few actual changes were made except that an emphasis was laid on the history and content of the Bible in English, and the discipline of apologetics was discontinued in favour of

dogmatics. Perhaps this was due, in part at least, to the rise of liberal theology and biblical criticism in Europe, and the fear that it might come to influence students of theology. There was a concern for “the negative influence of criticism” and its potential to be “destructive to their faith” (LMI Report 1892:27).

The greater concern, however, was with the methodology of the course. “The nature of the subjects they have been studying is such as to make demands more upon the memory and understanding, than upon the Reflective Powers of the mind, but it still furnishes abundant food for such Reflection” (LMI Report 1893:32). This comment reveals the weakness of the ‘banking’ method of education where leaders in the Christian community may well be able to repeat parrot fashion what they have been taught, but are unable to enter into discussion of that same content persuasively and so convince the unchurched of the worthiness of following the Gospel. The systematic approach to theology was found to be wanting in effectiveness. The approach that seemed to yield better results was “more conversational than methodical” (LMI Report 1893:33) and practical. This was especially true of the preparation of evangelists who were generally more mature in years. Rev John Lennox, tutor, commented: “What they lacked in nimbleness of mind, was compensated by the power of appreciation, born of their own former experience of evangelistic work” (LMI Report 1894:31). Here was the *raison d’être* for the conversational method!

However, Stewart had a generally low, though at times contradictory, opinion of the capabilities of black candidates. He could say of missionary agents: “... As the standard of success, things are hardly yet within sight of what we hope they will one day be”, while at the same time “there never has been a year so remarkable *for promise* as the present” (LMI Report 1894:31). His problem seemed to be the fulfilment of potential. This was in line with his general view: “That Africans usually reach a maximum, and that a rather low one, is an undoubted fact” (!) (ibid:5). The drive to maintain standards led him to introduce a preparatory theological course in 1901 (LMI Report 1875:20) and to insist on stringent trials prior to ordination. Hence, he aimed to train preachers “who may after considerable trial be found fitted by their mental qualification and general [Christian] character”

(LMI Report 1873:3) which was considered to be “the end of missionary education” (LMI Report 1890:6).

However, he was reluctant to ordain even those who had completed the three year theological course “without regular ordination” (LMI Report 1873:6), that is, “without expecting ordination to a charge” (LMI Report 1872:5).

Yet, Stewart’s approach was tempered by the reality of his situation. Due to doubts concerning the supply of missionaries from Scotland for the future, he realised “an urgent need for raising up a Native Ministry” (LMI Report 1879:5). Rather than consider the ordination of more black ministers, he introduced a new six-year long course for Native Preachers and Evangelists. In 1891, a one-year evangelists’ course was introduced. In order to further increase the numbers of lay workers Stewart proposed that “intending teachers ought to receive a measure of theological training to qualify them to act as Evangelists. Christian teachers so trained would be a power for good in a heathen community” (LMI Report 1879:5). By this means of expanding the ranks of alternative forms of ministry, he could successfully restrict access to the ordained ministry.

Stewart subscribed to a contemporary separatist approach and this may well have been a contributory factor, along with the maintenance of high standards, in the ordination of so few pastors. Between 1856 and 1910, less than twenty-five pastors were ordained among black Presbyterians. Switzer (1993:125) suggests that this was due to the fact that “missionary enthusiasm for ordaining African pastors was on the wane by the 1880s, as the arbiters of a segregationist culture began to separate church congregations and limit contact between white and black clergy”.

Consequently, the imminent rise of the secessionary movement was to demonstrate how deeply black pastors felt concerning their being kept in subordinate roles and denied equal status (i.e. ordination and, consequently, equal stipends) and opportunities with their white counterparts. Stewart himself suffered the personal indignity of his protégé and colleague, Rev Mpambani J Mzimba, seceding from the Free Church of Scotland Mission. Mzimba had been one of the first

black ministers trained at Lovedale to be ordained along with Elijah Makiwane in 1875 (LMI Report 1875:6).

They had completed the theological course with a Congregationalist, James van Rooyen who went to do missionary work with the London Missionary Society (LMS). After seceding with a large section of his congregation at Lovedale, Mzimba formed the Presbyterian Church of Africa in 1898. Perhaps the system of theological education at Lovedale had prepared its candidates for leadership positions in the church too well! Yet, it was unfortunate that some had to leave the Mission to demonstrate and realise their leadership potential.

