

Religion and Resistance in Natal 1900-1910
Norman Etherington
University of Western Australia

A remarkable number of persons prominent in the formation of the ANC emerged from the former colony of Natal, among them founding President John Dube and future president Pixley Seme, as well as Alfred Mangena, H Selby Msimang and his brother Richard – to name but the best known.¹ What made Natal such a potent forging ground for African nationalism? This paper argues that the war on black Christianity waged by the white supremacist regime of Natal in the decade prior to the formation of the Union of South Africa convinced Christian intellectuals that the hopes formerly held out for equality before the law were unrealistic. Britain would not defend their rights in self-governing colonies and dominions. The Natal government's attempts to recruit assistance from other white settler regimes demonstrated that resistance would have to be conducted on a South Africa-wide basis. The Natal Native Congress formed by Christian intellectuals in 1900, which provided a template of sorts for the ANC, pursued religious issues as vigorously as demands for political representation and land ownership. Christian evangelism in Natal was intricately entwined with political, legal and economic struggles. That is why the settler regime targeted black Christianity as its most dangerous opponent.

The inception of settler rule following Britain's grant of Responsible Government to Natal in 1893 put the government on a collision course with Christian Africans who had enjoyed a number of significant privileges since the mid-Victorian era. Under a series of governors and Theophilus Shepstone, the long-serving Secretary for Native Affairs, these had been part of an explicit programme of 'Christianization and Civilization'. African who lived in square houses rather than round huts – virtually all of them Christians – were exempt from the hut taxes paid by all other household heads. Substantial Mission Reserves had been set aside where, subject to the consent of missionaries, people lived and farmed virtually rent-free. Government grants in aid of mission schools provided the only public source of funding for education. An important law of 1865 allowed people to apply for exemption from Native Law. This had been explicitly designed to serve the needs of Christians who denounced polygamy and other 'heathen customs'. In more practical terms, it assisted people to acquire and hold property, manage businesses and accumulate capital. Exemption also enabled men who met the requisite educational and property qualifications to enrol as voters. Although legislation and administrative practice had restricted many of these benefits, educated Christians continued to cherish hopes of enjoying full equality under the law.² After 1893 they watched with increasing alarm and dismay as the new order moved explicitly against them.

That the regime pursued a conscious and relentless campaign is not in doubt. In September 1901, S O Samuelson, the permanent Undersecretary for Native Affairs, advised his Minister with evident satisfaction that 'the legislation affecting the Native population from 1894 will show that the Government has had an object in view and has not

¹ For other personal associations see Shula Marks *Reluctant Rebellion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 69-72.

² For an overview of the worsening situation for Africans in late-Victorian Natal, see John Lambert, *Betrayed Trust: Africans and the State in Colonial Natal* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1995).

been idle'.³ That object was to bring 'the tribal system' under statutory control, from which no escape would be possible. Although it was 'a despotic form of Government', it had been 'taken over from the natives themselves', and was 'peculiarly suitable to their condition and circumstances'. It provided 'a ready means of communication and control beginning with the Supreme Chief and extending to the individual native in his kraal; but the exercise of the franchise is unknown to it, and it should be so maintained'. Along with his extensive list of bills passed, he commented on recent administrative practice in relation to exemptions from Native Law.

Exemptions from the operation of Native Law have been sparingly granted, and then only in special cases. The Law under which they are granted is, however, a blot on our Statute Book, and should never have been enacted.

The Minister's reaction was to propose repeal of the 1865 law that provided for exemption. Cabinet balked at repeal but endorsed a policy of granting certificates only in 'very special cases'.⁴ The Victorian policy of Christianity and civilization had been officially pronounced dead.

Christian Africans – or kholwa as they were known in Natal – had long dreaded just such a result and had tried to forestall it from the inception of Responsible Government. In May 1896 Simeon Kambule as chairman of an association of exempted Natives joined Solomon Kumalo, Ezekiel Mhlanga and Martin Luthuli petitioned the governor enquiring what position they occupied in colonial law.⁵ According to the advice tendered to the Attorney General by the Crown Solicitor, exemption freed people from the body of Native Law existing in 1865, but did not enable them to escape from later legislation applicable to Natives as a class. The official reply to Kambule therefore stated

That natives holding letters of exemption granted under Law 28, 1865 are, notwithstanding their exemption from N. Law, subject to any later laws which may be applicable to any special class which include them.

Privately, the Minister for Native Affairs commented that letters of exemption were 'misleading and unsatisfactory. Natives who receive them believe that they receive the full legal status of Europeans.'⁶

Meanwhile, the restrictions on exemption bit with increasing force. In 1901 Pixley Semi's father Isaac, a property-holding evangelist recommended by his white missionary had his application rejected for the second time. The Magistrate of his district agreed with the Minister for Native Affairs that 'in 9 out of every 10 cases the privilege [of exemption] is misused.'⁷ Mbango Myayiza Pewa, a Christian who had resided from birth at Inanda Mission Station applied for exemption in the hope of ensuring his property would pass to his wife and children at his death, was likewise refused.⁸ Paul Gumbi, a respected man from Edendale with a substantial share in a jointly owned farm was refused with no reason given. Preachers who held existing letters of exemption and wished to preach in Zululand were informed that 'Exemption in Natal does not apply in Zululand.'⁹ Hostility to exemption

³ SO Samuelson, USNA, Memorandum to SNA, Sept. 1901. Enclosed in 2270/1901, Secretary for Native Affairs Papers, Natal Archives, Pietermaritzburg (henceforth SNA) 1/1/293.

⁴ F R Moor Minute of 22 October 1901 in 2270/1901, SNA 1/1/293.

⁵ 27/19/1896, incorporated in 1596/1902, SNA 1/1/296.

⁶ J. Liege Hulett to Colonial Secretary, 1 Feb, 1898, SNA 1/1/296.

