

# METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON THE FIRST BLACK CATHOLIC PRIESTS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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## *Abstract*

This article looks at the first four black Catholic priests in South Africa from 1887 to 1957. It examines the use of oral history methodology in accessing the silenced voices of these priests. The article bases its method on oral history and archival research. In some instances, and where necessary, secondary sources are also used. The article expands on the merits and demerits of the oral history method and its implication for a history of a people who were oppressed and marginalised. Finally, brief biographies of Edward Mnganga, Alois Mncadi, Andreas Ngidi and Julius Mbhele are presented. The article concludes that oral history methodology can actually assist us to see beyond the events as described to us in current literature.

## 1 INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

The methodology of the article is based primarily on oral history and archival research. However, in numerous instances secondary sources are also used to complement these oral and archival sources. Oral history methodology makes it possible to probe events more deeply, and to take a more perceptive approach which, according to Ogbu Kalu, “should analyse the inner dynamics of the evangelisation process, perceiving that process as an encounter between viable cosmologies and cultures. This method rejects European Christianity as the starting point of African church history. On the contrary, Africa and its cultures constitute the starting point”.<sup>2</sup> With the use of oral history we initiate the process of distancing ourselves from the “missionary historiography (which) is often hagiographic, triumphalist and disdainful of indigenous non-European cultures”.<sup>3</sup>

An attempt will be made to document history as seen by some black clergy. It is hoped that the voices of these black ministers – lost and silenced during the formative years – will improve the knowledge of the past, as these individuals played a significant role in the evolution of the religious societies and dioceses to which they belonged.

There are both merits and demerits to using the oral history method, and in its implications for a history of a people who were oppressed and marginalised. In this article extensive use was made of oral sources. In recent developments, these sources have enhanced the study of church history in South Africa and the world at large.<sup>4</sup> The main concern for oral sources lies in what tends to be hidden in expression through word of mouth. This message is transmitted by oral history and oral tradition.<sup>5</sup> As Denis expands:

Oral history is based on reminiscences, hearsay or eyewitness accounts which occurred during the lifetime of the people who are interviewed. Oral historians typically interview participants in recent or very recent events, when historical consciousness in the communities involved is still in flux.<sup>6</sup>

Oral history therefore refers to first-hand recollection or hearsay accounts and situations of a person interviewed by a historian. Depending on the topic, the historian selects witnesses and then interviews them on past and present events.<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of this article, I selected priests and an individual who had experienced some aspects of the establishment of the black Catholic clergy in South Africa.

However, when stories are passed by word of mouth from one generation to the next, they are referred to as oral traditions as distinguished from oral history.<sup>8</sup> Oral traditions are not contemporary: that is they are not direct experiences of the narrators. They consist of verbal descriptions and narratives of events and people from the past that have been handed down by word of mouth over several generations.<sup>9</sup> Oral tradition is both the product and the process: here, oral messages are the “products” and are based on past messages which have existed for at least a generation, while the act of transmission by word of mouth is known as the “process”. Such tradition continues until the message disappears.<sup>10</sup>

Jan Vansina distinguishes different classes of traditions: formula and prayer, followed by poetry, then epic, and finally narrative. In highly industrialised nations, oral traditions have diminished in use, but still play a major role for some people in modern society. An example is pre-colonial societies, where oral tradition has proved invaluable as a source of information. The difference between oral tradition and oral history is that the former is something held and shared by a larger community, and is not easily diluted, whereas the latter is usually shared by a select number of people and, because its circulation is limited, it may not survive for very long.<sup>11</sup>

This research makes substantial use of oral history methodology. As a discipline, oral history embraces theory and content used in relation to its history, that is the past, present and possible future. A crucial element of this methodology is the interview technique, which places great emphasis on the historical aspect of the subject. Priority is given to the accounts of witnesses or first-hand participants in events and situations; the recollections of these interviewees are, therefore, treated as historical evidence and recognised as having historical value. The interviewer systematically collects, arranges, preserves, records and publicises the verbal opinions and accounts of witnesses and participants which are likely to interest scholars in the future.<sup>12</sup> As Thompson cogently says: "All the exact words are used as they were spoken; and added to them are social clues, the nuances of uncertainty, humour, or pretence, as well as the texture of dialect."<sup>13</sup> The oral accounts are spoken and generally colloquial, that is they are conversations that belong to common speech.<sup>14</sup> These interviews are usually recorded on tape and then transcribed.