As we have seen above, there was a real sense of continuity in the policies of William Govan and James Stewart. That sense was even greater between Stewart and James Henderson, his successor. Henderson's entire work, in continuity with his predecessors, was governed by a strong need to develop Christian character as a prerequisite for Christian leadership. This process was also part of Govan and Stewart's programme. He was committed to a 'character ethic' described by Covey (in Kretzschmar 2002:54). It was marked by "integrity, humility, fidelity, temperance, courage, justice, patience, industry, simplicity, modesty and the Golden Rule [do unto others ...]". Shepherd (1971:71) aptly commented: "He believed that the steady discipline of the Institution, its spiritual influence and ideals, its claims upon obedience and self-restraint, were performing great service in the upbuilding of character."

One of the few developments he introduced was in theological education where he initiated a new scheme for the training of evangelists and Bible women. He recognised the valuable role women were already playing in the furtherance of the Gospel. Evangelism had been fundamental to the establishment of Lovedale. Shepherd (1971:97) had captured the significance of the development of indigenous leadership: "It was recognized that for the evangelisation of the African, trained Africans must be secured, for they knew as no other the intricacies of the African mind and could appeal with power to the African heart."

It is instructive to note how many of those who trained for the

ordained ministry exercised their leadership skills beyond the confines of the church context. A number of Christians and ordained ministers were amongst the founders of the South African Native National Congress in 1912. Their mission education had prepared them well for leadership both within the church and in the wider community. Practically, all the most influential political leaders in Africa went through the Christian mission or church schools. It is no wonder that even Africans regard the Church as the 'guardian angel' of African nationalism and that the Church has laid 'secure political foundations' for African nationalism (Oosthuizen 1973:779).

If you look a far back as the time of the formation of the ANC in 1912, the leaders there were ... people that had been trained in the Mission Schools in the first instance (Langa 1999:48).

The work of the Theological Department, which had been suspended for ten years, was restarted in 1913. The course lasted for four years and had six students. Under the continuing able direction of Rev John Lennox, theological tutor, theological studies were given a more contextual emphasis: "One is tempted to advocate boldly that with students at the stage of these Native men the logical completeness of Systematic Theology should be abandoned in favour of a more incidental [contextual] but living discussion of Christian truth as it arises in a comprehensive study of the Scriptures" (LMI Report 1915:34). Lennox had earlier expressed his belief in the value of recognising the prior learning experiences of candidates for the ministry, especially those who were older and had considerable experience of Christian work. Written during the First World War, his views were apposite for the training of ministers whose ordained colleagues were rendering sterling service in the war zone. The situation which Lennox sought to address creatively was, and still is today in many African institutions, the situation where "theology produced elsewhere is still being studied and taught in a non-reflexive way, without the teachers and students appropriating theological truths within their own context and creating new knowledge, insights and applications" (Kretzschmar 2002:55). "The ultimate value of contextualisation for us, is that it is in the very particularity of its interpretation in specific situations that the gospel

achieves a universal application” (Duncan 1997:8). This is the approach which moves from the local to the global:

Contextualisation places more emphasis on the *specific* contexts of people, than on the *universal*. The supposition behind this is the conviction that it is in being fully true to one’s *particular* locality (the total context), that one can also be fully true to the *universality* of the Christian community (Saayman 1995:191).

In 1916, due largely to the vision of James Stewart and the energy of James Henderson, the South African Native College was established on land adjacent to Lovedale at Fort Hare. Due to the war situation, a new preparatory course for theological education began at the South African Native College in 1917. It returned to Lovedale in 1918. Theological education was transferred to the College in 1920 with the opening of a Presbyterian Hostel with Rev John Lennox, theological tutor, as warden. So ended the formal connection of Lovedale with theological education, though informal contacts would remain into the future.

Although the ordinands of the Tsonga Presbyterian Church (Swiss Mission) only joined the Seminary in 1967, historically their training had been based in Lesotho at Morija and at the Elim Pastoral School in the Northern Transvaal. Around 1907, the Swiss mission decided to engage in preparing an indigenous clergy. Morija was used as a result of the close relationship between the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (PEMS) and the Swiss Romande Mission. The first candidates were Calvin and Jonas Maphophe and Samuel Malale Maluleke (Maluleke 1995:69-70, 72, 74). Jonas Maphophe later began to train evangelists. From the 1960s, the South African government made it increasingly difficult to train ministers outside the country by delaying the issuing of passports. In addition, it was nearer and less expensive to train ministers in South Africa. Key figures in this move were Prof HWE Ntsanwisi, Rev J S Shimate and Daniel Marivate, a minister of the Tsonga Presbyterian Church, who was educated as a teacher at Lovedale but had little formal theological education. Ntsanwisi’s role was pivotal as he was the first indigenous moderator of Synod and was, in large part, responsible

for the transfer of power from the Swiss Mission and the formation of the Tsonga Presbyterian Church with subsequent developments including the changes in theological education.