⁷ Application of Mbekwana Isaac Seme, 453/1901, SNA 1/1/291.

⁸ Petition of Mbango Myayiza Pewa, 270/1902, SNA 1/1/295.

⁹ Rev. W. C. Wilcox Groutville. Renews application for the admission of native pastor uPlant as teacher at the AZM, Impapala, 69/1902, SNA 1/1/299.

pervaded the system from top to bottom. Questioned on possible improvements to the legal system in 1903, magistrate C O Griffin commented the ordinary exempted native is merely a mischief maker ... He has proved himself unable to use his position for much good, but more often what he knows is used in airing imaginary grievances of his people.' Echoing the common opinion of the white populace, Griffin went on to argue:

The raw native is the truest gentleman there is. He is true to his traditions and customs, and true to the authority under which he lives. Take him out of that and he is immediately a danger. Stop exemptions of natives, curtail the privileges of the Kholwa, and above all things stop the acquirement of land by natives.¹⁰

It is a tribute to the perseverance of the African Christian community that despite repeated setbacks the Council of Exempted Natives remained in existence. Following a Supreme Court Decision of 1905 that children of exempted parents were not themselves exempted unless specifically mentioned in the original certificate, the Council pressed continually from 1905 for a change to the law, gaining its point only after Natal had been incorporated into the Union of South Africa in 1910.¹¹ An overlap between the Council's membership and that of the Natal Native Congress ensured that lessons learned in this long campaign would be carried into the ANC.

Widespread agreement that kholwa were privileged trouble-makers motivated officials to seek any excuse to attack them as a class. The ideal target arose in the form of 'the Ethiopian menace'. Some Protestant churches – Congregationalists, Methodists and Presbyterians in particular – had begun to experience defections as early as the 1880s. These generally involved individual ministers who chafed against missionary authority. In 1892 the Rev. Mangena Makone [aka Mokoni] gave a name to secessionist tendencies when he left the Methodist connexion to found his own independent Wesleyan congregation which he named the Ethiopian Church – after the Psalm 68:31 prophesying that 'Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God'.¹² The movement acquired a slogan in 1896 when an idiosyncratic English missionary promoted a scheme he called the African Christian Union, which aspired to put Africans in charge of missions, plantations and commercial ventures. The heading of his appeal was 'Africa for the Africans'.¹³ In 1897 the fledgling movement affiliated itself with the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC) of the United States. Following a triumphant visit by Bishop H M Turner in 1898, the AMEC rapidly expanded its South African operations.¹⁴ It was probably this event that caused Samuelson to date the movement from 1898.¹⁵

By 1900 the government was employing paid informers, police and secret agents to spy on preachers accused of spreading 'Ethiopian sedition'. Even without special

¹⁰ Report of C O Griffin, Magistrate Bergville, 19 Dec. 1903, in 3077/1903, SNA 1/1/305.

¹¹ HE the Gov. Durban, 22/2/05. Children of Exempted Natives, 113/05, SNA 1/1/317.

¹² Makone, a carpenter, part time school teacher and lay preacher in Natal in 1870s had been accepted as a minister on trial in 1880, and had been granted exemption from Native Law. Because he had established himself on the Witwatersrand gold fields by the time of his secession his Ethiopian church initially escaped attention from Natal authorities.

¹³ F. B. Bridgman, 'The Ethiopian Movements in South Africa', *Missionary Review of the World*, n.s. Vol 17, No. 6 (June 1904), 434-445; Laura Perry ed., *Africa for the Africans* Zomba, Malawi: Kachere, 1996, 2nd ed. 2007.

¹⁴ J T Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 132-38.

¹⁵ S.O. Samuelson, U.S.N. Affairs, 19 Nov. 1902, enclosed in McCallum to Chamberlain, 28 Nov. 1892, CO179/224, British National Archives, Kew (Henceforth BNA).

legislation various expedients were employed to punish suspects. Soon after his return from America John Dube was briefly held under the provisions of martial law in force during the Boer War.¹⁶ About the same time Johannes Zondi, a blind preacher associated with a dissident faction of the Congregational Church at Table Mountain, was also picked up and held under martial law. Even after the war he continued to be held under no particular law at the Ubombo magistracy gaol until 1905 – his crime said to have been ‘uttering seditious language’.¹⁷ Other preachers were harassed using the pass laws, especially in the southern part of the colony where congregations of independent Amakutshe (Cushites) had put down roots. The most charismatic of their preachers, Funiselo Solani, originally from the Cape Colony, was subject to police surveillance as early as 1900. Spies sent to listen to his sermons were almost immediately exposed as government agents. In the absence of concrete evidence of seditious preaching, the local magistrate ordered Solani exiled for the crime of crossing the border without a pass.¹⁸ Three of his associates were arrested and sentenced to fines of £5 each or two months hard labour for crossing into Natal from Pondoland without passes.¹⁹ The following year Solani was back, causing the Undersecretary for Native Affairs to instruct all magistrates that any application for a pass must be refused. In 1903 he was once again arrested and sentenced to one month’s imprisonment and a £5 fine.²⁰ Harassment of Solani and his followers under the pass laws continued even after the Union of South Africa established a policy of tolerating all sects.²¹

It did Solani no good to affiliate himself to Foreign Mission Board of the National Baptist Convention of the USA, or to have his congregation affirm that ‘our Pastor during his work amongst us has devoted himself to preaching and teaching the Word of God and has never spoken on political matters’.²² The government treated affiliation to any black American church as *prima facie* evidence of Ethiopianism. J. B. Mfazwe, also a recognized minister of the Baptist Convention, who had been denied a pass, attempted unsuccessfully to petition Britain’s Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, in 1902, only to have it quashed by Natal’s Governor McCallum.²³ When the parent body wrote to Chamberlain to complain that a ‘number of our workers have been confined in jail, and others were driven from their posts for the testimony they bore’, the only response was to forward the letter to

¹⁶ McCallum to Elgin, 30 May 1906, CO179/235, BNA.

