

The first ten years (1923-1933) of the Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa

From mission to church, from church to mission?

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Abstract

The formation of the autonomous Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa (BPCSA) in 1923, as the culmination of the Scottish Presbyterian missionary enterprise, provided a unifying centre for the formation of other black denominations in South Africa by being the first of its kind. Other European sourced churches dealt with integration differently. Still, BPCSA was much criticised for being the result of a racist policy; yet had it not been for racism prevalent in South Africa at the time, its formation might have been unnecessary as part of the missionary outreach of the United Free Church of Scotland (UFCoS). For better or worse it was established and there was no going back. However, its mission through participation in God's mission of reconciliation was hindered by attempts to control it externally by the Scottish church and internally by missionaries and their Mission Council (MC). The first ten years of its history testify to this. Its subsequent history bears witness to the attempt to make it an authentic African missionary church open to the ecumenical scene and is a significant step in the mission history of South Africa and the African continent. The mission became a church but was it fit for purpose for further mission? The article will engage with the missiological concepts of dependency and independency to ascertain whether or not the integrity of the mission was maintained and promoted.

Keywords: Bantu Presbyterian Church (BPC), General Assembly, finance, missionaries, Presbyterian Church of South Africa (PCSA), theological education, United Free Church of Scotland (UFCoS)

1. Introduction

While it is not the task of the mission historian to read back into the past, Verkuyl (1978:174) had made a significant comment that has missio-historical value in terms of dependency/independency within the Reformed tradition, that it should "pay close heed to the cry of the various churches around the world for a greater opportunity to be themselves". This relates directly to the issue of dependency/independency in mission and was not a novel issue at the time of the formation of the Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa (BPCSA). It had been an emerging

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theme at the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910. Stanley (2009:91) described it in the title of chapter five of his work on Edinburgh 1910 'Give us friends!': The voice of the younger Churches'. This call emanated from Bishop Vedanayagam Samuel Azariah (an Asian delegate) and called for parity in relationships for friendships cannot exist or develop where there are unequal stances wherever the mission occurs. In broader perspective, the evaluation of Ott et al., (2010:219) reflect Bishop Azariah's plea that "Churches must relate to one another as equal partners in God's mission".

Historians have increasingly emphasised that Africans were not passive victims of colonisation, oppression and segregation, but were involved in a wide range of inventive political responses and innovative forms of action (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991; 1997):

... At the same time, the limits of nationalist and working-class organisation have been recognised. Africans could not mount any coordinated political action which might challenge the state. In many senses, the rural areas rather than the cities were the primary focus of political conflict in the 1920s... the incomplete transformation of African societies, together with the thrust of state policy, opened areas of compromise in the reserves where opportunities for African advance sometimes seemed more tangible. Some popular movements were actually separatist in character. The accommodation reached ultimately helped to defuse conflict in the inter-war years at the height of segregation (Beinart, 1994:108).

Yet this was not only a socio-economic-political matter, for it was also predominantly true in the rural areas that:

... the conversion of the heathen must be followed by the institution of a Church for the converts. Congregations must become self-supporting. Aspirations towards full independence would inevitably follow and the "mother" Church must not try to frustrate them. Nor must it decolonise the converts or destroy their indigenous culture. Therefore, an independent and separate Church was the obvious answer (Hinchliffe, 1966:201).

However, this was not just a matter of converted indigenous people becoming self-supporting but also self-propagating and self-governing (Venn & Anderson in Bosch, 1991:331; Reese, 2010:160). More recently, the call has been for indigenous churches to also be self-theologising (Hiebert, 1985:196) as an integral part of their missionary outreach. However, this was present from the earliest times as Africans sought, not just to reject mission Christianity, but also to forge a distinctly

new form of African Christianity. It was in these complex political and ecclesiastical contexts, by 1923, that the time had arrived for black Presbyterian Christians to become and be a church denomination fit for purpose to continue God's mission in South Africa. At the inauguration of BPC, the Moderator of the first General Assembly (GA), Rev. William Stuart, commented:

Little wonder if the taking of this step had occasioned doubts, fears and anxieties in the minds of some of our people... It has been well for ourselves and for these communities that the taking of this step has been matter of long continued earnest deliberation, much consultation and many earnest prayers (Moderatorial Address BPCSA GA, 1923:35).

Discussions, arguments, secessions and plans preceded this step. It had been a long, arduous and complex journey but one which eventually bore fruit. It was now up to the church to prove its worth by making its mark both in the ecclesiastical and wider context of South Africa.

Yet, this happened despite Elphick's (2012:81) view:

By the 1920s, after Protestants had been conducting intensive missions in parts of South Africa for more than a century, the fulfilment of the implication of their gospel – that the equality of believers before God entailed equality of black and white in church and society – had been, it seemed, indefinitely postponed.

Further:

The local missionaries fretted that Africans were unable to administer organisations, manage money, rebuke sin, or maintain high standards of doctrine and morality. Yet, many hoped that the ordained African ministers would be allies in the battle against laxness and vice, and prove to the world that missions had been a success (Elphick, 2012:86).

Whatever their personal reservations about Africans' abilities, no missionaries publicly advocated perpetual European domination of the African church. In theory, the principles of Christian universalism and the indigenous church dovetailed neatly, since the proclamation of a single gospel throughout the world would give rise to churches equal in stature though implanted in different cultures. In South Africa, however, where white Christians had founded well-endowed and cohesive churches, the two principles were in tension. Universalism in South Africa meant close fellowship and effective equality between white and black Christians, while the doctrine of indigenous churches implied that Africans, with their distinctive cultures, would go their own way, as whites would go theirs (Elphick, 2012:94-95).