### 3 THE CONGREGATIONAL STREAM

Three strands of training can be discerned in the Congregationalists' training for the ministry. These resulted from the different bodies which are today grouped together as Congregationalist; in those days they were separate corporate and individual missions. First, early attempts at theological education were carried out by individual missionaries such as Bryant and Ireland at Imfume, Natal, Rood at Amanzintoti, Wilder at Umtwalane and Tyler at Esidumbini. From humble beginnings at Imfume, powerful preachers and pastors emerged such as uMatanda, uSihlonono and iYisidunuka. These were Ireland's protégés and his theological courses were prototypes of the work later done at Adams College from 1866 in Amanzintoti, Natal, which had been opened in 1853 with the aim of "preparing an able ministry of the Word" (Christoferson 1967:51). Prior to this there had been Zulu 'helpers' in most mission stations from their inception.

In 1861, as the result of the London Missionary Society's (LMS) policy of "promoting self-sustentation in the Mission Churches" (Briggs & Wing 1970:103) to encourage its missions to become independent as soon as possible, the Union of Voluntary Evangelical Churches was established on the basis of the voluntary principle.<sup>1</sup> Between 1869 and 1876, it appears that a matter of some concern was the preparation of men for ministry. Older men were reaching the end of their ministries and the work was expanding throughout the country. At the outset of the Union there was only one minister who was not white, Rev Arie van Rooyen, so there was a great need to establish an indigenous ministry. By the early 1860s, Nicholas Goezaar, who had been educated at Lovedale, was sent to the Dutch Reformed Seminary at Stellenbosch to complete his studies. He was

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<sup>1</sup> Based on a refusal to allow state interference on church affairs. The Union was to become the Congregational Union of South Africa (CUSA) in 1877 (Wing J [ed.] sa. *Jesus is Lord in Church and World: Studies in the Nature of Congregationalism*. Johannesburg: UCCSA).

followed by Gwai Tyamzashe who studied at Lovedale under Dr James Stewart and completed his studies in 1872. In 1871, James van Rooyen (Arie's son) began studies for the ministry at Lovedale and completed them in 1875. This produced a financial crisis as no provision had been made for theological education. Requests were sent to former LMS churches for assistance and it was agreed to make an annual application to the LMS for financial assistance since there was no LMS training centre in South Africa. The Union also appealed to its member churches for help. There was a positive response from all parties. Timothy van Rooyen, James' brother, began training at Lovedale and John Mtila joined him to be trained as an evangelist. Several white candidates also went to England for training.

The work at Amanzintoti, sponsored by the American Board of Commissioners for Mission, continued under Elijah Robbins from 1875 until 1899. From 1880, he was assisted by Charles Kilbon until 1903, and at other times help was provided by Charles Ransom, Fred Bunker, James Dorward, James Dexter Taylor and William Wilcox. The admission requirements were low, requiring only the ability to read and write Zulu. However, new students were accepted each year. In time there was a definite attempt to raise standards by separating the groups into two: one would need Standard IV for admission to the class for ordination, while the other would have a syllabus for the preparation of evangelists. The school closed from 1907-1910.

The college moved too and was established as the Union Seminary at Impolweni in 1910 as the result of cooperation with the United Free Church of Scotland. This work continued at Impolweni until 1918. This was the result of imported attitudes of voluntarism and the complete separation of church and state, which led the Congregationalists (Congregational Union of South Africa [CUSA] and LMS) to try to establish their own centre at Hankey under Rev T D Philip. The Impolweni College was possibly the first formal attempt at ecumenical theological education in South Africa apart from what was already established at Lovedale. This experiment failed in 1917 due to lack of support and the Presbyterians transferred their students to Fort Hare. The college with the

Congregationalists then returned to Amanzintoti under the care of Henry Stick until after the end of the Second World War. Also, as we have seen, the Congregationalists subsequently sent students to Lovedale where Philip taught for ten years. Fifteen Congregationalists trained at Lovedale until the end of Philip's tenure. For a time, they trained coloured and African ministers at the University College of Fort Hare and worked in a shared department with Anglicans, Methodists and Presbyterians until its takeover by the government in 1959 as a result of the Separate Universities Act of 1958 and the Fort Hare University Transfer Act of 1959. Congregationalists experienced a difficulty in placing trained ministers because congregations preferred white ministers for reasons of prestige and whose stipends were sourced externally.