¹⁷ P. R. Vermaak, Helpmakaar, 2 June 1905. Johannes Zondi removed to Ubombo under Martial Law for sedition, 304/05, SNA1/1/317. He appears to have been the same Johan Zondi mentioned as a dissident at Table Mountain by American missionaries in 1902, minutes of Special meeting of American Zulu Mission, 19-20 Aug. 1902, archives of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Houghton Library, Harvard University (henceforth ABC), 15.4, vol. 21.

¹⁸ Magistrate Alfred Division, 2271/1901, SNA1/1/293.

¹⁹ Report of C. Meiners, Sub Inspector of Natal Police, 16 Nov. 1901, 2271/1901, SNA1/1/293.

²⁰ On appeal the prison sentence was quashed, but the fine confirmed; 1066/1903. Copy of Order Funiselo Solani v. Rex. In Appeal. SNA 1/1/300.

²¹ Magistrate Alfred Div. Outward pass refused to J. Simanga, 621/04, SNA1/1/310. Chief Native Commissioner, Natal to Magistrate, Port Shepstone, 15 April 1920, addendum to 1054/03, SNA 1/1/300.

²² Petition of the Deacons and Elders of the African Missionary Baptist Church and Congregation at Port Shepstone, to SNA, 15 Jan. 1903, SNA1/1/299.

²³ Rev. Johnson Benjamin Mfazwe, Durban, 18 Dec. 1902, 1616/02, SNA1/1/299.

Natal.²⁴ Officials ground their teeth when the black American minister, S. C. Crutcher of the Worlds Faith Mission Association who landed in Durban in 1903, escaped arrest by producing evidence of his U.S. citizenship.²⁵ John Dube reported Crutcher's departure in 1904 in his paper *Ilanga lase Natal*, along with a tribute to 'his peaceful and amiable disposition'. When this was brought to his attention, the Minister for Native Affairs requested 'that the Principal Immigration Officer be requested to take a note of S.C. Crutcher's name as an undesirable immigrant, should he endeavour to land in this Colony again.'²⁶ Soon the struggle to exclude new churches extended even to denominations run by Europeans. Governor McCallum wrote to Chamberlain in 1903 suggesting that on the basis of Natal's experience, it would wise to bar Joseph Booth from entry into all African colonies along with all 'persons calling themselves Ethiopians or Seventh Day Adventists, or other persons of that kind whose influence and precepts would be better kept away from the Native population.'²⁷

Throughout the first decade of the twentieth century Natal officials continued to behave as though they had a firm handle on evangelists of all kinds. In fact the Christianization of the African population had long since escaped their power to control or even document. This was the era when the new faith escaped from mission stations and swept over the land like a grass fire. New preachers calling themselves faith missionaries, both white and black, went about their business with a new mode of operation. Instead of settling down on fixed stations they wandered over the land itinerating like a modern-day version of mendicant friars. Many of them believed in the literal truth of the biblical prophesy that Christ would only return to earth when the gospel had been preached to all the earth.²⁸ Whether anyone really understood or believed was a secondary consideration. Sometimes these missionaries applied to the government for permission to preach, as did Hans Porter of the American Hephzibah Faith Missionary Society on the ground that he would 'carry out the Great Commission to Preach the Gospel to Every Creature.' As he did 'not appear to belong to any known Church', the Minister for Native Affairs recommended refusal, stating that 'this application savours of Ethiopianism'.²⁹ More often the faith missionaries ignored officialdom and carried on with their holy errand. Above and beyond these organized endeavours were the spontaneous local evangelical operations described by the American Zulu Mission in 1900 following a prolonged period of revivalist enthusiasm:

Young men and women returning to their heathen homes from our schools, and from those of other societies, are starting evangelistic work in the kraals. They begin by gathering their friends for Sunday services, soon interesting the children in learning to read. A school is started in a hut or under the shelter of a tree; a few primers are bought by the most ambitious, or by those who have three pence of their own to spend. If there is a Mission near by of the society to which the teacher belongs, or to which he is attracted, he may apply to the missionary for superintendence or help. Otherwise, it may please him to start an

²⁴ L. Ton Evans to Chamberlain, 1902, CO179/225, BNA.

²⁵ Report of Detective Walker, Criminal Investigation Department, Durban, 5 May, 1903, 821/03, SNA1/1/300.

²⁶ *Ilanga lase Natal*, 20 May 1904; Leuchars to Colonial Secretary, 4 June 1904, 1077/04, SNA1/1/311.

²⁷ McCallum to Chamberlain, 19 Jan. 1903. Confidential No. 1, CO179/226, BNA.

²⁸ Norman Etherington, ed., *Missions and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 16-17, 54-55.

²⁹ Hans Porter of Hephzibah Faith Missionary Society to Secretary of Native Affairs, 1346/05, SNA1/1/321.

independent work under a new name, or that of the church to which he belongs and which is too far away to know about or supervise his work. Thus we are already in danger of any number of churches in embryo being started all over the country, with no supervision, or worse than that, unwise supervision, as such places are soonest snatched up by faction societies or schismatic bodies.³⁰

The note of concern expressed here shows the common ground that initially united older missionary societies and government functionaries in their fears of Ethiopianism. Ironically, this was to assist officials in the broader effort to curb all African evangelism – including that sponsored by established European and North American mission societies. In 1901 F B Bridgman of the American Zulu Mission wrote to the Undersecretary for Native Affairs to enquire whether Simungu Shibe (aka Bafazini), one of the Table Mountain dissidents was recognized by government as qualified to perform Christian marriages. If not, Bridgman continued, and ‘he is so acting and is breaking the law it would doubtless be a wholesome lesson and help to suppress the schismatic tendencies shown by the natives in some quarters of late years, were he caught and convicted’. Although the department had no record of any marriages performed by Shibe, Taylor’s letter initiated a wider investigation into whether his preaching was seditious, eventually being circulated to the prime minister and cabinet.³¹

