

HISTORY OF MISSIONS IN THE EASTERN CAPE

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1 THE ERA OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MISSIONS AND CHURCHES

- 1.1 The London Missionary Society and the Glasgow Missionary Society commenced working in SA during 1799. Dr J van der Kemp was their first missionary in this area. On his arrival he stayed at the kraal of Chief Ngqika. He worked there for 15 months before moving on.
- 1.2 The Methodist Church started to work on arrival of the Rev William Shaw with the British Settlers in 1820. Their missionary outreaches were established round about 1823 with their first mission station, Wesleyville and the vision to build a chain of mission stations right to the northern border of Transkei. They sent a number of remarkable missionaries to this part of the country. There were many more but I will only mention two of them whose work I came across whilst working in Transkei.
- 1.2.1 **Rev Edmunds**, as a missionary, established a printing press at Palmerton, near Lusikisiki. He published good quality Christian Literature as a most effective tool in the outreach of the church. Maintenance of this type of equipment caused many a headache. I was told that often he knelt next to the printing machine and prayed until it functioned again.
- 1.2.2 **Rev Peter Hargreaves** arrived at Mfundisweni on 11th July 1882 as the newly appointed pastor assigned to the Pondo Mission. Mfundisweni is situated near Flagstaff in Eastern Pondoland. He established schools, training schools for teachers and vocational schools etc. In those days, whatever you may have wanted to do, you could only do with the approval of the chiefs. Although he frequently had to enter into the most sensitive negotiations with them, he eventually gained their confidence and support. His contribution to missions in that part of Transkei was quite significant. (*The story of the two lady-missionaries.*) In 1980 26% of the converts in Transkei were Methodist.
- 1.3 The Anglican missionaries arrived in 1795 with the annexation of the Cape. During 1823 they built the cathedral in Grahamstown. In 1836 they were in Port Elizabeth. In 1855 they built their first mission at St Marks near Queenstown. In 1980 12% of the converts in Transkei were Anglican
- Dr Frank Drew** - Obtained his MA in theology in 1912 and in 1918 he completed his medical studies. *"There is a chief in Pondoland, South Africa, that wants a medical mission to be founded. Are you prepared to go?" "Yes, I'll go but what about the money?"* The church was not in a position to support him with any other money than to pay for his voyage. He approached his local church for financial support but they maintained that their budget did not provide for any mission ventures. The church wardens however were not happy with this "cold" attitude towards a worthwhile challenge like this. As the people were filing out of the church that morning, there they were, standing at the doors to collect donations. This unconventional effort was blessed with £100 in donations. With that Frank Drew set out to South Africa to build a mission hospital in Pondoland.
- Early in January 1920 he embarked on a cattle and cargo ship bound for Durban. Later on, his wife Ursula and their daughter joined him. At Holy Cross mission he built a 400 bed hospital.
- He became a "blood-brother" to the then paramount chief Faku of Eastern Pondoland.
- He was one of the most dedicated missionaries I have ever known. His invaluable contribution to the building the Church of our Lord in Transkei, was the result of his close and intimate relationship with his Lord and Saviour and his dedication to the needs of the Pondo people.
- When he retired he was invited back by his church to his home country. As a reward his home church afforded him with an extended holiday and was prepared to avail him of a retirement facility at the place of his choice. Frank Drew returned to Transkei where he worked for another 20 years as a devoted medical missionary.
- For me, it was a life enriching experience to have worked with him for a couple of years. I will always remember those days with gratitude towards the Lord. At the age of 85 the Lord called him home. I attended his funeral at Holy Cross where he was buried next to the church building. His wish was to have only a rock as a tombstone with the inscription *"For God and the Pondos!"* This was the closing chapter in the life of a gift of God to the Pondo people.
- 1.4 The Roman Catholic Church built a number of missions since 1882 and 8% of the converts belonged to the RCC in 1980
- 1.5 In 1836 the Berlin Missionary Society was established in the vicinity of King William's Town.
- 1.6 As from 1852 the Dutch Reformed Church established a number of congregations in the border area. Although it was decided in 1824 to start mission work in Transkei, it was not before 1829 that they sent out their first missionaries to Umzimkulu and later Isilimela near Port St Johns.