By 1881, twelve men were in training for the ministry at Adams. In 1948, discussions were initiated by Rev William R Booth, the new Principal, which led to the formation of Adams United Theological School in 1955 where ministers of the American Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC), the Presbyterian Church of Africa, the London Missionary Society and the Bantu Congregational Church were trained. The school was renamed Adams United Theological School in anticipation of the formation of a united theological school. The Congregational Union of South Africa and other churches began negotiations to send students to Adams, but this scheme collapsed with the passing of the Bantu Education Act (1953) and the subsequent withdrawal of the AMEC. The Adams property was taken over by the government in 1957 which resulted in its registration as a private school being denied. The college might have survived had it been prepared to implement government racial policy. However, it was not prepared to make this sacrifice of principle. The Bantu Education Act placed black institutions in the invidious position of having either to sacrifice their hard fought for and hard won educational philosophies and practices or be deprived of vital government funding. The best workable solution that was achieved was the retention of hostels attached to missionary institutions. This allowed the churches the opportunity to continue to influence the lifestyle of students.

An attempt to join the work of the Swiss Mission and Paris

Evangelical Missionary Society at their Bible School at Morija, Lesotho failed. Consequently, the project moved temporarily to Modderpoort in the Free State in 1957 where Rev Clifford C Khuzwayo was the first black tutor to be appointed. At this time discussions took place with the Morija Theological School of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (PEMS: *Kereke ea Fora*) and the Swiss Mission in South Africa (Tsonga Presbyterian Church) with a view to forming a united college but this failed due to border problems between Lesotho and the republic. Rev William Booth was the first Principal of Adams United College and it was he who first had the vision of a united seminary which came to fruition in the opening of the Federal Theological Seminary. Booth correctly states: "Adams Theological College trained and developed ministers for a long time, until it became part of Albert Luthuli College at the Federal Seminary" (Booth 1999:89). Booth conceived the vision for an ecumenical seminary at Adams when it seemed likely that the government would close the schools.

Another congregational strand in theological education developed when the London Missionary Society which operated in the Northern Cape and Botswana opened an institution at Shoshong which was later moved to the Moffat Institution at Kuruman. In 1908, this was transferred to the Bible School at Tiger Kloof, which had been established in 1904. A bible school was opened to train ministers and evangelists. A J Haile had succeeded W C Wiloughby as Principal in 1914. Gavin Smith was Bible School tutor from 1919 until 1938 and trained "some of the finest African ministers the LMS and CUSA ever had" (Briggs & Wing 1970:183). The first two ordinations took place in 1910. From 1919 until 1938 it was the central location for ministerial training for black ministers. Tiger Kloof suffered the same fate as other institutions taken over by the government in the 1950s following the passing of the Bantu Education Act (1952). On 1 January 1956, the institution received a letter from the Native Affairs Department stating its intention to take control of Tiger Kloof. The LMS was given the opportunity to continue to run the hostels but a particularly disturbing revelation in the letter stated that no students might be enrolled from beyond South Africa. This was particularly problematic since the Society operated in a transnational context. It refused in any way to collude with the government, gave up control of the

hostels and sent its candidates first to Modderpoort and later to Adams United College at Alice.

A third strand emerged when use was also made of Fort Hare by the Congregational Union of South Africa (CUSA) for its coloured and black students prior to its takeover by the government. This had its origin at Lovedale Missionary Institution where theological education began in earnest in 1870 under Dr James Stewart, although it had begun with the opening of Lovedale in 1846. From 1921, this training was centred at Iona house at the South African Native College, Fort Hare under the committed and capable supervision of Rev John Lennox.

As a result of the passing of the Separate Universities Act of 1958 and the Fort Hare University Transfer Act of 1959, this tradition of theological education was terminated and the Congregationalists, Methodists and Presbyterians came together to form the Lovedale United Theological College in 1960. This project was abandoned in 1963 when three Presbyterian churches, the Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa, the Presbyterian Church of Africa and the Presbyterian Church of South Africa, formed St Columba's College. At this time, the Tsonga Presbyterian Church of South Africa was training its ministers at Morija and at the Elim Pastoral School in the northern Transvaal. At the end of 1966, they consolidated their training at St Columba's College.

The Congregationalists participated in the formation of the Department of Divinity at Rhodes University for white students in 1947. However, very few white candidates were sent for training during the period 1949 to 1967.