A few months later Bridgman and his missionary colleague H D Goodenough met the Minister and Undersecretary to discuss the question of licensing marriage officers.³² Keen to crush the Table Mountain dissidents, the missionaries endorsed the idea of new legislation and suggested bringing a test case before the courts to test the authority of Shibe to conduct marriages. The Minister, F R Moor agreed to get an opinion from the Attorney General before shifting the conversation to an ominous new tack. ‘He was of opinion that missionary work amongst the natives should be confined to Europeans: natives were not fitted for it, and would not be in a hundred years’ time.’³³ Then,

Reverting to the question of the solemnisation of matrimony by Native Ministers, the Secretary for Native Affairs said he did not consider that such power should be given to natives as they were not yet fit for it. He did not see how they were going to draw the line as native ministers were setting up for themselves and would claim that they were ordained according to the rites of their respective churches.

Next the conversation turned to the American missionaries’ longstanding hope that they might proceed to grant freehold titles to Christian farmers on their Mission Reserves (a development envisaged in the original grants). Moor expressed his own opinion that individual titles were undesirable because ‘if they once gave individual title to the land the tribal control would be done for because each man having his own piece of land he could defy everybody.’ However the issue could not be decided in advance of the forthcoming report of a parliamentary Land Commission.

In an hour or so of conversation, Moor had foreshadowed an extended assault on the program of Christianisation and civilisation. Black clergymen would be denied the right to perform marriages and other functions carried out by white ministers. They would be free to preach, only where there was ‘a white Missionary in charge.’ The residents of Mission

³⁰ General Letter of the AZM, 1899-1900 signed by Laura Mellen, June 1900, ABC15.4, vol. 22.

³¹ Bridgman to USNA, 8 Oct. 1901; 2772, 1901 SNA1/1/294.

³² There were not the only mission society to take up the marriage question at this time. See also J. Fernie to USNA, 7 May 1902, 1484/1902, SNA1/1/296; James Dalziel to USNA 11 April, 1901, 687/01, SNA1/1/291.

³³ Notes taken at an interview between the SNA and the Revd. Mssrs. H. D. Goodenough and Bridgman 8 April 1902, 1380/1902, SNA1/1/296.

Reserves would lose their existing privileges and give up hope of ever obtaining freehold titles to land. When Goodenough concluded by asking for more extensive powers to control the Mission Reserves, Moor snapped, 'What, to make these preachers? No, never.' The missionaries must have regretted ever raised the question of licensed marriage officers. Moor had challenged the basis on which most Protestant missions had been based since early in the nineteenth century: as black ministers were ordained, they and their congregations would become self-supporting, enabling the foreign missionaries to move on to other fields. Now they were told they must stay and supervise their African subordinates for at least the next hundred years. Appalled, they could only watch while the colonial government moved against them on all fronts.

The government wasted no time in dealing with the marriage question. Surprisingly, the Attorney General advised there was currently no penalty by statute for celebrations of marriages by persons not competent to do so.³⁴ And although he found no current ground for denying ordained ministers the right to conduct marriages, he believed that 'none but Officers or Ministers specially licensed by the Supreme Chief should be authorised to celebrate marriages between natives'.³⁵ The resort to the vague but vast powers exercised by the Governor in his capacity as Supreme Chief cunningly avoided the drafting of legislation that could be challenged in colonial courts, as had happened in the Cape Colony.³⁶ According to the prevailing theory articulated earlier by S O Samuelson, when acting as Supreme Chief the governor functioned essentially as an unrestrained despot. As the real target of the legislation was the Ethiopian menace, the Attorney went on to say that while the governor's suggestion 'that all coloured preachers should be licensed by the Government' was a good one, he would rather see the Supreme Chief invested with power to stop any preacher or person meddling with the natives under the cloak of religion.'

[A] special act might authorise the Supreme Chief to investigate any suspicious cases and 'act as he may think necessary, - including the imposition of fines and order to quit the Colony etc., very much on the same lines as in the case of undesirable, the decision of the Supreme Chief to be final without appeal to the Courts of Law. ... The treatment must of necessity be of a somewhat drastic nature having regard to the difficulty of obtaining evidence for Courts of Law. What he had in mind resembled the current practice in relation to exemptions from Native Law. No reason need be given for refusal and there could be no appeal. This was more or less the line pursued in relation to the question of marriage celebrants. Bill No. 55 of 1953 amended the law relating to Marriages of Natives by Christian Rites. Henceforth 'No Minister shall solemnize any marriage between Natives according to Christian rites unless he shall have been licensed for that purpose by the Governor.' Punishment for infractions would be fines and imprisonment. An unsigned memorandum prepared on the bill advocating 'registration of religious associations securing that no Government aid in money or otherwise be given to movements with race cleavage as the foundation of their establishment. ... It should be made unlawful for any Native whether exempted or otherwise to address meetings or congregations of Natives unless he be licensed and a full member of a registered religious association.' Moreover Section 263 of the Code of

³⁴ Attorney General to SNA, 3 Feb. 1903, 4191/02, SNA1/1/298.

³⁵ Minute by G. A. de Roquefeuil Labistour, Attorney General, 13 May 1902, enclosed in Conf. 1. McCallum to Chamberlain, 28 Nov. 1902, CO179/224, BNA.

³⁶ Proposed Amendment of Law 46/1887, 1322/03, SNA1/1/301.

Native Law should be amended so as to apply to 'exempted Natives to deal with seditious preaching.'