Therefore, BPCSA was birthed in the midst of racial tension, but also in the context of dependency and the argument for independence, two themes at the core of the Missionary Movement. This was unfortunate as John Mott, the great missionary statesman of the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910, had made two points abundantly clear when relating the great achievements of the 19th century:

The missionary no longer stood alone; and an increasing army of nationals stood ready to assist him.

The younger Churches were beginning to produce leaders at least the equals of the missionary in intellectual gifts and spiritual nature (Neill, 1964:395).

It seems that the South African missionaries either had not known of this, though they were represented at Edinburgh in 1910, or that they had not internalised the rapidly changing situation where indigenous Christians were shaking off the shackles of dependence.

2. Dependence and Independence

Allen (1912:141-142) set the scene for our discussion in 1912:

... there are everywhere, three very disquieting symptoms: (1) Everywhere Christianity is still an exotic [plant] ... (2) Everywhere our missions are dependent ... (3) Everywhere we see the same types ... So far then was see our missions exotic, dependent, uniform, we begin to accuse ourselves of failure.

In every case it was a replica of the same old, same old model of the establishment and fostering of dependent Christian communities. Reese (2010:1) defines dependency as “the unhealthy reliance on foreign resources that accompanies the feeling that churches and institutions are unable to function without outside assistance”. This is what western missionary bodies imposed on young missions and churches which became long-term policy. This restricted the possibility of them becoming truly indigenised churches. This was fostered through the deployment of finance and personnel in pursuit of the aims and objectives of educational, medical, agricultural, industrial and other forms of mission, in addition to spiritual/pastoral mission. This need not have been so. Evidently, poor African Christians were dependent on external support. However, this was used as a weapon to dominate and control them as missionaries built dynastic empires (in some cases, e.g. the Ross family in the Eastern Cape). Control and dependence were two sides of the same coin.

It is suggested that “dependency is an unintended part of the colonial legacy” (Reese, 1985:3); yet Reese (1985:2) suggests that “the problem of dependency in mission

churches remains a chronic one". It is difficult to attribute innocence as part of the motivation for this practice when it was contrary to the sending church policy. Whether this is true or not, it is true that this facilitated the colonial exercise of power and control of indigenous people and foreign 'resources'. Secular historian, Hobsbawm (1987:5) confirmed this in his claim that the age of empire, also known as the 'high imperial era' and the 'high missionary era' (1880-1920), evidenced a world separated into:

two sectors combined into one global system, the developed and the lagging, the dominant and the dependent, the rich and the poor... The (much larger) second world was united by nothing except its relations with, that is to say its potential or actual dependency, the first.

Independence, on the other hand, required that missionaries step back, where they remained in place, and allow local people to decide and execute policy with a minimum of interference. The lack of a facilitative, enabling and supportive approach exposed the deficiencies in the mission. The late decades of the 19th century and early decades of the 20th witnessed the development of Ethiopian type churches in response, *inter alia*, to the results of missionary domination. Some retained the doctrine, liturgy, liturgical dress and polity of their previous masters but they chose this for themselves; it was no longer imposed on them. They also developed indigenous forms of expression and took great risks of failure in terms of administration of finance and property due to lack of training and inexperience. Duncan (1997:72-103) has claimed that secessions stimulated the movement towards the formation of autonomous churches. However, secessions actually happened in accord with the Three-Self policy although this was itself an American/European concept. This is what happened in the case of the formation of BPCSA in 1923.

3. Prelude to Formation

The Free Church of Scotland (FCoS) mission began in the Eastern Cape in 1824 at Tyumie, near what was to become the famous Lovedale Missionary Institution. "It developed in a haphazard manner according to the whims of the respective missionaries, despite an overarching vision on the part of the Scottish Presbyterian Church whose mission policy in South Africa, from its inception, prefigured the formation of an independent church" (Duncan, 2016b:332). In the early years, white missionary dominated Mission Councils (MC) exercised control of these developments which spread throughout the Cape and Natal. The FCoS aimed to divest itself of long-term responsibility for its mission. A "minute of the Foreign Mission Committee (FMC) was agreed in 1866 that confirmed FCoS' support of the Three-Self principle" (Duncan, 2012:220).

A secession took place at Lovedale in 1898, under the leadership of Rev. Pam-bani J. Mzimba who had taken grave offence resulting from a number of issues including the control of money, missionary domination, disciplinary issues and poorer stipends than white missionaries (Duncan, 2013:52-79). This thrust towards independence had a negative effect on the mission but a positive effect on those black Christians who wanted to assert and maintain their independence of white control and develop a distinctive African Christianity (Duncan, 2016b:333; Switzer, 1993:185-190). Another positive effect was the stimulus the secession provided for the Scottish missionaries and their colleagues in Scotland to rethink their policy although FMC had made their view about the formation of an African church quite clear earlier.

Consideration had been given to a union which led to the formation of PCSA in 1897. It had been hoped that this union would encompass the South African Presbyterians who constituted PCSA and Scottish church missions. This option failed. The alternative option was that an indigenous black church be established. This approach succeeded and led directly to the formation of BPCSA.