For the most part oral sources were used, but written sources were also consulted as these methods complement each other. The distinction between the two sources is partly artificial, due to the fact that many written documents were once oral and contain hidden oral evidence. The oral sources are also often transcribed or put into writing, and in the process become written documents.

There is a need for written sources to be complemented by oral sources. In this particular instance, they helped address the limitations inherent in the history of the Catholic Church based exclusively on written sources. Written sources tended to reflect the institutional aspect of Christian life, in other words the arrival of missionaries and the building of churches and schools, while largely overlooking the social, economic, political and

cultural elements of the people's lives. Secondly, written sources offered an outsider's perspective of the Church, rather than an insider's view, thereby overlooking, for the most part, the contribution of the local people.<sup>15</sup> Finally, in most cases – including the case in point – the bulk of the material in the archives reflects what James C Scott describes as the “*public transcript* of the dominant”.<sup>16</sup> The material preserved generally reflects only the aspect of the powerful, while the side of the subjugated is hidden and rarely finds its way to the archives. In the case of the black Catholic priests, however, the insiders' views were not completely irretrievable and could be retrieved, to some degree, through the methodology of oral history.

However, a critical evaluation of oral sources was needed. The pertinent question is how accurate is oral history concerning some of the incidences narrated. The striking problem experienced in conducting the interviews was the lack of chronological precision. One of the priests under investigation had died almost sixty years before. Some of the informants could not remember the exact dates of events (for instance, dates of birth, ordination and death), whereas others could. Traditional historians make use of serial time, of chronology, whereas most people do not, and this may create problems. With the aid of improved interviewing techniques and outside written sources, such as newspapers and letters, more precision can be achieved. For a better evaluation of some of the interviews, the investigator used all the available sources pertaining to the theme under investigation.

The second difficulty was the tendency of the interviewees to reconstruct the past. In some cases, the informants consciously or unconsciously tried to grace the past. In other cases, they tried to justify their actions, even though the event had occurred a long time ago. This was seen particularly with bishops, when asked about racial relationships in the Catholic Church. The answers resounded with a heavily reconstructed past. Other priests, however, gave the official version of the incident, possibly because they were uncomfortable with the past, or because it might have left painful memories.

The third problem experienced was the unconscious use of literary sources. In some cases, after I rang the informants to arrange for an interview, it was evident that they had consulted their personal archives for books or pamphlets written on the topic of the first Black priests; books that I had mentioned. When interviewing, I often recognised lines from

either Joy Brain's or Godfrey Sieber's books.<sup>17</sup> When I commented on this, some interviewees became critical. Interestingly though, as little has been written on the first black priests, most of the informants were compelled to dig deep in their memories to recollect events and situations in their lives, or in those of their confrères.

Other general problems encountered can be summarised as follows: Some interviewees described events without critically examining the incidents, and when I wanted to probe an interesting point further, they would simply tell a story which I considered marginal to the central issue under investigation. Later on, after analysing the interviews, some of these stories proved to be useful and greatly enriched the interview process. In some cases, one could sense that the informants were selecting what to say. They probably knew the whole story, but were cautious of what they told. This occurred especially with the story of Edward Mnganga, where I sensed that Bishop Dominic Khumalo and Natalis Mjoli were telling me only what I needed to know. Other informants gave very brief answers to the questions, which could have meant that the story was either not very important, or was too painful to recall. But because I was dealing with a subject they considered interesting, I managed to get at least some additional information.

The general impression from the interviews conducted, especially those with the black priests and bishops, was that there was a willingness to talk. It was as if, after almost 40 years, they wanted to tell the real story they had waited so long to tell. Several of the books on the black Catholic clergy were dismissed by some of the interviewees as being biased and uncritical. Most of the informants felt that, by telling their story, they were not only elaborating on the existing written evidence but also correcting the errors. The time had come it seemed, to write the new history of South Africa.