The application of the new licensing law proceeded much as expected. All ministers of religion, regardless of race, had to apply for licenses. These were granted to most whites and denied to the majority of African applicants.³⁷ Although ministers associated with black American Churches and the American Zulu Mission suffered particular discrimination, Africans from all denominations suffered under the new policy.³⁸ The Salvation Army was refused recognition as a legitimate Christian denomination.³⁹ Rev. J Y Gumede, who had been ordained in 1898 and preaching for 20 years was refused, as was Rev. Job Bunga, whose impeccably written and beautifully penned application was denied 'on the ground that his apparent lack of education would render him incompetent to fulfil the requirements of the Marriage Laws in regard to registration and other necessary matters.'⁴⁰ Curtailing their right to perform Christian marriages had a direct material as well as symbolic important effect on African ministers. The ceremonies supplemented their incomes through the voluntary contributions customarily made on those occasions. Equally hurtful was the clear statement by government that despite their ordination, they were less worthy than other clergy.

John Dube perceived the larger dangers associated with the move when he proposed in his newspaper that the Natal Native Congress should take up the issue.

Our teachers are debarred from solemnising marriages, but no reasons for doing so are given. I prophesied when this law was being framed that it was their intention to 'check' us, but I was contradicted by the Rev. Goodenough. He said it was intended as a restriction on those who forcibly assumed the missionary calling. But I now learn that of all the "missionaries" of the African Congregational Church, two only hold authority to celebrate marriages, and the remainder, who previously held the authority by right, have been deprived unjustly. The Government stated that if the missionaries' application were supported by the signature of the Chairman of the denomination to which they belonged, they would receive the authority to celebrate marriages, but all these are but empty promises. From your point of view Zulus, what do you consider to be the object of those who rule us? Is it a fact that they intend to civilise, and promote us from our present position? Well then, if you perceive, why remain silent? The Government cannot throw dust into our eyes by stating that the restrictions placed on our protectors prevent the spread of Ethiopianism. This is the very reason that would cause it. If we perceive that in matters of civilisation and improvement we are being hampered, they may find those amongst us with burning aspirations, acting improperly.⁴¹

Dube's warning that the new regulations constituted but one part of a multi-pronged attack on the kholwa proved only too accurate. Unknown to the missions, Governor McCallum had

³⁷ See the very large volume of applications, 277/05, SNA1/1/317, as well as 10/06 in SNA1/1/333.

³⁸ See J B Mfazwe to SNA, 12 Dec. 1902, 1616/02, SNA1/1/299 and J D Taylor, Report on Negotiations with Government, 26 June 1907, ABC15.4, vol. 22.

³⁹ Registrar General to Adjutant Hendy, 27 Oct. 1903, 2720/03, SNA1/1/304. For a discussion of the Salvation Army's initial faith mission approach, see A. M. Eason, "'All Things to All People to Save Some": Salvation Army Missionary Work among the Zulus of Victorian Natal, *Journal of Southern African Studies* (2009) 35:7-27.

⁴⁰ Jwili Y Gumede to Magistrate, Umlazi, 22 April, 1904, 922/04, SNA1/1/310; J Bunga to Magistrate, Newcastle Div., 11 July 1905, 1822/05, SNA1/1/323.

⁴¹ USNA, Political Reports, 5/12/04. Excerpt from *Ilanga lase Natal*, translated from Zulu in SNA office, 7 Dec. 1904, 2468/1904, SNA1/1/315.

already alerted Joseph Chamberlain to the intention of a 'a Parliament composed largely of persons connected with the farming interest' to engineer a takeover of the Mission Reserves, which 'keep the native in idleness'.⁴² Several months later in February 1903 the Minister for Native Affairs summoned missionaries of all denominations to hear the report of the Land Commission respecting Mission Reserves. It called for the current Trustees to cede control to the Natal Native Trust.⁴³ Legal advice suggested that no legislation could have compelled the proposed takeover in the absence of an agreement with the various missions holding the Reserves. Nonetheless, in a startling capitulation representatives of all bodies agreed to a compromise proposal put forward by Goodenough, which ceded control to the government on three conditions:

- (1) That suitable sites for schools and churches shall be leased at a nominal rent to the Mission Society named in the Deed of Grant.
- (2) That the Reserves shall be kept for the sole occupation of natives and shall be administered in accordance with the intent of the Deed of Trust.
- (3) That all the revenue derived from the Reserves shall be used for the benefit of the Natives living on the Reserves, one half of such revenue being turned over to the Mission Society named in the Deed of Grant for native education in accordance with rules framed by the Education Department.

When the question of possible freehold titles was raised in discussion, the Minister for Native Affairs was adamant.

The condition of the Native to-day is such that I think he should be autocratically governed. I do not think he has yet attained a position when we could give him liberty, but if you once confer a grant of land you cannot govern that native autocratically. He becomes master of his own house.⁴⁴

No single act of any missionary had ever so outraged the kholwa of Natal as this betrayal. Their anger was compounded when, in a concession to white farmers the government reneged on its promise to maintain rents at their previous level and raised them to £3 per dwelling. People on the Mission Reserves charged the missionaries with having played the role of Judas and sold them out in return for thirty pieces of silver, i.e., the half-share of revenue that would accrue to the mission authorities as the result of the increased rents.

John Dube, who had at first inclined in *Ilanga lase Natal* to endorse the financial arrangements as an aid to the support of African pastors, changed his tune in the face of the people's anguish. At a conference between white and black ministers of the American Zulu mission he confessed his mistake.

It is a very difficult thing to be an editor of a paper, because a person is apt to talk very much, until sometimes he puts himself into matters which will catch him after a while ... There is a proverb of the people which says that a person learns continually. ... in respect of this money, the people are very, very angry. I am not saying what is not so, when I say that a great many would have liked to have killed you, if they would have had the power to do it. The hatred of the people is as great as this in regard to you and the half of the money which you have taken.⁴⁵

⁴² McCallum to Chamberlain, 5 May 1902, C0179/223, BNA.