4. The First General Assembly of the BPCSA

Following a period of negotiations which had involved the FMC of FCoS and PCSA, a convocation of Presbyterian missions gathered at Lovedale on the evening of 4th July 1923. Rev. P.L. Hunter took the Chair, while Rev. J. Lennox gave a brief historical survey of the events leading to the union, following which the uniting missions tabled reports. The Synod of Kaffraria resolved to convey to the new church all of its properties; the Presbytery of Kaffraria tabled the disjunction certificates of all in the Presbytery with the exception of Rev. J. Lundie of Malan, along with the disjunction certificates in favour of the Presbytery from PCSA. The Presbytery of Mankazana tabled its disjunction from PCSA and it was reported that the MC of Natal had not yet met but would report subsequently. The membership of the new denomination was in the region of 25,000 souls.

Rev. W. Stuart of Burnshill was then unanimously elected Moderator of the General Assembly. Sundkler's (1961:32) claim that Rev. Yekela Mbali was the Moderator of the first General Assembly of BPCSA is an error. Mbali became the first black Moderator in 1925 (BPCSA GA, 1925-1926:5). It is an anomaly that the first Moderator of the General Assembly should be a white missionary. This indicates a continued state of dependence on external support in the form of both finance and personnel. This was a missed opportunity to exert black authority and competence. It was almost fifty years since the first black ministers had been ordained and 67 years since Rev. Tiyo Soga had returned to South Africa, having been ordained in Scotland in 1856. Stuart formally constituted the gathering and gave his Moderato-

rial Address. He commented that the union of the UP and FC missions with the MC of Natal was “a forward step in the line of natural development” and a result of “earnest and prayerful deliberation, full and careful consideration of the many interests involved, and persons specially concerned”. The highest office was open to blacks “as it ought to be” (but not yet, the common call of a racist ideology), thus the new church retained the concepts of equality and parity. “The Church of Christ is for any and everyone..., irrespective of nationality, colour or tongue” (Rev. W. Stuart, Moderatorial Address at 1st General Assembly, BPCSA, General Assembly Minute 39), though van der Spuy (1971:45) believes that this remark would have been more appropriate in the context of a united church. Many would disagree with this assessment. Nonetheless, BPCSA “was placed in a paradoxical situation for while it claimed universality and colour-blindness, its very name, composition and future relationships proclaimed something different” (van der Spuy, 1971:45). This was a rather negative view for it was open to all as many missionaries and a few non-missionary church workers discovered. The policy was absolutely clear. This was an inclusive church open to all in contrast to those South African churches which had chosen to and defended their decision to be exclusive to one racial group. Often, it was the missionaries who proved the truth of the statement for having served their working years in BPCSA, many retired into the service of PCSA! Swiss missionaries have upon retirement, left the EPCSA/SMSA to join local white churches (Maluleke, 1995:19). This momentous step forward was a sign of independence. However, this view turned out to be quite mistaken as subsequent events would prove.

One matter which remained unclear was the relationship of the General Assembly to the MC of Kaffraria. This was another potential problem area and a joint commission was appointed to consider the matter.

Rev. J. Lennox was appointed Senior Clerk and Rev. M. Sililo of New Scotland, Natal, Junior Clerk. It should not be assumed that the appointment of a black clerk was a concession to a non-racist church. An alternative could have been to appoint a black minister as the Senior Clerk with Lennox as the Junior Clerk. Thereafter, a number of representatives of other churches brought greetings to the General Assembly along with a number of tribal chiefs “to congratulate the Presbyterian Missions on the step they had taken and to stimulate the newly formed Church to greater and nobler efforts for the spiritual uplift of the African races” (Sikutshwa, 1946:12). The FCoS FMC conveyed the Extract Minute recording its satisfaction with the completion of negotiations for union. In loyal addresses to the King and the Prime Minister, there are references to the current situation in the country, “unrest and bitterness so widely manifest in the social and political life of the world” and to moves being made “to improve the relations between the different races in the land” that demonstrate the context in which the birth of BPCSA has occurred,

and the “church’s social and political concern” (BPCSA GA, 1923; Minute 26:46). There was an assumption of acquiescence in the post-1910 political dispensation where South Africa remained part of the British Empire.

5. The Constitution of the BPCSA

The constitution adopted by BPCSA was basically that of UFCoS (BPCSA, 1925:51-70) and unashamedly Presbyterian (BPCSA, 1925:51). Its distinctive features included:

4. Congregations are not independent of each other but are integral portions of one and the same Church having a common doctrine and being subject to a common government.
6. The constitution of the Church, being entirely spiritual, appeal from the decision of any of the courts to the Civil Tribunals is regarded as an offence against the laws of the Church.
11. This Church has the inherent right, under the safeguards for deliberate action and legislation which itself has provided to frame and adopt its Subordinate Standards, to revise and alter the same, whenever in its opinion the necessity for so doing arises, to interpret its Statement of Doctrine, to modify or change its Constitution, but always in agreement with the Word of God and with due regard to liberty of opinion which do not enter into the substance of the faith (BPCSA, 1925:51-52).

There was no concession to the African context with regard to polity and procedure. This was in effect, a Scottish church in South Africa. Yet, the separation of the spiritual and temporal was a dissonant factor in an African church.