## **2 THE FIRST FOUR BLACK PRIESTS**

This section will introduce the first four black priests, i.e. Edward Mnganga, Alois Mncadi, Andreas Ngidi and Julius Mbhele. It will present a general discussion of the background of the individual priest before providing an exposition of his interaction with missionary priests, using oral testimonies and archival sources where applicable. It is important to note at this stage that the first four black priests were diocesan or secular priests and did not belong to any religious order or congregation. They

belonged to the Diocese of Mariannhill and some later moved to the Diocese of Zululand.

## 2.1 Edward Muller Kece Mnganga (1872-1945)

In November 1887, “a promising boy” from the “Latin School” at Mariannhill presented himself to the Mariannhill missionaries. Pfanner, the superior, decided to send him to Rome to study for the priesthood.<sup>18</sup> Edward Mnganga came from the Mangangeni in Mhlatuzane.<sup>19</sup> As Mrs Malukati Mncadi recalled: “The thing he used to tell me was that he was coming from Mangangeni [...] as he (Edward Mnganga) was called Mangangeni. I think that place is close to Mariannhill ...”<sup>20</sup>

Mnganga travelled to Rome with a young Mariannhill priest from England by the name of David Bryant.<sup>21</sup> Bryant had been ordained that same year and, after his return to South Africa, worked in the Transkei, as it was known at the time. He was later transferred to Ebuhleni, near Emoyeni. Ebuhleni had been founded as a result of a series of events closely associated with a white Zulu chief by the name of John Dunn.

Upon Mnganga’s arrival, “Bishop Jolivet decided that he would be of most use to the vicariate among his own people in Zululand and sent him there to assist A T Bryant (later known as David) who was working amidst the Zulu at Ebuhleni”.<sup>22</sup> We learn afterwards that:

After April 1898 Bryant was assisted by the first Zulu priest, Father Edward Kece Mnganga () who was to *take charge of the school*. Father Mnganga, who had left for Rome in 1887, was a secular priest who had his early education at Mariannhill and was to spend most of his life in the Black missions.<sup>23</sup>

By 1898 the Emoyeni mission was serving about 80 Christians and catechumens, while at Ebuhleni Bryant had 200 people at his Sunday services.

### *2.1.1 Mnganga's conflict with David Bryant*

Mnganga worked at this mission from 1898 to 1906. While working there, he encountered many problems.<sup>24</sup> In *Vergissmeinnicht* Vitalis Fux outlined the main reasons for Mnganga's difficulties:

The difficulties he faced as a priest were, white racism, human faults, passion and jealousy. These dangers grew so much that it managed to destroy his soul. His ideas of a priest and holy faith on one side and the difficulties from the outside and a cruel reality on the other side fought a dangerous battle against his existence ... He had to go all this way, till the height of Calvary in deep darkness. He no longer worked as a priest. Instead, he had to stay in a mental institution for 17 years ... He, nevertheless, fought a good battle and still believed in God.<sup>25</sup>

It is important to note that "white racism, human faults, passion and jealousy" are considered to be the main difficulties which Mnganga faced, according to author Vitalis Fux whose article in *Vergissmeinnicht* was entitled *Der erste Priester dem Stamme der Zulus*. These problems are discussed more fully in the oral testimonies that follow. The main problem, and one which is not addressed in Fux's article, is that Mnganga clashed with Bryant, got angry and resorted to physical assault against Bryant. In our oral testimonies, Mnganga's anger is explained in four different ways. Firstly, that he lost his temper because he was annoyed with Bryant<sup>26</sup> for ill-treating him as a black priest (source: Bishops Biyase & Khumalo); secondly, that Bryant interfered unnecessarily with his school (source: Natalis Mjoli); thirdly, that Bryant burnt and buried Mnganga's vestments; and, finally, that Mnganga found Bryant pointing to the private parts of a naked Zulu woman while studying Zulu ethnography (source: third and fourth reason by four priests who requested that their names not be disclosed).

I chose to interview two bishops because at the time they were the only ones who knew something about Mnganga and were willing to talk to me. The other priests were selected randomly, especially those who had met or heard something about Mnganga.

### *2.1.2 Oral testimonies on the conflict*

The first two versions of Mnganga's conflict were explained to the researcher through oral testimonies by black bishops and priests who were ordained between the 1940s and the 1970s, the late Bishops Biyase and Khumalo and Fr Natalis Mjoli. These testimonies concur: Mnganga, who was not on good terms with his rector, got angry and lost his temper. While the consequences of this anger are explained in different ways, it is important to understand that anger is the common denominator.