## 4 THE METHODIST STREAM

John Wesley's approach to theological education was to combine both the evangelical and academic in order that ministers might be well equipped for their work. For him, the spiritual and intellectual aspects of preparation were interlinked. In South African Methodism, evangelism and education were two sides of the same coin in terms

of ministerial formation. The first British Methodist theological seminary was only opened in 1835, two years prior to the beginning of Methodist theological education in South Africa.

Formal theological education among black people began with the opening of the Watson Institution in the old Mission House, Grahams-town, in 1837. It concentrated on teaching the elements of the Christian faith with the aim of establishing a 'native' ministry in South Africa. Additional preparation was supervised locally by district superintendents. In 1840, it moved to Farmerfield. Two additional branches were established in D'Urban (Peddie) and Mount Coke on the principle that theological formation needed be made available on more than one site. This was not a successful experiment because available limited resources were soon stretched beyond the limits of rationalisation. Farmerfield and Mount Coke collapsed and Peddie (renamed Ayliff) struggled on in the shadow of the Healdtown Institution which was established in 1844. In 1865, five men came forward for the ministry: Charles Pamla, William Shaw Kama, and Peter Masiza from the Annshaw Circuit and James and John Lwana from the Peddie Circuit. These were the first blacks to be accepted as candidates for the Methodist ministry. Following a revival in 1866, the District Synod decided in 1867 to convert Healdtown into a theological institute for the training a *native ministry* (Balila 1991:28) consisting of evangelists, teachers and ministers. It opened with four students, Charles Pamla, James and Charles Lwana, and Boyce Mama who completed their courses and were ordained in 1871. During their three-year course, they studied Biblical and General Information, Homiletics, English Grammar and Wesley's Sermons. They also learned New Testament Greek as part of their New Testament studies, but the contemporary trend was opposed to teaching biblical languages to blacks. They all exercised faithful ministries and, contrary to the expectations of their white mentors proved to be "instruments of awakening' as soon as the work was put 'in their hands'" (Balila 1991:28). In 1875, the entrance qualifications were raised. These included having passed the District examinations with a recommendation to Conference, being married, having the ability to read and write the home language and some knowledge of English, having a good general knowledge of the Scriptures, the Methodist Catechisms and simple arithmetic as well

as having their character and piety attested by their Quarterly meeting and District. These were still below what was expected at Lovedale where the academic was emphasised:

In a literary point of view some might think their attainments low, but for adaptation and qualifications for their office as plain, earnest expounders of God's Word, and as being well able to apply it to the consciences of men, they were, and are, fully efficient, whilst the success has attended and followed their ministrations, is God's endorsement that they had not gone 'a warfare at their own charges' (Holden, *Kaffir Express*[KE], 1 May 1873).

Despite this, there was no suggestion of parity with their white colleagues! They were, and would remain, Native *Assistant* Missionaries (emphasis mine). The Healdtown Governing Council raised these entrance qualifications in 1875.

The studies of the year have embraced Theology, Wesley's Notes (on the New Testament), grammar, arithmetic, history and science. All the candidates speak English. The general advance of education amongst the Christian Natives and the growing acquaintance of the native Youth with English Literature ... render it a matter of great importance that our Native Ministry should attain to a high degree of general and theological knowledge, and the committee is confirmed in the views that it expressed last year as to the importance of having a good knowledge of the English language (Healdtown Institution Report, 1875 in Gqubule 1977:104).

The Vice-Principal of Healdtown was responsible for the theological programme with no assistance! This was the situation Robert Lamplough found himself in along with being superintendent of the Healdtown circuit. In a ten-year period (1867-1877) there were six theological tutors. Student numbers were low until 1880 when the final student completed his course. Many candidates and evangelists were subsequently ordained without any formal preparation. The course lasted for three years and included both academic and

practical work. The issue of teaching the classical languages also surfaced at Lovedale and the same conclusions were reached and implemented. Methodist theological education did not reach the same standards as that of the Presbyterians. While the Presbyterian system was inherited from Scotland and had a wealth of experience and tradition to support it, the Methodist approach was far more pragmatic and had been since Wesley's time. Poor staffing provision exacerbated the situation. In addition, there were doubts concerning the value of theological education for blacks: "This lack of adequate planning for starting a theological school is further proof that the Church was not convinced about the necessity of training an African ministry" (Gqubule 1977:107).