6. The Name of the Church

In dealing with the name of the new church, Sikutshwa is extremely circumspect. Prior to the formation of the Church, the agreed name was ‘The United Presbyterian Church of South Africa’. Sikutshwa does not even mention this. He refers to churches being named after their founders, i.e. the retention of the designation ‘Presbyterian’ or ‘*Rabe*’ (after the name of the raRabe ethnic group in the Eastern Cape amongst whom the first Presbyterian missionary activity took place). However, he suggests that the name of the church has to be seen in the light of attempts at a solution of the ‘Native Problem’ and avoidance of ‘political tactics’ (Sikutshwa, 1946:13). Perhaps he comes nearest to the truth when he declared the importance of avoiding a name which is too similar to that of another church, i.e. PCSA. Here, there was a possibility of confusion. In fact, PCSA objected to the proposed name of ‘United’ Church. Its General Assembly had “agreed to facilitate a Native Church in

federal relationship with the Presbyterian Church of South Africa and that the name of the proposed new body failed to make this clear and would further lead to confusion in the public mind” (PCSA Blue Book, 18th September 1922:34; Ac 1971/Ahl.3.; William Cullen Library, Wits). ‘Public mind’, of course, would have meant white mind! It is of concern that PCSA had such an influence on the naming of a new black denomination and this further suggested an element of dependency (need for approval) on the one hand, and the exercise of power on the other.

The final choice of name was ‘The Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa’, proposed by the Commission on Union and adopted by a large majority with over six votes cast for ‘The United Presbyterian Church of South Africa’. Thus, it was clearly designated a black church – a good thing to make it clear that it was African, but a bad thing because of the racial connotation. The General Assembly agreed to:

... instruct Clerks to inform the Government of the Union of South Africa of the step now taken in constituting this Church, so that the Church now formed may be officially registered under the new name (BPCSA GA, 1923:25).

This would avoid complications which many of the South African Initiated Churches (AICs) had encountered. Assembly further decided to raise the status of mission stations ‘under Native Missionaries’ as soon as they demonstrated that they were self-sufficient (BPCSA GA, 1923:31).

7. The Role of Missionaries

The place and function of Missionaries had to be resolved speedily since, at the time of union, there were still many serving in South Africa and keen to continue doing so. It was agreed that the following should have seats in the higher courts of the Church:

- Ordained ministers in pastoral charges;
- Ordained Missionaries appointed by the General Assembly ‘with the view of giving all necessary advice and assistance, but they shall leave the conduct of business as far as practicable to the Native members (Plan of Union of the UFCoS; Minute 41,2(a) of General Assembly, BPCSA, 1923 in Sikutshwa 1946:14);
- Theological tutors, who at this time would all be missionaries;
- Representative elders from each congregation or mission.

It was further agreed that ‘ordained Native assistants’ be given seats in the courts of the BPCSA (GA, 1923:23).

This area was problematic as no checks and balances were built in to limit the missionaries’ exercise of power. It was going to be as difficult for them to accept a reduced role as it would be for black ministers to assert themselves. This was

especially true when there had to be a debate about the status of Native assistants in courts of the Church before it was resolved to admit them to higher than associate status (Duncan, 1997:153). However, the intention was for black Christians to take control of their own affairs and decision making. The problem was that this was difficult for the foreign missionaries who were so used to making decisions for local Christians, with or without consultation. The concept of partnership in mission was not yet at a stage of development that it could be integrated into the life and witness of the missionaries and black ministers. This began in earnest as Church of Scotland policy in 1947 (Duncan, 2008:109; Lyon, 1998:5) although what emerged was continued domination through control of personnel and finance. There was little or no control on the missionaries' use of finance or the deployment of personnel while the all white MCs remained in place. Consultation was still a concept to be developed in the future of missionary outreach.

It should be noted that there was a difference between missionaries as foreign appointments, while the term also designated black ministers who were without a call and appointed to congregations (BPCSA, 1925:35).

8. Theological Education

Related to the above, theological education had become a contested field following the secessions of the late 19th and early 20th century. Stanley (1990:134) has asserted that "educated indigenous leadership was a prerequisite of progress towards autonomy". This is cogently supported by Verkuyl (1978:317):

I cannot emphasize too strongly that the first and best place to look for personnel is among the local people themselves. Western missionary history and the history of the young churches prove time and again that, humanly speaking, whether a church will expand or decline is so vitally linked to the training and equipping of Native leadership.

As the need for an indigenous ministry expanded, so did the need for improved training facilities. Theological education had begun in earnest at Lovedale Missionary Institution in 1870 and remained so into the 1920s. The opening of the South African Native College, Fort Hare, in 1916, stimulated the drive for an educated black ministry, and the building of Iona house, partly funded by the Women's Association provided further impetus to the establishment of divinity at Fort Hare in the 1930s (Denis & Duncan, 2011:28). However, the curricula were replicas of those used in Scottish faculties and colleges. This had led to the unfortunate dispute between William Govan and James Stewart, Principals of Lovedale Missionary Institution, regarding the value of continuing the teaching of Latin and Greek (Shepherd, 1971:27-31). Although

Stewart won the dispute and the languages were displaced, there were no further substantial changes in the curriculum. This encouraged the continuation of dependency as no account was taken of contextual African factors. It also forced candidates for the ministry to adopt an Enlightenment paradigm which denied any possibility of the successful and faithful inculturation of the gospel by enforcing a European worldview in opposition to the enforced demise of their African worldview. This was subsequently imposed on their congregations and converts, and resulted in the development of a false distinction between religion and culture. Little or no effort was made to investigate the role of the culture in the location of missionary outreach. It was simply dismissed to be replaced by mission Christianity imported from Europe.

9. The Pastoral Care of the Church

In the first instance, seven presbyteries were formed to care and supervise the work of the Church, namely; Kaffraria, Mankazana, Transkei, Griqualand East, Umtata, Natal and Zoutspansberg. It had been planned to unite the Presbyteries of Kaffraria and Mankazana, but this was considered premature at the time, though they later united.