Another interesting explanation is given by Alois Mncadi's cousin, Mrs Malukati Mncadi (b.1894), who later became a cook for Mnganga. She attributes his problems to the fact that he was very intelligent. The last two versions were presented by four young Zulu priests, who were ordained in the late 1980s and early 1990s and who spoke to me under cover of anonymity.

Essentially, the conflict between Mnganga and Bryant arose when Bryant provoked Mnganga, who got angry, lost his temper and threatened Bryant. Consequently Bryant, probably with some white missionaries and in collaboration with the civil white authorities of the time, had Mnganga placed in a government asylum in Pietermaritzburg. He stayed there for seventeen years, under the pretext that he was mentally deranged.

I will now move on to the second priest, Alois Majonga Mncadi, who was sent to Rome in 1894 with his colleague, Charles Mbengane who, unfortunately, took ill and died.

## **2.2 Alois Majonga Mncadi (1877-1933)**

Alois Majonga Mncadi was sent to Rome on 24 August 1894 and was ordained in 1903.<sup>27</sup> *The Catholic Directory* records that in 1921 he worked at Maria Linden, and that from 1925 to 1927<sup>28</sup> he worked at Mariannhill as well as at Lourdes, Centocow, Ixopo, St. Michael's, Himmelberg, St John's and Maria Trost.<sup>29</sup> Shortly before he left the Mariannhill vicariate, Mncadi worked at Highflats before finally moving to Zululand in 1933. He died on 28 October of the same year and, by that time, had been a priest for 30 of his 59 years.<sup>30</sup>

From the sources available, we see that Mncadi was involved in two conflicts as a priest at Mariannhill (1903-1932). The first, in 1918, was



with Fr Florian Rauch, who was rector at Maria Trost mission at that time. The conflict arose because Florian vehemently objected to Mncadi's staying with his niece at St Michael's. The second conflict was with Bishop Fleischer and involved the ownership of a farm.

### 2.3 Andreas Mdontswa Ngidi (1881-1951)

Andreas Mdontswa Ngidi was born in 1881, not very long after the 1879 Zulu War. Ngidi was admitted to the mission boarding school at the beginning of October 1892. He presented himself for baptism classes and, two years later on 19 March 1894, he was baptised, choosing the name Andreas. Fr Bede Gramsch arrived from Lourdes mission and took charge of the boarding house. He noticed that Ngidi was very clever and believed he had the potential to become a priest. "Andrew Ngidi who has never attached any love for any place or familiarity with home surrounding agreed on the moment to try his best in following this ideal."<sup>31</sup> In 1896 three more boys came forward to offer themselves for training for the priesthood. This resulted in letters being sent to Rome to apply for permission to train the four boys. Although they were all accepted, two of the boys withdrew. This left Andreas Ngidi and Julius Mbhele as the two candidates for the priesthood.

Andreas Ngidi and Julius Mbhele left for overseas on 22 September 1899, just two days before the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War. They stayed there for eight years and were quite successful. As Ngidi says: "In fact, the younger African passed these examinations with greatest honours, getting 'Excellent' in Classics: Latin and Greek, having always topped his classes in all subjects. A rare fact! Of course, Greek students could not be beaten in their own Greek language."<sup>32</sup> Both Ngidi and Mbhele received doctorates in Philosophy and, in addition, Ngidi completed a doctorate in Theology.

They soon fulfilled their most ardent desire: being ordained to the priesthood in the Lateran Basilica by Cardinal Respighi, the Vicar of Rome, on 25 May 1907. Both said their first Mass the next day:

... the Rev Julius Mbhele, being the dean of the class, in the chapel of the Propaganda College: whilst Fr Andrew Ngidi chose to celebrate his first Mass in the German national church, *del anima*, for he had great love and gratitude for the

German missionaries in his country ... Shortly before, their group had been received by the Holy Father Pope Pius X.<sup>33</sup>

Before they returned to South Africa in 1907, they visited Switzerland, Germany, Holland and England.<sup>34</sup>

After their return, the two priests were assigned to different missions in the vicariate of Natal. Ngidi worked at the Keilands, Lourdes and Cassino missions.<sup>35</sup>

While working at the Maria Telgte mission, Ngidi experienced some trouble with his rector, Albert Schwieger. The rector spied on him to see whether he was writing material contrary to what the missionaries believed in. Schwieger used to sneak into Ngidi's room and steal his writings, trying to see what kind of material Ngidi had written. Ngidi had written down some notes on what he thought the situation could be after the white man had been defeated. The rector took these and was scandalised.