- 1.7 The German Baptist Association in SA was established in 1867 but and amalgamated with the Baptist Union of SA. The SA Baptist Missionary Society was founded in 1892 when they took over the work of the German Baptist near King William's Town.
- 1.8 Many churches and missionary movements were founded in this area since 1828 - The Moravian mission and the Berlin Mission (1883) Since 1900 churches like the Free Methodist of North America, Pilgrim Holiness Mission, Apostolic Faith Mission, Full Gospel, Assemblies and many other followed.
- 1.9 Port Elizabeth, Uitenhage, KWT, EL, Butterworth, Umtata and Queenstown became strongholds for the churches and missionary societies.

2 XHOSA PROPHETS

There were a number of Xhosa prophets. One of them by the name of Ntsikana was born near Peddie in 1750 as the son of Gaba, an adviser to Chief Ngqika. He spent most of his life at Thwathwa near Hertzog.

He heard the gospel at Gaikas Great Place from 1799 - 1800 from Dr J van der Kemp, a missionary of the London Missionary Society and from James Read and Joseph William. That was his first experience with the gospel. He maintained however that he was converted to the Christian Faith when he received a vision in 1815 at an "entonjane" dance, which was part of the initiation ceremony of Xhosa girls. That night on his way home he was overtaken by a very strong desire to be cleansed. He washed himself in the river to remove the red clay and everything reminding him of his heathen past. As soon as he had done that he cried, "Le nto indingeneyo, ithi makuthandazwe, makuguquke yonke into". ("This thing that entered my heart is saying, let there be prayer, let all things be converted.")

He taught his people to submit to God and obey Him - the only way to have peace. He taught them to pray and break with any form of sin. He planted his own church at Thwathwa. He made certain statements about the contact between the Xhosa and white people. Therefore he was referred to as a prophet and a saint. He was regarded a forerunner who received his insight independently of the missionaries. He is still well known amongst the Xhosa people.

3 THE ERA OF REVIVALS

The Church establishment era was followed by the most exciting revivals that took place in the Eastern Cape.

Prayer movements by pastors, missionaries, small groups, churches and many unknown was the driving force behind all the revivals that took place in the EC.

Rev Andrew Murray, father of Dr Andrew Murray in Graaff-Reinet, was one such a prayer giant - praying for revival in the EC for many years. Every Friday night he locked the door of his study and prayed for hours. Many a night his two sons, John and Andrew stood outside listening to their father's prayers.

Rev William Shaw worked in Grahamstown since 1822. An awakening came during that year, again in 1831 and in 1837. Every night the new Methodist Commemoration Chapel was filled to capacity (about 1400 people). Port Alfred, Healdtown, Fish River and almost all the surrounding areas were affected. The Methodist Church doubled its membership within one year. These awakenings spread to the Transkei. A Methodist missionary wrote, "*Here in Butterworth the cries of the people under distress of soul become so general, that the people cannot hear my voice or the voices of those who pray for them; their cry is for God to have mercy on them; when we are compelled to break up the meeting, many go away from the chapel sobbing.*" Thousands of Xhosa people turned to the Lord. Churches were overcrowded all over.

In 1858 revival was brought to SA by the Rev William Taylor. He was born in Virginia in 1821, converted at the age of 20 and became an evangelist. He preached in Cape Town and made his way on horseback to Port Elizabeth where many people were converted. He went from here to King William's Town where thousands of Xhosa people attended his meetings. His interpreter Charles Pamla sometimes became so excited about what Taylor was saying that he sang the interpretation so that it sounded like a beautiful hymn. At the end of every meeting - up to 300 people of all race groups came forward for prayer. Taylor guided five prayer meetings and preached six times during the day. He went all over the EC, bringing with him such a presence of God that the whole EC was aflame. The Xhosa people called him "the blazing firebrand." 2000 Xhosa people and 600 English and Afrikaans people were saved.