The business of the Church was dealt with by seventeen Committees: Life and Work, Finance, Board of Trustees, Welfare of Youth, Education, Training of Theological Students, Evangelists, Temperance, Statistics, Publications, Church Extension, Creed and Formulae, Presbyterian Hostel Fund, Preparation of Loyal Addresses, Relations with the MC of Kaffraria, Representatives to the General Assembly of PCSA and Committee for Work amongst Lepers at Emjanyana (BPCSA GA, 1923:22). However, there was no committee on missions. The mission of the denomination would be advanced by the Life and Work, Trustees, Welfare of Youth, Education, Training of Theological Students, Evangelists, Temperance, Publications, Church Extension, Presbyterian Hostel Fund, Relations with the MC of Kaffraria, Representatives to the General Assembly of the PCSA and Committee for Work amongst Lepers at Emjanyana committees. A further important means of extending the mission would be through the church associations, the Women's Christian Association, the Girls' Association and the Young Men's Christian Guild. The church associations were the nearest BPCSA came to indigenising the denomination. It was here that we note the first and virtually the only attempt to Africanise the liturgy.

This demonstrates a high level of organisation and extensive interests both in church and community. The new Church adopted the 'Practice and Procedure' of the UFCoS (1927) until it drew up its own *Manual of the Bantu Presbyterian Church* in 1958, and when it did so, the *Manual* closely resembled the FCoS Law. It appeared as if anything distinctly African would be inferior to its European counterpart.

The pastoral care of the church was closely linked to finance. With regard to pastoral charges, it was felt that mission stations should be upgraded to full sta-

tus as pastoral charges when they “reached a stage of maturity to manage satisfactorily their financial responsibilities” (BPCSA GA, 1923; Minute 53:31). Black ministers were to be paid by their congregations. The question arose concerning non-payment due to financial stringency. If this occurred, supplements would be paid from Assembly funds. This posed a potential problem because the stipends of missionaries were secured, and poorer congregations were put in the position of becoming paupers. In contrast, black ministers were always vulnerable financially and dependent on the good graces of their missionary mentors who controlled the Assembly finances. This was an indirect means of control over the black ministry and an example of the maintenance of dependency through financial control.

The matter of shortage of ordained ministry impacted significantly on the pastoral care of the denomination through the administration of the sacraments in a scattered context. It was decided to restrict celebration of Baptism and Holy Communion to “those who are clerically ordained” (BPCSA GA, 1925-1926:21).

Pastoral affairs even extended into the field of politics when Rev. T.B. Soga issued a letter condemning the Pass Laws in 1925 and the BPC took up the matter to little effect. Another pastoral matter which exercised many assemblies was that of temperance (BPCSA GA, 1927:14, BPCSA, 1928:16-17).

10. Liturgy

A remarkable event took place in 1929 with the publication of *Amaculo ase Rabe*, the Xhosa hymn book which has stood the test of time and is still used by most of the Xhosa speaking churches today. “This was a joint project of the BPC, the Congregational Church, the FCoS Missions and some other religious bodies” (BPCSA, 1929:ix). It has to be remembered that the worship style inherited from Scotland and promoted in South Africa was formal in the extreme. As part of the Reformed tradition, the United Free Church was firmly based in Scripture as the Word of God. Formality reached its zenith in the celebration of the sacrament of Holy Communion. It is noteworthy, that even up until the union of the Bantu/ Reformed Presbyterian Church with PCSA in 1999, in many congregations, men were not ordained to the eldership unless they could afford to purchase a frock coat to wear at communion. This is the situation today in rural areas of the Transkei as at Somerville congregation at Tsolo in Umthatha Presbytery. This also applies to women elders although there were none during the period under consideration. Consequently, worship was cerebral and intellectual with little space given to the affective domain. The expression of emotion was strictly circumscribed. This was a matter of control and exercise of power. The unrestrained freedom of the spirit in worship was evident only in the church associations, which for the most part the missionaries eschewed, particularly in their liturgy with the emphasis on *imvuselelo* (revival). This would

also gradually become part of the Sunday morning liturgy, except during the celebration of Holy Communion. This freedom extended to the associations of BPCSA.

11. Women's Association

A further important means of extending the mission would be through the church associations. Although the women's organisations had been operating prior to 1923 (Nzo, 2017:77), they also united at the first General Assembly (BPCSA GA, 1923:23-24). It became the custom for a delegation of the Women's Christian Association to be received at each General Assembly where they would report on their work and make donations for the work of the denomination. In 1924, they presented their Constitution and it was decided that the Business Committee should report at the next Assembly "on relations between the Conference of the Women's Association and the Assembly regarding issues wherein through co-operation between the two bodies can be furthered" (BPCSA GA, 1925:32). Their constitution stated that they would meet annually along with the General Assembly (BPCSA, 1925:71). This was the beginning of what would, in time, become a symbiotic relationship.

Along with the women's Christian Association, the Girls' Association and the Young Men's Christian Guild also performed a missionary function in the church through their intensive evangelical outreach, particularly in the field of worship with the adoption of the *umvuselelo* (revival) and *umjikelo* (fund-raising) services. This was linked to the pressing need for pastoral care in the contexts of extreme poverty and racial discrimination to which they were subjected. One of the reasons that the associations had freedom was that the missionaries had little or no experience of church associations at that time and tended to distance themselves from them, despite the fact that it was a missionary's wife who initiated the Womens' Christian Association, Mrs Mary Doig (Nzo, 2017:77). This was a field where indigenous agency succeeded in extending the mission of the church, beyond missionary control and influence. It demonstrated that indigenous people were capable of working independently of missionary control.