Ngidi later moved to Zululand and worked at Nongoma, Eshowe, Emoyeni Holy Cross Mission, Nquthu, Qudeni and Nkandla.<sup>36</sup> Ngidi's years in the Diocese of Zululand can be divided into the following themes: missions, the Catholic Africa Union (CAU), The Zulu Society of South Africa, bursary schemes, the buying of property and writing. In these themes, we notice that Ngidi challenged the process of colonisation and the coming of the white man to Natal.

## **2.4 Julius uMkomazi Mbhele (1879-1956)**

Julius uMkomazi Mbhele was born in 1879 into the Amabela tribe. He was received into the mission station at Lourdes in 1894 and was baptised in 1896. In 1899, at the age of 20, he entered the Collegium Urbanum in Rome.<sup>37</sup> On his return from Rome in 1907 until 1924 Julius Mbhele was involved in mission work at Mariannhill. In 1910, while working at Mariannhill, Mbhele was incarcerated to Einsiedeln Abbey in Switzerland and was not allowed to practise as a priest. Mbhele experienced problems staying at any mission because of differences with the rectors and the bishop of Mariannhill.

By the end of 1924, he was transferred to St. John's Parish in Umgodi where he worked for two years. The farm became a major concern for

Bishop Fleischer and, in 1924, the bishop wrote a letter to Mbhele in which he suspended him and asked him to dispose of the farm:

As you today declared before me, Fr Superior here and Fr Aloys Mncadi that you did not try nor are willing to do so in future, to dispose of your farm. Although I ordered you under the 4<sup>th</sup> of September this year to do so before this Christmas, I suspend you from saying Holy Mass. At that 4<sup>th</sup> of September I declared to you that I hold it a duty of conscience to give you that order. On the 6th again, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of the month I repeated it saying you are on the way to hell by your continued stubborn disobedience to your bishop who wants to save your soul by order. P.S. I told you next month you have opportunity to put your case before the apostolic delegate who comes here.<sup>38</sup>

Mbhele refused to sell the farm and, in November 1924, appealed to the apostolic delegate. The delegate wrote back saying that according to Canons 127 and 142, a priest was supposed to obey his bishop when commanded to do so. In the same year, Andreas Ngidi and Mbhele wrote a petition to the apostolic delegate regarding their right to own property. Not much was achieved through this petition, however. As stated earlier, Fr Mbhele was a diocesan (secular) priest, and in consultation with his bishop he could own property, even a farm. However, his superior thought that owning the farm would derail his vocation and hence discouraged it. But Fr Mbhele insisted that he had the right to own the farm.

In 1927, Mbhele was transferred back to the Mariannhill Monastery. During this period he also wrote a great deal for the local newspaper, *Izindaba Zabantu*<sup>39</sup> and was involved in the translation of the Bible. As Mncadi wrote:

As his Lordship has an exceptional talent in the person of A N (Andreas Ngidi) and J M (Julius Mbhele), especially the intellectual gift of Rev. Mbhele might use them for translating the New and Old Bible into Zulu. These two are the best in the whole South Africa even I may in all earnestness and fairness say that they are the best and unique machinery for that purpose in the sub-continent.<sup>40</sup>

In 1933, Mbhele left Mariannhill and joined the Zululand Diocese. He worked at Inkamana for a year and the following year was transferred to Entabeni. In Zululand he experienced similar problems relating to his

farm. Between March 1933 and October 1937 Bishop Spreiter wrote numerous letters to Mbhele concerning his farm near Ncala mission.