In 1880, Rev John Kilner, Methodist Missionary Secretary for Africa, prepared a report on "The Native Ministry and Native Agency Generally" (Gqubule 1977, APP c:232-234): "The most important question of the day" in a situation where there are "many men who doubtless had a call to the work who were kept back by a timid, if not at times, jealous hand." Kilner noted that there were fifty to sixty men who had all the qualities required for ordination. What greater encouragement was necessary? The Kilner Report challenged the absence of an ordained black ministry though Kilner believed, mistakenly (Balila 1991:46), that special training was necessary to prepare them for ordination. The training period was three years but it was felt that "our Native Ministry should attain to a high degree of general and theological knowledge" (Healdtown Institution [HI] Report 1875). It was also combined with practical work. The classical languages were not considered of great value. Charles Pamla with James and John Lwana were the first black ministers to be ordained in South Africa on 26 February 1871. In the 1880s, the white missionaries decided to raise the qualifications for ministerial candidates. This had the effect of denying ordination to many who had served the church faithfully for many years.

In 1883, theological education was transferred from Healdtown to Lesseyton and placed under the supervision of a supernumerary, George Chapman. This was probably because Chapman wished to retire to Lesseyton. This is a further indication of the casual manner in which the Methodists treated the training of ministers. The

numbers of candidates was on average ten per year. The entrance qualification was the Primary Teachers' Examination (PTC) and this became universal by 1917. The course had remained basically the same as that taught at Healdtown but by 1917 included Bible History and Introduction, Dogmatic Theology and Methodist History and Polity. There was little teaching on homiletics. The two-year course was normal with the possibility of a third year if suitable financial arrangements could be made. As the move to train candidates at the South African Native College at Fort Hare, Alice, became imminent, an attempt was made to raise the standard to Matriculation or its equivalent. It was clear in the case of the Methodists that as a denomination it was not possible to provide the comprehensive theological education programme that was necessary. Orange Free State candidates were sent to Lesseyton where the work continued until Rev James Pendlebury transferred to Fort Hare with the students in July 1920. The Methodists had never been entirely happy with the training provided at Lesseyton and, after considering several other possibilities, agreed to the principle of transferring the Lesseyton Native Ministers' Training School to Fort Hare. This was despite the fact that Lesseyton produced a number of ministers of high quality. There were outstanding preachers and administrators like Alexander Giwa, E J Mqoboli, J Barn and Z R Mahabane; and noted hymn writers such as W Jijana, S J Mvambo, R L Gonjwa, Alfred Mji, P G Mdebuka,, E J Mqoboli, F Nomvete, E G Rani, J J Mokitimi and Canno Sidiyo.

In the Transvaal, little theological education was provided prior to 1885 when work began at Potchefstroom under Rev J G Benson with the opening of the Bantu Teacher Training Institution. This work was later transferred to Kilnerton, Pretoria. Following the South African War (1899-1902) during which the institution was closed, Kilnerton was reopened in 1903 amongst other things for "theological purposes" (Le Roux & Millard 2004:7). However, it was in school and teacher training education that it did its greatest work. As a result of the passing of the Bantu Education Act, Kilnerton was closed in 1962. It was resurrected in 1994 as a ministerial training centre following the closure of the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa.

The Methodists, along with the Presbyterians, also participated in the

South African Native College at Fort Hare and its Faculty of Divinity from 1920 where the aim was to raise the standard of theological education and participate in an ecumenical ministerial formation which would be more cost effective. This was also the result of the British Methodist preference for giving its candidates both a general and theological education through citing Methodist colleges in the vicinity of universities. A prominent Methodist, Prof D T Jabavu, was instrumental in the founding of Fort Hare. Along with the Presbyterians, the Methodists transferred their students from Lesseyton to the church hostels proposed for the College. They agreed to establish denominational hostels with an ordained minister looking after the students of his own denomination, exercising a spiritual oversight over members of his denomination at the university college and the “training of those wishing to enter the ministry of the Church” (*The Christian Express*, 1 December 1905, in Gqubule 1977:123).

This was further developed when the Faculty of Divinity was established. The Anglicans also established Beda Hall though the Church of the Province did not propose to train its African ordinands at the College. It was not only divinity students who were accommodated there. Each hostel appointed a warden who was also a theological tutor. The Methodist Wesley House became the centre of its activities. It also became a focus of student political and social activity on campus and was named the ‘Great House’ (Williams 2001:54-55). The hostels and their tutors provided the initial impetus for the foundation of the Divinity faculty in later years. College services and regular prayers were enshrined in the College constitution. These hostels were fully operational by 1921:

My testimony is that the scheme not only worked without friction but provided one of the few successful examples in modern Church life in Africa of the comity that everyone recognizes that ought to exist between those belonging to different traditions of worship (Kerr 1968:58).