12. Finance and Property

The basic issue relating to finance (and its adjuncts, property and personnel) is well summarised by Verkuyl (1987:320) with reference to Philip Potter:

There is something demonic about a powerful, rich sending agency negotiating with poor people and poor agencies. . .

Financial assistance *too* often goes hand in hand with power *over*. The danger is more than illusory that mission agencies could either wholly or – more frequently – in part become the managers of the full-time workers in the Native churches and be tempted to manipulate these churches (Verkuyl, 1987:323).

Here we are not dealing with the theoretical situation but with the *de facto* experiences of the young churches whose missionary outreach was frustrated and obstructed by missionaries and sending churches and societies who thought and believed that they knew better how their donations should be used.

A basic approach to the sustenance of the BPCSA was agreed in 1925:

... it is the Christian duty and privilege of each member and candidate to give freely and liberally for the support and extension of the Work of Christ, through the Church according to their means; but that the offering shall not be regarded as a tax imposed by the Assembly, nor a payment for the privileges of Church membership (BPCSA GA, 1925:38).

An initial principle was agreed that all the immovable property of BPCSA should remain vested in the name of the General Trustees of UFCoS (BPCSA GA, 1925:37). However, by 1926, another view prevailed, and it was proposed that:

In view of the fact that at present the newly formed has no direct control over the Property held in trust for them, the Assembly desires humbly to petition the Foreign Mission Committee of the United Free Church to associate the Trustees of the Bantu Presbyterian Church with the Representatives of the Home Church trustees for the South African property, so as to prepare ways and means on the question of transference of property (BPCSA GA, 1926:12).

This was a forward-looking step as events transpired. Property early became a matter of dispute between BPCSA and PCSA in Glenthorn, Mankazana Presbytery, where recourse had to be made to "the Bantu Presbyterian Congregation at Glenthorn, as shown by documents in the possession of the South African Representatives of the Board of Trustees of UFCoS" (BPCSA GA, 1928:22).

The issue of finance took no account of the Three-Self policy with regard to BPCSA becoming self-supporting. Matters continued as before with the United Free Church (the Free Church united with FCoS to form the UFCoS in 1900) continuing their financial support as previously, despite their desire to reduce their financial commitment. There was no endowment to allow the church to develop its own approach to financial government. In addition, black people did not have the financial resources of white congregations, so this necessitated a different approach to stewardship. A complicating factor was that, in addition to being forced to plead for grant assistance, the money given was sent to the MC where missionaries controlled and disbursed it as they saw fit. This led to a situation where missionaries determined where the needs lay and not the communities (congregations, presbyteries, denomination) affected. To operate with regular grants from Scotland militated

against financial independence and kept the BPCSA in servitude, as beggars constantly having to appeal for crumbs from the white man's table. This was demeaning and humiliating at any time but especially for a newly established denomination.

13. Relationship with UFCoS and MC

While this appeared to be a matter that was settled on the formation of BPCSA, this was by no means the case. Pending the retirement of Rev. J.M. Auld from Columba Mission in 1927, BPCSA requested that FMC grant the congregation a right of call (Columba Min. 471; BPCSA GA, 1927:35). This was refused with the suggestion that BPCSA form a "Native 'congregation' on the grounds that the area superintended from Columba, with its numerous schools, and its service for the European population, and other responsibilities, cannot be regarded as a suitable parish for a Native minister" (Columba Min. 523; BPCSA GA: 1928:25). It was made clear that the European station, buildings and farm lands "are not the property of a congregation" (Columba Minute 523; BPCSA GA, 1928:25). Separate development was their view, and nothing could be done without consultation with the MC whose membership was solely white missionaries. The matter was referred back to FMC for reconsideration:

"as in the judgment of the Assembly, the Minute deprives the Bantu Presbyterian Church Assembly of rights in the control of congregations which Assembly has believed to belong to itself and the lower courts of the Church through and since the formation of the Bantu Presbyterian Church" (Columba Minute 523; BPCSA GA, 1928:25).

Apart from the financial issue, the United Free Church maintained its hold on properties in the young BPCSA. If at all there were nascent ideas of partnership predicated on the assumption that the BPCSA would acquiesce unquestioningly in the wishes of UFCoS. This could easily be construed as a racist stance on the part of the FMC. A further step was taken by Rev. William Gavin the next year when he proposed a South African body for resolving such issues by the Joint Committee of Assembly and that the MC be consulted (BPCSA GA, 1929:40).