In Queenstown 2763 and in Grahamstown 2360 whites were saved after Taylor's visit. A pastor in Murraysburg said, "I think in the Little Karoo not more than 50 people could be left unsaved." When this was reported in the Synod of the DRC in CT in 1862, the entire synod stood up to give thanks and praise to God for His goodness. The 1862 revival was followed by another in 1868, 1870 and 1884.

In 1905 there were revivals in Graaff-Reinet, Somerset-East and Aberdeen. The same year more than a

hundred British soldiers from the Anglo Boer war - soldiers who fought here, returned to SA as missionaries and 205 boer soldiers from the war went into Africa as missionaries.

Charles Pamla, the interpreter of Rev Taylor in 1860 commenced preaching again. Within a couple of years it was said, the Lord used him to bring more than 25.000 people to Him -right up to Umtata.

4 XHOSA MISSIONARIES TO ANGONI LAND (MALAWI)

In 1875 revivals started amongst the students of Lovedale. 250 of 600 students were converted. In 1876 the Lovedale students were challenged to go as missionaries to Malawi. Fourteen volunteered but only four were accepted to go. They were Mapas Ntintili, (Returned) Shadrak Ngunana, William Koyi (Their graves are with the people they loved so much) and Isaac Wauchope (Returned due to ill health)

After his funeral it was said about William Koyi: *“So died William Koyi, having been a humble and faithful follower of the Saviour, a trophy from heathenism, and the pioneer of the Gospel in Ngoniland. It was meet that, his work done, his dust should rest where he had fought the battle becoming the title deed to “Ngoniland for Christ.”* Their dedication to the Lord who called them and to the people of “Ngoniland” (Today Malawi) were confirmed by their graves in that country - amongst the people they loved so much. To date their descendants are still there.

At all these revivals the churches were united irrespective of religious convictions, nationality, race or social standing.

The trademark of revival was the unity of the churches and the power of united prayer. No unity - no revival! Revival brings us back to basics. (John 17)

Bless the nations stand for **PRAYER, REVIVAL AND WORLD MISSIONS** in that sequence. This is, I believe the perfect recipe to accept the challenge of Matt 28: **“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations.”** This is the key to the missionary problem!

*“All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. **And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”** (Acts 2: 44 - 47)*

I have attempted to give you a run down of the establishment of the church in the Eastern Cape. There was a series of successive revivals over a period of about a hundred years. It happened again from time to time in different places but never again to such an extent.

What I have told you from the past - we call history. What happened in Acts 2: 44 - 47 - we call that “happenings from Bible times,” conveniently history and Bible times because then it does not challenge us. Then I am off the hook!

Why did it stop? We have to find answers to this heart searching question!

What was the reason for revivals in those days?

Prayer and unity - no prayer - no revival - no unity - no revival!

This was done by dedicated people who were,

- experiencing a deep sense of Gods presence
- prepared to submit themselves to God
- to confess their sins
- obedient to God
- united in prayer
- united with fellow Christians irrespective of convictions, nationality or race

The result was the series of the revivals in the Eastern Cape.

In Uganda, many years ago, the people were praying for revival - but revival did not come – Why not? They then sent out a questionnaire to the churches with heart searching questions. The result was that teachers, evangelists, church workers, elders, deacons, missionaries and pastors confessed their sins and revival was in the air. Revival came when the Church leaders confessed their sins.

Why can it not happen again? I am part of it - we are all part of the present time - let us bring history back to the present - Bible times back into our time. Why not?

Revival never starts with someone else. Revival starts with me!

The moment we are prepared to search our own hearts - to confess our sins as in Uganda - then we will bring the history back to the present and Bible times will become our time. Then all of us will be united in

one church - the church of the Lord - revival will be with us - ***And the Lord will add to our number daily those who are saved.***"