### 3 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this article I have looked at the first four black priests in South Africa. Mnganga was the first to be ordained, in 1898, and he worked in Zululand. His rector, David Bryant, alleged that he had problems and was “mentally disturbed” and, as a consequence, Mnganga spent seventeen years of his life in the Natal Government Asylum. Alois Mncadi also differed with the white priest with whom he was working, over cultural issues. Andreas Ngidi was another black priest who had problems with a rector who kept on invading his privacy until Ngidi was transferred to a new parish. Finally, we looked at Julius Mbhele, whose work and efforts were constantly sabotaged by Sixtus Wittekind. In three of the four cases, a missionary priest was the instigator of the conflict and, in each case, that missionary priest made the lives of these black priests unbearable, punishing them with a “swift stroke of repression”.

By relying on our written sources, we can conclude that life was very difficult for these first black priests. There are several possible reasons for this. Firstly, all had been to Rome and acquired doctorates in theology and philosophy: this in itself may have created some problems of jealousy towards them among the clergy, because most of the missionaries received only basic priestly training. The first black priests had licentiates (equivalent to a master’s degree) and doctorates. The priests may have behaved rather proudly or arrogantly.<sup>41</sup> They were, to a certain extent, aware of two world views - Zulu (indigenous) and Western - and, sources suggest, they were also aware of the power struggle between these cultures and that this may have made their lives more difficult. Initially, they may have thought they could associate with the white priests, but when they were continually ill-treated, the trust broke down. Due to their high levels of education, they were quite possibly also alienated from African society. All these factors influenced the interaction and relationship between the missionary priests and these black priests.

While the evidence leads one to suspect that these might have been the difficulties the priests faced, we cannot necessarily conclude that these were the difficulties. The definition of “problems” is in itself a matter of perspective. It could have been that the missionaries did not fully comprehend the dynamics of African culture. According to the Comaroffs,

it is from culture that we develop salient aspects of human existence, hegemony and ideology. The missionaries arrived with the superior idea that Africa was blank and needed their God; they wanted to erase a culture which had developed over several centuries. By not understanding the culture of the indigenous people, they also misunderstood their *modus operandi* and were convinced that the problems lay with the African priests.

However, it should be noted that in South Africa the factor of the historical development of world views and relationships between black and white, especially after the dissolution of apartheid and efforts in inculturation, have progressed quite steadily in the Roman Catholic Church today. Numerous efforts have been spearheaded by the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) and in some cases by individual priests, for instance Fr Dabula Mpako. In some cases, these have yielded some positive results; nevertheless, more concerted efforts still need to be made in the Catholic Church today. Insofar as the endeavours of the early missionaries are concerned, one should emphasise the fact that the first black priests and the missionaries were men of their time. Both sides had prejudices towards each other and came from different cultural backgrounds as stated above. One can say there was goodwill on the side of white missionaries - leaders of religious orders - in that they initiated the early training of black priests by sending them to Rome and they received a good education, some even obtaining doctorates.

As mentioned earlier, the pertinent question in this article is how accurate are oral histories concerning some of the incidences narrated. In the case of Fr Mnganga, we rely heavily on oral sources to justify the fact that he was not mentally disturbed. Furthermore, the evidence in the oral sources is also supported by the outcome from the asylum in that Mnganga was released after seventeen years and functioned as a normal priest in Mariathal, Ixopo.<sup>42</sup> To a greater extent, this fact does persuade us that the oral sources might be giving us an accurate account of the events. Comparing the oral and written sources, one can objectively extract the fact that Fr Mnganga might have been wrongly accused and sent to the mental asylum. For the other three priests, I relied mainly on archival sources to reconstruct their biographies. However, oral testimonies do support the sequence of events found in the archival sources. A key methodological consideration is that in order for us to reconstruct the past as objectively as possible, we need to use both the written and oral sources. These two sources complement each other and help us

reconstruct a comprehensive picture of the events which transpired. With the use of oral history methodology we notice that a new dimension is brought to the fore. For instance, the experiences of the black priests were highlighted by the late Bishop Biyase as follows:

[their experience] can enrich us ... first of all in the manner of approach to this priesthood or pastoring to people ... So I would imagine that studying the acts of these guys just like the Acts of the Apostles ...<sup>43</sup>

#### 4 CONCLUSION

In some instances, with the help of oral history, we can go beyond the mere stories of the conflicts between the local clergy and the missionaries. The interaction was characterised by contestation, compliance, repulsion and fascination. The missionaries proved to be more capable of imposing their cultural background on the colonial field; however, the black priests were not passive recipients of the European culture – they also resisted. The form of resistance of the black priests can be linked with culture: they resisted the missionaries' campaign to reconstruct aspects of their everyday lives, and struggled to retain control over words, space and the use of the Zulu language.