FMC responded (BPCSA GA, 1929:46-49). First, they commended the competent manner in which BPCSA had organised and carried out its affairs and patronisingly commented that the MC ('Big Brother') "will rejoice in every evidence of the growing ability of the Bantu Assembly to rule her own house, and that the Assembly will always cherish the affectionate and grateful feelings of a daughter to her mother" (BPCSA GA, 1929:46). However, FMC "cannot overlook the fact that the Native ministry is not yet adequate to undertake full responsibility for the whole work formerly administered and now in process by the MC" (BPCSA GA, 1929:46). This

raises the delicate issue of who decides when the black church is ready to take full responsibility for its own affairs and by what criteria? It raises a further question, Why was BPCSA established if it was not competent to conduct its own affairs and reach its own decisions? This was no more than imposed dependency as there was no mechanism put in place to prepare black BPCSA ministers and members for a transfer of authority. It is a pity that this had not been made clear prior to 1923. In order to resolve the dissonant views, FMC suggested “the appointment of a Committee of Assembly (including Native ministers, elders and Scottish missionaries) to consider all questions in which the functions of Assembly and the MC are intertwined” (BPCSA GA, 1929:47). FMC blurred the issue by asserting that BPCSA “has autonomous powers in the organisation and government of the Church in all spiritual matters” (which were not defined) (BPCSA GA, 1929:47). Put simply, BPCSA was given authority over intangible matters while the missionaries controlled all property moveable and particularly immovable, such as land. The problem arose because of the involvement of MCs as FMCs ‘representatives on the field’ (BPCSA GA, 1929:4). With regard to property, FMC “hold all the mission property as a trust, and they have the responsibility for seeing that it is used in the best interests of evangelisation in Africa” (BPCSA GA, 1929:4). This was the patronising policy of trusteeship at work in a very crass manner. It enforced dependency and made no provision to end this approach to mission. There was no means by which BPC could approach FCoS directly, despite protestations to the contrary:

“The Committee will be glad to receive communications from the Bantu Church direct, but suggest that all matters which affect the relations of the Bantu Church to the Council should be dealt with first by the proposed Special Committee, who will pass on their recommendations to the [Mission] Council and Assembly. If the Bantu Assembly communicate directly with the Foreign Mission Committee will necessarily require to pass such back to the Council, who are the Committee’s local executive, for their opinion before the Foreign Mission committee’s answer to the Assembly can be given”.

At every step there was a check in place to delay and limit independent decision making and action. This hardly demonstrates autonomy for BPCSA. This was an issue that would endure until the dissolution of the MC in 1981. The BPCSA was held in bondage by MCs which were dominated by missionaries and, later, missionary opinion, and their *imprimatur, nihil obstat* was required before any policy decisions regarding property and finance could be made. The BPC had to copy the MC regarding correspondence with the FMC, but the reverse was not required. This resulted in one-sided transparency on the part of the BPCSA and one-sided secrecy

on the part of the MC. This was not a sound means of developing independence of thought and action or trusting relationships despite the mollifying language.

The following year, a report was received regarding this matter and BPCSA's Assembly requested:

6. ... that the Foreign Mission Committee consider the advisability of arranging for handing over, under legal title, the property of some station or stations as a first step towards more general transfer and in order to give the Trustees of the Bantu Presbyterian Church the opportunity of training in the management of property;
7. With a view to removing misunderstandings between the General Assembly and Mission Council and improving relations between these bodies, all correspondence to and from the Foreign Mission Committee and Mission Council which affects the Bantu Presbyterian Church be submitted to the Special Committee to be appointed by the General Assembly.

The existing situation promoted and maintained an imbalance in relationships. This was clear from a letter from Robert Forgan, Joint Convener of FMC, to BPCSA:

... I have sent a copy to Mr Godfrey thinking it right that the MC should be informed of our action. We earnestly hope that the Bantu Assembly in September will be wisely guided, and that action may be taken on lines that will lead to united action in the future and prevent separate action on the part either of the Assembly or the MC (Forgan to Shepherd, 8 May 1930; BPCSA GA, 1930:45).

This seemed to mean that BPCSA was to conform to the policy of the MC. But the core of the matter was explained in a message sent by FMC to the 1930 BPCSA General Assembly referring to the proceedings of the 1929 General Assembly:

In which several cases are recorded as giving rise to difficulty just because they were being dealt with separately by the General Assembly and the Mission Council. ... Further the Foreign Mission Committee [confirms] the full recognition of the independence of the Bantu Church.

The heart of the problem was that FMC did not envisage a situation where there is no need for the MC "where such Christian Natives were unrepresented" (BPCSA GA, 1930:52) and where there is an independent church. This raises the question regarding what independence BPCSA actually have? Further, what was the purpose of the MC other than to police the thinking of BPCSA? Duncan (2016a:22-32) has advanced a strong argument that the continued existence of the MC is a "self-perpetuating anachronism" hampering the mission of BPCSA.

Rev. T.B. Soga prepared a memorandum relating to this matter and argued that the matter of relations between BPCSA and MC should have been finalised prior to the formation of BPCSA. Hence in the current situation, “they are calculated to radically destroy the principle and autonomy of the Native Church in South Africa. As things are, evidently, the Church Overseas has no intention of leaving these problems wholly to the discretion of the Bantu Assembly” (BPCSA GA, 1930:4). He challenged the idea of dividing the mission areas as a means of weakening them rather than consolidating them and of being anti-Presbyterian. What were *adiaphora* prior to union are now matters of great consequence (BPCSA GA, 1930:49). Members of the MC possessed double powers of voting. He summarises his view very strongly:

The Minute indicates that “should any disagreement arise concerning matters of Mission Council [MC] interest, the Bantu Assembly will have no say; but that such matters will have to be forthwith referred to the FMC, ‘where the Bantu Assembly will not be represented again; and more weight will ultimately, be given to the opinion of the MC as such. This is what we understand by the Mission Council’s executive powers in South Africa’; and it is an indirect way of nullifying the very autonomy of the Bantu Church. What the UF Church gives with one hand, it indirectly takes away with another. . . .these [lands] cannot be claimed by the Bantu Church as a right” (BPCSA GA, 1930:49).