By any standards, this appears to be a somewhat romanticised view of student and ecclesiastical life. However, it was far from the truth of the situation of the 1950s (cf. Williams 2001) and subsequent decades.

From the beginning of theological education at Fort Hare, the full range of theological subjects, with selected humanities subjects, was taught with related practical work. This closely resembled the Lovedale course. From 1931, combined classes were taught by the Methodist and Presbyterian wardens, along with their Anglican colleagues, to their students along with the Congregationalists. This arose as the result of the initiative of the respective wardens, Rev W W Shilling and Rev Mungo Carrick. Certificate, diploma and degree courses were offered to accommodate the educational needs of the candidates and the requirements of Fort Hare. By 1949, theological students came from the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches in addition to the Paris Evangelical Mission, the Moravian Church and the American Board Mission. This was completely innovative and was subsequently copied by Rhodes University when it founded Livingstone House.

However, there were problems at Fort Hare. The practical courses were not accredited as part of the formal qualifications. The staff complement, despite the degree of cooperation achieved, was insufficient. An example is that of Rev E Lynn Cragg (1973:28), Methodist warden (1948-1959):

This meant for me a timetable of 20 to 25 lectures a week in addition to sermon classes, religious services, devotional meetings and hostel administration, and in my time at Fort Hare, I lectured on most biblical and theological subjects as well as psychology, ethics and economics.

There were also problems relating to spiritual formation due to pressure of work on tutors.

So from its beginning Fort Hare not only continued in the fine tradition established by the early missionaries, it was also grounded in a Christian ecumenical tradition where the churches' "cooperation could be secured and assistance rendered by and to a community as poor economically as the African" (Kerr 1968:58).

## 5 THE ANGLICAN STREAM

The inaugural provincial synod of the Church of the Province of South Africa in 1870 affirmed the need for clergy training. One of the earliest experiments was established by Dr Henry Callaway when he began to prepare “young natives *and colonists* as clergy and teachers” (Ngewu 1994 in Suggit & Goedhals (eds) 1998:116). This was a significantly non-racial approach (reminiscent of that practiced at the early Lovedale).

The Anglican approach to ministerial training was to begin at grass root levels in villages, and by training catechists who, if and when they proved themselves, were trained for ordination. This happened at the diocesan level until 1934. St Cyprian’s College was established by the diocese of Bloemfontein in 1876. It also became a diocesan training college. In 1898, after discussions at diocesan and Episcopal synods, a provincial faculty of divinity was established. The early history of Anglican theological education is closely linked to the development of three colleges, St Peter’s, St Bede’s and St Paul’s.

The Anglican College, St Peter’s, founded in 1903, was first situated at 10 Sherwell Street, Doornfontein, and ten years later moved to Rosettenville, Johannesburg, which at the time was outwith the bounds of the city of Johannesburg, and was organised by the Community of the Resurrection. For some time priests and catechists were trained together, but from 1937, priests were trained separately at St Peter’s. With the closing of Anglican theological colleges in Natal and Zululand, St Peter’s became the training institution for the North while St Bede’s was to become the training institution for the South (Minutes of Seminary Council, S4869/2/10/77, UFH). Having begun its life in a relatively unpopulated area, “it has become, through no fault of its own, a black spot in a white area - with the uncertainty of tenure that that fact involves. However, we hope to be allowed to carry on in our present situation” (Father G Pawson, Principal of St Peter’s in Suggit & Goedhals (ed) 1998:107). When this area was rezoned as a white area, the college was forced to move.

The Anglican approach to the theological education of black priests

arose out of the vision of Bishops Henry Callaway and Bransby Key of St John's diocese in the Transkei. Callaway worked from the principle that blacks were the best people to evangelise their own people. Towards this end, he founded St John's College in Umtata. Bishop Key, feeling that an institution which also trained teachers did not provide the optimum environment for the training of priests, moved the education of priests to the College of St Augusta and renamed it St Bede's in 1899. It was considered to be a diocesan college. A subtle change occurred in the early part of the twentieth century when Bishop Williams introduced the idea that black priests would only act as assistants to white priests! This arose out of the concern that black candidates were not of the highest intellectual calibre. Until 1954, the college was run by a single lecturer. This situation changed in 1954 when the Principal, James Shuster, invited Michael Carmichael to join him on the staff. In 1955, the bishops of the Province approved a constitution for the college which accorded St Bede's clear diocesan status with a degree of provincial recognition.