⁴³ Notes of Conference held 12 Feb. 1903, 723/03, SNA1/1/300.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Report of the Discussion regarding the Disposal of Mission Reserve Funds, accruing under the Mission Reserves Law of 1903; received at mission headquarters in Boston, May 28 1906, ABC15.4, vol. 22.

What was at stake here, he continued, was nothing less than the trust they had for decades placed in white missionaries as defenders of their interests. He recalled having once

contradicted Martin Lutuli [uncle of future ANC President Albert Luthuli] when he said that one white man was like another. I got an opportunity to talk to him face to face. He said to me: 'Do you know what was done by John Dunn? He was given many wives by Cetywayo, but when the time came for him to make known his thanks, at the Zulu War, he went over to the others.' He then talked of Sir Theophilus Shepstone, and said: 'First he appeared like a person who loved the people, but at the end it was evident that he went over to the side of the majority, and showed contempt for the people.' He then said that the white man whom the people trusted is now dead. He said the same of Colenso. He said that if Bishop Colenso had lived a longer time, and the occasion had arisen for him to represent them, he also would have gone over to the majority. There is a truth, to a certain extent, in these statements. I talked with Mr. Lutuli very much about the lives of the missionaries, and I think I finally convinced him of the self-sacrifice of the missionaries on behalf of the people, and even of the way in which they got the land for the people.

Here was the crux of the matter. For men like Dube and Martin Lutuli questions of Christianity, exemption from Native Law, land and race were not separate issues but aspects of a single larger question: how might they confidently stand on equal footing with humankind before their God and the state. The failure of the Missions to defend the Reserve lands at a critical juncture contributed to a growing resolve to constitute their own forum for the articulation of grievances.

If the missions thought they might curry favour by giving in on the Reserves, they were soon to find discover the colonial government had no intention of moderating its war against black evangelists. Since February 1902 officials had been informally moving toward a policy of removing any evangelist not under direct supervision of a white clergyman. In a confidential coded telegram the governor informed Chamberlain that Natal would be refusing permits for entry from any 'coloured or negro' missionaries, whether or not belonging to an independent church.⁴⁶ Instructions issued to the magistrate of Alfred Division that same month confirmed that the policy was already in operation.⁴⁷ Next the government used the powers of the Natal Native Trust to bar any African preacher from Locations unless that person was under direct supervision by a European missionary. Natal's large designated Locations far exceeded the total area of the Mission Reserves and had no designated access for Christian evangelism. Ultimate control over these lands rested with the Natal Native Trust, which after 1893 consisted of the Governor, the Prime Minister and Cabinet. As the Undersecretary for Native Affairs replied when asked what was the difference between the government and the Natal Native Trust, he replied 'it is a distinction without a difference. The Government consists of the Ministry with the Governor in Council; the Natal native Trust is practically the same body.'⁴⁸ Without reference to parliament it could control movement in or out of the Locations, lease out Location lands and determine who might reside on them. Although the state lacked the resources to patrol them, it

⁴⁶ McCallum to Mr. Chamberlain, 1 Feb. 1902.

⁴⁷ See file on J. N. Sibiya, Minister, Presbyterian Church of Africa to SNA, Feb, 1902, 359/1902, SNA1/1/295.

⁴⁸ Notes of Conference held 12 Feb. 1903, 723/03, SNA1/1/300.

now routinely refused all requests for black clergy or lay preachers to conduct church services or schools anywhere except under direct white supervision. When missionaries attempted to circumvent the requirement by using white female teachers, the government further refined its policy to exclude women from any supervisory role.⁴⁹ By 1903 the Secretary of Native Affairs had further specified that 'it is a principle of the Natal Native Trust to prohibit the building of Churches or School Houses in Location Lands except such buildings and the services held thereat be under the personal supervision of a Resident European male Missionary'.⁵⁰ When Methodist minister A. Mtinkulu applied in July, 1903 to register a house for an evangelist on Location land, the Governor, as head of the Natal Native Trust exploded, 'What business has this Evangelist to have started an establishment in a location without authority. We must put a stop to these encroachments by these coloured evangelists who are simply defying us.'⁵¹ Local police were instructed that if the evangelist refused to move, they were to forcibly remove him.

In an address to the annual meeting of the Anglican Maritzburg Missionary Association in May 1904 the Governor made his stance public.

They gave every opportunity and encouragement to the white missionaries, but they had made it an axiom now that black missionaries should not be allowed to practise on their own initiative. They had to get a white missionary in touch with them to supervise them. It was thought that by this means, and by such means as had been adopted to prevent the performance of marriage ceremonies without due license, that they would be able to keep in hands a movement they were determined to throttle, and which practically meant disloyalty.⁵²

However phrased, the missions understood this to be a declaration of war on Christian evangelism. Foreign churches would never have the resources to staff every church with a white male missionary in Natal, even if they abandoned work in the rest of Africa. The war turned violent when the state began sending police to destroy churches. On orders from George Leuchars, the new Minister from Native Affairs, Sergeant Coupe of the Natal Police cut down a church with axes in July 1904. Similar acts of official vandalism ensued.⁵³ While not specifically banning preaching in the open air, the government aimed to curtail its efficacy by ruling against residency in Locations by anyone exempted from Native Law.⁵⁴ In 1905 the Minister went on to rule that exempted Natives would have to apply for permission even to reside on a Mission Reserve.⁵⁵

At last missionaries of all societies awoke to the realization that what had begun as a campaign against Ethiopianism had become a war on all virtually all African evangelization. In other words their vocation itself was called in question. In response to a united appeal from the Natal Missionary Conference, the Leuchars agreed to meet a deputation on 22 Dec. 1904 to discuss the assault on Christianity.⁵⁶ As Rev. John Smith put the case

⁴⁹ Statement of Rev. Suter in Notes of SNA meeting with delegates of Natal Missionary Conference held 22 Dec. 1904, 2569/1904, SNA1/1/315; minutes of Special Meeting of the American Zulu Mission, 28 Nov. 1903, ABC15.4, vol. 21.