Soga pointed out the resulting unhealthy relationship of distrust between the MC and BPC which he determined to be a spiritual matter and a cause of ‘estrangement between the Bantu Church and the MC will remain forever’ (BPCSA GA, 1930:49). Here, we can see how enforced dependency prevented the development of good relationships. This would later be a prime problem with the concept of partnership in mission (Duncan, 2008). Regarding the issue of the control of mission lands, “one sees no end to conflict” (BPCSA GA, 1930:49). These were to be prophetic words indeed. Loyalty was another issue raised by Soga who reminded FMC that the missionaries “have become members in full of more than one church” (BPCSA GA, 1930:50). Therefore, to whom did they owe their first loyalty? In other words, on which power did they depend for their ability to control – UFCoS or BPCSA?

Land was an extremely sensitive issue, and one of which the missionaries and certainly FMC had little or no understanding. There was no comprehension that land was not the absolute property of FCoS (but of God, Psalm 24:1) although they ‘owned’ it and used it as they saw fit. There was considerable ignorance of the spiritual nature and value of land (Duncan 2016b). Soga (BPCSA GA 1930:50) explained the significance:

At the commencement of the Church's mission in South Africa, the nation through their then chiefs marked out certain lands for the use of early missionaries and school people [*amakholwa*]. Later when the political circumstances changed, and rule was taken from Native hands, government authorities granted some tracts of land for the use of missionary societies, and small allotments with common-age rights adjoining mission glebes were given to the individual Christian families within mission station boundaries separate from the rest of the district. This is the land now in question, and the missionary holds it to be the property of the Home Church, and that it must meet Mission Council interest.

Soga continued in this vein, even mocking the FMC for delegating the 'higher' functions of spiritual oversight while withholding the temporal oversight of property (BPCSA GA, 1930:51). He is scathing in his assessment of FMC's power and dominance, through the MC where it has "liberty to tamper with our Assembly decisions exclusively, subsequently, and, privately" (BPCSA GA, 1930:52). He reiterates the point that "the White [missionaries] belong to two churches legally, where the Native does not belong" (BPCSA GA, 1930:52-53). This was clearly a very difficult memorandum to pen by one who held the Mission and UFCoS in such high regard (BPCSA GA, 1930:53-54). His father, Rev. Tiyo Soga, was the first black person to be trained and ordained in Scotland and held a high, though ambivalent, view of the Scottish church.

The 1931 General Assembly agreed to copy its correspondence to FMC and MC (BPCSA GA, 1931:22). It further agreed that Rev. Dr. R.H.W. Shepherd's missionary proposal be implemented:

That the Assembly accept the principle of the demarcation of the present European mission areas into suitable parishes and refer the matter to the Committee on Relationships between the Assembly, the Foreign Mission Committee and the Mission Council for consideration and report to the next Assembly (BPCSA GA, 1931:24).

Later, the same Assembly rejoiced in "earnest and constant desire of the FMC to promote both the spiritual progress and material prosperity of the Bantu Presbyterian Church" (BPCSA GA 1931:37). FMC's response to TB Soga's memorandum indicated a clear change of policy for if communication from BPCSA to FMC was to be through the MC they "shall be sent without any alteration by the Council. If the MC desires to make any observations on such proposals from the Bantu Assembly they will be requested to do so quite apart from the proposals themselves" (BPCSA GA, 1931:487). FMC confirmed that the duty of superintendence is the function of the Presbytery. They reminded BPC of the cost of trusteeship of property and asserted the long-term time scale involved in transfer of property (this, in fact, took until the

1970s and 1980s and required that BPCSA be registered as Trustees of property [BPCSA GA, 1932:35]. It was at this Assembly that the momentous step was taken to include 'Native members' of the MC (BPCSA GA, 1932:35).

The only other denomination that was formed in the same manner was the Tsonga [Evangelical] Presbyterian Church in South Africa (Maluleke, 1995). It also suffered identical problems concerning their relationship with the *Département Missionnaire* of their Swiss mission church during the same period. Hence, BPCSA provided a 'unifying centre' for the development of black churches in South Africa.

14. Conclusion

In many ways, the Bantu Presbyterian made a good start as an independent denomination. It had a strong Presbyterian ethos, and this was reflected in its organisation. The lack of a separate mission committee meant that missions were treated on a business as usual basis. This was hampered by the tensions which existed between UFCoS FMC, the MC and the BPC General Assembly. Continued and constant dependency characterised the relationship in the midst of contested loyalties and a lack of mutual trust, particularly in the areas of finance and property. The general missionary presumption was that the new church would conform to the standards and values of the 'mother' church in Scotland. Evidently, insufficient thought and action had taken place in the process leading to the formation of BPCSA regarding the potential problems that could arise. As far as UFCoS and the MC were concerned, it was business as usual. These problems were an enduring sore in the life of the BPCSA until the dissolution of the Church of Scotland South Africa Joint Council in 1981 and probably restricted her faithfulness as a missionary church. There is little evidence that UFCoS promoted the ideals expressed in the Three-Self policy of becoming self-supporting (finance), self-propagating (mission) and self-governing (polity). Despite all this, it was a 'unifying centre' for future ecclesiastical developments in South Africa, but the emergent BPC was neither autonomous nor independent. It remained a dependent denomination in terms of staffing by Scottish missionary personnel, and regular annual grants. This was an increasing source of frustration and distrust and hampered the development of the missionary outreach of BPCSA.

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