The resistance of the black priests included simple gestures of refusal, writing rebellious letters and petitions, arguing over the mastery of the Zulu language and refusing to obey some of the bishops' commands. It could be said that their resistance was not really radical, as it did not actually overturn the existing power structures and did not effect change. In other words, they demonstrated short-term resistance in the face of the current crisis, rather than resistance that would change the whole church in South Africa.

I believe it is important to distinguish between the different forms of resistance in society. More advanced forms of resistance usually bring about change because they question – and sometimes even overturn – the whole power structure. In the Roman Catholic Church, even though the first priests resisted and contested the foreign world view imposed on them, in reality they did not bring about any long-term change. I suggest, in fact, that to some extent these four priests used survivalist tactics to cope with the crisis in the Catholic Church as Catholic priests.

## WORKS CONSULTED

### Oral interviews

	<i>Interview</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Place</i>
1	Ms Malukati Mncadi	1994	Mariathal Ixopo
2	Bishop Mansuet Biyase+	22 April 1997	Bishop's house Eshowe
3	Fr Natalis Mjoli	22 October 1997	Ngwelezane, Empangani
4	Bishop Dominic Khumalo+	24 November 1997	Pietermaritzburg
5	Fr Cosmas Mzizi	16 January 2006	Stellenbosch, Cape Town
6	Mr Reginald Myeza	15 February 2007	Johannesburg

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## ENDNOTES



- 1 This article is part of a doctoral thesis that was submitted to the University of KwaZulu–Natal, Faculty of Humanities in 2001, entitled “The establishment of the black Catholic clergy in South Africa from 1887 to 1957”.
- 2 See Ogbu U Kalu, “Church presence in Africa: A historical analysis of the evangelisation process” and Appiah-Kubi & Torres (eds.) *African theology en route* (New York: Orbis, 1983), 14ff.
- 3 Ogbu Kalu (ed.) *African Christianity: An African story* (Pretoria: Department of Church History: University of Pretoria, 2005), 15.
- 4 See Paul Thompson, *The voice of the past: Oral history* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
- 5 Philippe Denis “Oral history in a wounded country” in *Orality, literacy and colonialism in Southern Africa*, edited by Jonathan A Draper (Atlanta/Pietermaritzburg: Society of Biblical Literature/Cluster Publications, 2003), 205-16. Available: <http://www.sorat.ukzn.ac.za/sinomlando/>. Accessed: 14/02/2007.
- 6 Ibid, 205-16.
- 7 John Tosh, *The pursuit of history: Aims, methods, and new directions in the study of modern history* (London: Longman, 1991), 206.
- 8 Jan Vansina, the Belgian anthropologist, called these stories “oral traditions” to distinguish them from “oral history”. In *Oral tradition as history* (1985), he argued about their validity as historical sources.
- 9 Thompson, *The voice of the past: Oral history*, 22.
- 10 Jan Vansina, *Oral tradition as history* (London: James Currey, 1985), 3.
- 11 Philippe Denis “Oral history in a wounded country”, 205-16.
- 12 Vansina, 3.
- 13 Thompson, *The voice of the past: Oral history*, 108.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 See Ogbu Kalu (ed.) *African Christianity: An African story* (Pretoria: Department of Church History: University of Pretoria, 2005), 3-15.
- 16 See Scott, J, *Domination and the arts of resistance: Hidden transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 14ff.
- 17 Sieber, G, *Benedictines at Inkamana*, St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1995 and Sieber, G, *Der Aufbau katholischen Kirche im Zululand*, Münsterschwarzach, Vier Türme Verlag, 1976.
- 18 Monastery Chronicle 1882-1895, 50. Archives of Mariannhill Monastery. See also Respondek, “Erziehung von Eingeborenen zum Priestertum”, 48 and [Hermann], A, *History of the congregation of the missionary of Mariannhill in the province of Mariannhill, South Africa*, 19.
- 19 *Vergismichnicht*, 1899, 11. Archives of Mariannhill Monastery where the writer speaks of the first Zulu priest to be ordained and describes the astonishment and joy of especially the girls at a mission school in Pinetown, when the prior of Mariannhill arrived with the priest. Müller had been a pupil at a Mariannhill mission school since 1884 and was sent to Rome in 1887 by the then Prior Franz Pfanner. *Izindaba Zabantu*, (7 September, 1928). Respondek, “Erziehung von Eingeborenen zum Priestertum”, 48.
- 20 Malukati Mncadi, interview conducted in Mariathal, Ixopo, September 1994.
- 21 Monastery Chronicle, 1882-1895, 50. Archives of Mariannhill Monastery.
- 22 Chronicle Monastery, 1896-1911, 111. Archives of Mariannhill Monastery. See [Hermann], A, *History of the congregation of the missionary of Mariannhill in the province of Mariannhill, South Africa*, 19; Brain, *Catholics in Natal II, 1886-1925*, 252 and Respondek, “Erziehung von Eingeborenen zum Priestertum in der Mariannhill Mission” in *Zeitschrift für Missionwissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft*, 34, 1950, 47-49.
- 23 Brain, *Catholics in Natal II, 1886-1925*, 120 (italics mine). See also *Vergismeinnicht*, 1899, 11. Archives of Mariannhill Monastery. *Izindaba Zabantu*, 7 September 1928, where it says that after his arrival he was speaking Latin, English, Italian, German and Greek like his mother tongue. In 1928 he was contributing two articles to the newspapers “*Umlando we Bandla*” and “*Nohambo lwabangcwele*”.
- 24 “Der erste Zulu Priester” in *Vergissmeinnicht*, 1887, 11 and “Der erste Priester aus dem Stamme der Zulus” no. 63, 1945, 235-238. Archives of Mariannhill Monastery. See also Fr Cosmas Mzizi interview conducted in Stellenbosch, 16 January 2006 and Mr Reginald Myeza interview conducted in Johannesburg, 15 February 2007.