⁵⁰ SNA to Rev. D. T. Fraser 14 Oct. 1903, 2796/03, SNA 1/1/304.

⁵¹ McCallum to SNA, 19 Aug. 1903, 2796/03/ SNA1/1/304.

⁵² *Times of Natal*, 7 June, 1904.

⁵³ Leuchars to HE the Administrator, 14 June 1904, P. Coupe to Magistrate Weenen, 14 July 1904, 20104, SNA 1/1/309.

⁵⁴ Circular to Magistrates of all Divisions from S. Harrison, Acting USNA, 27 Jan. 1905.

⁵⁵ Circular to Magistrates, 26 Jan. 1905, 744/04, SNA 1/1/310.

⁵⁶ Notes on Meeting of 22 Dec. 1904, 2569/1904, SNA1/1/315.

It appears that the regulations which were framed and which have been put in force have borne very hardly upon many of the Natives who have become Christians and are living in the Locations and who are denied the opportunity of meeting together for the purpose of Christian worship. Some places of worship have been pulled down, permission to build others have been refused, and in this way it seems to the Deputation and to the Conference which it represents that it is a hardship and an injustice that Christian Natives should be so treated.

William Hacker on behalf of the Methodists declared that

buildings had actually been destroyed by the order or consent of the Government, and we wish to bring before you these cases because we, as Missionaries, realize that we have to stand before the people and account for the actions of the Government. To them it is a revelation that the Government, which has always fostered Mission work and made it possible for us to open schools and to carry on our Mission work, should now seemingly be taking an antagonistic step against Mission work. You yourself, Sir, have told me that the Government policy is that White Minister must be placed in charge of a Mission Station. Now no Society can carry on its work under those conditions. It is one of the fundamental principles with us that the Gospel must be carried to the Natives through their own people, and it has been our aim to raise up men and train them for the work, and to place men, in whom we have implicit confidence, in charge, under European supervision, of the various congregations in this Colony.' You are in effect saying there can be no missionary work except 'where a White Minister can be. That is the great trouble which we have this morning, and we wish to state very respectfully, but we state it very firmly, that we believe it is in opposition to the British Constitution....

When questioned on whether Leuchars intended to bar all Christian meetings from Locations unless in the presence of a white supervisor, he replied evasively that the present policy was only being applied to buildings. The meeting ended with no concessions from the government and a veiled threat from the missionaries to 'carry the matter further' – that is to say they might go public and attempt to mobilize opinion in their home churches.

In the event they did not – none of them, fearing further repressive actions by the state. Nor did the Imperial government contemplate any intervention on their behalf, holding to the principal of minimal interference with a colony under Responsible Government. Attempts to mobilize the opinion of organised philanthropy in Britain largely failed. A representation from H R Fox Bourne of the Aborigines Protection Society in 1903 elicited this minute from Colonial Office staff: 'The Society's letter is of the type with which we are familiar – "if everybody concerned in native affairs abuses his powers, then the native will suffer." The S[ecretary]. of S[tate] does not wish to encourage Mr. Fox Bourne, & I fancy the better course would be not to reply to him at all.'⁵⁷ In contrast, the government of Natal could through the governor, not only influence the Colonial Office but other colonies. When the governor notified his intention of barring missionaries from the Free Methodist Church, H B Cox at the Colonial Office minuted, 'We ought to prevent coloured people going if possible as Natal objects to them. If they go we shall have difficulties'.⁵⁸ When Natal recommended that Joseph Booth be banned from preaching anywhere in Southern Africa, the Foreign Office helpfully volunteered advice that a British Central Africa Order in Council allowed for the deportation of any person 'dangerous to peace and good order'.⁵⁹ When Salvation Army Headquarters complained

⁵⁷ Minute on McCallum to Chamberlain, 20 Aug. 1903, CO179/227.

⁵⁸ Minute on McCallum to Chamberlain, coded telegram, 1 Feb. 1902, CO179/222, BNA.

⁵⁹ Foreign Office Correspondence, 2nd June 1903, CO179/228, BNA.

that Africans from Natal had been denied permission to attend their forthcoming International Congress in 1904, the Colonial Office merely commented, 'One could have assumed that for the present purpose the Natal Govt would have raised no difficulty, but perhaps they are now taking a stronger line because of their antipathy to the Ethiopian movement. We must telegraph & call for the reason, if the report is correct.'⁶⁰ The reason given – and accepted – was 'that participation of natives in such a conference would have demoralizing effect on them'.⁶¹ Most disastrously, when Natal proposed to implement a poll tax that would precipitate the so-called rebellion of 1906, the Colonial Office commented pedantically:

A poll tax is an unpopular tax on account of its directness and inequality. It was commonly employed in the Middle Ages and indeed was in this country the cause of the rebellion of Wat Tyler in 1380. It was used in France ... before the Revolution and even now appears to survive in some American States ... but it has been very generally given up. If however Natal likes to revert to medieval methods of taxation I do not see that that is any business of ours.⁶²

Famously, when the conflict broke out the government of Natal maintained that taxation had nothing to do with it. Responsibility lay with the 'doctrines and seditious teachings of those connected with Ethiopian movement'.⁶³ The Colonial Office agreed, 'The Ethiopian movement is no doubt the source whence danger to S. Africa is mainly to be feared'.⁶⁴

For the future founders of the ANC their experiences during Natal's war on African Christianity must have been sobering and deeply disillusioning. They had been present as part of several of the delegations that paraded through the office of the Secretary for Native Affairs. They had held long and anguished discussions with missionaries and each other. It made no difference that no prominent African Christian had associated with Bambatha and the other 'rebels' of 1906-1907. They receive no credit and a substantial share of blame from the government. In May 1906 Governor McCallum sent the Colonial Secretary, Lord Elgin, an account of the humiliation he had imposed on John Dube in punishment for articles written in *Ilanga lase Natal* early in the crisis. Dube, he reminded Elgin, was educated in America, is a pronounced Ethiopian, and during the Boer War was arrested under martial law by the Military for seditious teaching'.⁶⁵ In the verbatim account he enclosed of the interview held in his office, McCallum begins by reminding Dube

It is not the first time that your name has been brought before me. Three or four years ago your name was not too favourably mentioned to me. It was considered then that you were taking up a line which was the result of certain teachings you

⁶⁰ Henry Howard, Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Salvation Army International Headquarters, London. To Lyttelton, 9 May 1904, CO179/230.