When Shuster became diocesan bishop, Carmichael became Principal and so began a period of stability with the vast majority of students coming from St John's diocese. While most students did not possess a matriculation certificate, under Carmichael's leadership, many did proceed to further studies. In 1961, Sidwell Thelejane was the first black chaplain to be appointed, closely followed by Matthew and Ephraim Mosothoane as staff members. In 1973, Robin Briggs succeeded Carmichael as Principal.

St Paul's began its life in 1902 as a hostel for white theological students. By 1906, it was full with six students! In 1910, St Paul's gained provincial status after extensions had been made to the original building. The early years were difficult and closure was even considered. In the 1930s, a new academic syllabus was introduced which led to the award of a Licentiate in Theology. The college closed briefly during the Second World War. St Paul's had six wardens during its first fifty years. During the 1950s, when Norman Blamires was warden, extensive developments took place which was completed in 1962. The 1960s was an unsettled period prior to the appointment of Duncan Buchanan as warden in 1966. His tenure

lasted for twenty years. The growth of the charismatic renewal movement in the 1970s led to a substantial increase in vocations and, consequently, student numbers. These were maintained until 1989. During this time, an emphasis was placed on accommodating student families and this period witnessed the introduction of female ordinands. The racial orientation of the college began to change in the 1970s as a deliberate policy despite the constitutional and legal implications which necessitated change and defiance.

Apart from what has already been stated with regard to the closure of St Bede's, there were other factors which led to the closure of both institutions. Student numbers at residential centres were dropping and finance became a serious problem leading to the reduction of the budget for theological education and the increase of student costs. In-service education was coming into vogue and a number of dioceses saw this as an attractive alternative to costly residential training. Apart from this, each diocese was free to decide how and where to train its candidates for priesthood.

In the midst of an investigation into the future of theological education in the Church of the Province in 1991, the bishops precipitately decided to close St Bede's College and retain St Paul's. As a result of the outburst that followed, this decision was rescinded and a subsequent decision was made to close both colleges and establish the College of the Transfiguration on the site of St Paul's. Luke Pato was appointed principal with a predominantly new staff. Former students of both colleges were brought together with an intake of new students.

## 6 CONCLUSION

From this it is clear that various factors prepared the way for the formation of the federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa. In part, there had been reasonably successful attempts at ecumenical theological education in the past which had encouraged cooperation and which had been based on common need, a lack of resources and a degree of non-racialism. This produced a sense of solidarity

which had arisen out of common need and purpose. In this respect, the results in terms of ministers trained, people converted to Christianity and their common witness to Jesus as Lord of their lives is no less than amazing!

Furthermore, ecumenical relationships had been growing from the beginning of the twentieth century in South Africa as a result of the formation of the General Missionary Conference of South Africa in 1904. This was also the century of ecumenism whose beginning was marked by the World Missionary Conference (Edinburgh 1910).

However, in all cases, it was the developing political situation of segregation during this period, culminating in the election of a Nationalist government in 1948 and the subsequent promulgation of the Bantu Education Act (1953) and related acts of parliament, which precipitated the need for a joint venture to safeguard theological education in apartheid South Africa. Nolan (1994:20) refers to:

socio-political forces which had brought these churches together to build a joint seminary ... Apartheid forces like the Bantu Education Act and the Group Areas Act made it necessary for the churches to come together to provide a seminary education for blacks in a so-called 'black' area. They could not do it separately so they did it together.

The Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa was born out of adversity (Van der Water 1999:222).

It was born out of what appeared to be disaster. The initial bonding was thus not primarily theological but praxiological. It was a case of the churches having to come together - some might say forced together - to do something together about their shared needs of theological education and ministerial formation (Lombaard 1999:222-223).

**Yet, as history confirms, there was also something of the Spirit guiding Fedsem to birth which sustained it through the worst days of apartheid and provided ministers with critical minds**

and strong social consciences. Yet, Fedsem became susceptible to the effects of the ending of apartheid and the advent of a new democratic South Africa.

Fedsem itself defined three reasons for establishing the seminary: the implementation of the Bantu Education and Groups Areas Acts; the urgent need to provide quality theological education for black candidates deprived of entry to 'white' institutions; and a "growing desire (note, not commitment) on the part of the Churches to cooperate and pool resources in the training and formation of candidates for the ministry" (Memorandum submitted by FedSem to the Consultation on Theological Education, Johannesburg, 15 June 1991). It would be true to say (partly in agreement with Worsnip 1996) that Fedsem provided a 'common cause' rather than a 'common vision'. "There was, after all, a common oppressor."

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