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- 25 Ibid, 237.
- 26 It is interesting to note that Bryant was a Zulu ethnographer. He was well known academically and he popularised the term “Nguni” to refer to Zulu speaking and Xhosa speaking people after he published his book. This has great impact on the story in the sense that Bryant was supposed to know Zulus better than the Zulus knew themselves. Yet when he encountered Mnganga (a Zulu) he could not handle the situation.
- 27 *Um-Afrika*, (3 November, 1933), 3.
- 28 *Catholic Directory*, 1921-25.
- 29 See Otto Heberling, “Mariannhill: Neueste Missionsnachrichten” in *Vergissmeinnicht*, 1934, 37. Archives of Mariannhill Monastery. See also *Um-Afrika*, (3 November, 1933), 3.
- 30 *Um-Afrika*, (10 November, 1933), 1.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Ibid, 8.
- 33 Ibid, 9.
- 34 The autobiography ends with their arrival in South Africa. The other information on where they worked and what transpired is from oral interviews and archival material. See also “Ein freudiges Ereignis” in *Vergissmeinnicht*, 1907, 194. Archives of Mariannhill Monastery.
- 35 A handwritten biography of Andrew Ngidi. Archives of Inkamana Monastery, Vryheid: Andreas Ngidi, File 1.
- 36 *Um-Afrika* (18 August 1951).
- 37 “Ein freudiges Ereignis” in *Vergissmeinnicht*, 1907, 194. Archives of Mariannhill Monastery.
- 38 Aldabero Fleischer letter to Fr Julius Mbhele, Mariannhill, 28/9/1924. Archives of the Archbishop, Durban: File on the first black clergy.
- 39 See articles entitled “*Kuka’ Kam nenzalo yake’ Um Afrika* (17 & 24 April 1925).
- 40 Aloysius Mncadi, A letter to the bishop, Mariatrost, Via Highflats, 13/3/1930. Archives of the Archbishop of Durban: File on the first black Clergy.
- 41 “Der erste Priester aus dem Stamme der Zulus” in *Vergissmeinnicht*, no. 63, 1945, 237. Archives of Mariannhill Mission.
- 42 Ibid., 235-238.
- 43 Bishop Mansuet Biyase interview conducted in Eshowe, 22 April 1997.