⁶¹ Telegram from Officer Administering the Government of Natal (Henry Bale) to Lyttelton, 21 May 1904, CO179/229.

⁶² H. Lambert minute of 16 May 1905 on Conf. 1, 20 April 1905, CO179/231, BNA.

⁶³ Telegram Gov. Natal to Secretary of State, 15th Feb. 1906, No. 1, GH1467, Natal Archives.

⁶⁴ Minute of A. Keith, 12 Feb. 1906 on telegram, McCallum to Elgin, 11 Feb 1906. CO179/231, BNA. The same line would be taken by James Stuart in his official history: *History of the Zulu Rebellion 1906 and of Dinuzulu's Arrest, Trial and Expatriation*. (London: Macmillan, 1913), p. 521). See also Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion*, pp. 334-36.

⁶⁵ McCallum to Elgin, 30 May 1906, CO179/235, BNA.

had got in America, and which were not in harmony with the relations which should exist between the blacks and white in this Colony.

Going on, McCallum claims

From the 16th March onwards I have looked through the translations of the different articles which have appeared in your paper and I fail to find, from that date up to the 11th May, one single loyal sentiment, or anything to support the Government in the difficult task it has before it. We cannot allow your paper to go on using arguments calculated to mislead and agitate the natives, particularly during these times of rebellion. I have asked Mr. Samuelson to be present because I understand that the articles, bad as they are in English, when translated, are very much worse in the vernacular, – that it is very much more difficult to express in the vernacular owing to its limited vocabulary – that the same word has often different meanings, and so you have managed to bring it about that the worst and not the best meaning can be attached to it. Is not that so, Mr. Samuelson?

Samuelson: Yes, Your Excellency.'

When Dube quietly and humbly said he had only complained of collective punishments being visited on innocent people. Now McCallum assumed his cloak of Supreme Chief.

His Excellency: Mr. Dube, you are Bantu. You know very well yourself that according to Bantu custom it is tribal and not individual responsibility that is attached to any disturbance of this nature. Is that not so, Mr. Dube?

Dube: 'Yes, Your Excellency.

His Excellency: As the Government have carried out the Bantu custom, perhaps you can now tell me where the injustice comes in?

Dube: I expected the English Government to deal more justly with the natives than the Bantu custom would have done.'

Passing over that apposite observation the Governor insisted that an apology be printed in *Ilanga lase*. Dube offered to do so.

His Excellency: I am glad to hear that, as it is practically an acknowledgment that a mistake had been made by you. ... You will find from our newspapers that even the white people, who are the ruling race – and I presume you acknowledge that we are the ruling race – have determined that there shall be no discussion on native affairs while rebellion exists. In the same way I say to you, as editor of this native paper, that we expect you, your educated friends and all of you in fact to lend us your influence instead of stirring up mud at the present time; to give us your assistance by advising the chiefs and members of tribes rightly. Do you understand?

Dube: I understand, Your Excellency.

On seeing the apology subsequently printed in the *Natal Mercury* one Colonial Office official commented 'Mr. Dube's fangs seem to have been extracted painlessly', while another cautioned sagely that the interview is 'is not I think suitable for inclusion' in the papers on the Natal troubles to be printed for Parliament.⁶⁶

A month later the long hand of the governor also stretched out to England in a vain effort to have Pixley Seme denied entrance to legal studies at Oxford. 'From notices in public prints', he told Lord Elgin, 'it appears that a Kaffir named Pixley Seme, a student at the Columbia University, America, has been posing as a Zulu Prince. As it is

⁶⁶ Minute by R V Vernon, 27/6/06 and H Graham, 27/6/06, on McCallum to Elgin, 30 May 1906, CO179/235, BNA.

stated he proposes to go to the Oxford University' the university authorities should be informed 'he has no pretensions to the rank of a Zulu Chief at all.' Interviewed at Worcester College, Seme stated 'that he is a Zulu, and that he is only a Kaffir in the sense that all Zulus are Kaffirs. He denies altogether that he has posed as a Zulu Prince. He is a graduate of Columbia University, and gained the Gold Medal for public speaking. This brought him much to the front, and the New York Press persisted in describing him as a Zulu Prince.'⁶⁷

The college admitted him, he went to the bar and eventually followed Dube as ANC president. But, thanks to the bitter experiences of Natal's long war on African Christianity, they entered into their duties in a far more sombre and realistic frame of mind than had animated the founders of the Natal Native Congress in July 1900. Then prominent G H Hulett, a prominent Natal Planter and son of the serving Minister for Native Affairs, J Liege Hullet took the chair at a meeting where 'after prayers and hymns, loyal resolutions were passed and votes of thanks proposed to the Queen'.⁶⁸ By the end of the following decade such occasions were practically unthinkable. Christianity made African leaders less, not more acceptable to white colonists and their governors. Their religion had been shown to be inseparable from the many other disadvantages imposed upon them, and would continue to be integral to the struggle of the next century.

⁶⁷ McCallum to Elgin, 2 June 1906, CO179/235,, and A C Clark, Acting Registrar, Oxford to Secretary of State for Colonies, 30 Oct. 1906, CO179/235.

⁶⁸ Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion*, p. 71.