CHAPTER II

THE RISE OF THE INDEPENDENT CHURCH MOVEMENT

The Bantu independent Church movement in South Africa already has a history. It is a history of bold aspirations and of baffled endeavours. With all its weaknesses it is part of the story of Christian Missions. I shall here limit myself to the *general trend* and the main *types* of the independent church movement.

(1) HISTORY OF CHURCHES OF ETHIOPIAN AND ZIONIST TYPE

The first so-called "Ethiopian" church was founded on the Witwatersrand in 1892. Before that date there had, however, occurred certain attempts at Bantu emancipation from mission authority. We begin by recording briefly these apparently sporadic movements.

In the Hermon congregation of the Paris mission in Basutoland there was in 1872 a minor secession, caused no doubt in part by the changes in ecclesiastical organization which the mission underwent in that same year.[1] Of greater importance was the tribal church, organized in 1884 by the Wesleyan minister, Nehemiah Tile. This man was one of the group of prominent African leaders within the Wesleyan Mission Church who had been ordained as a result of John Kilner's "deputational hurricane" in 1880.[2] As Tile was criticized by a European missionary because of his strong Tembu-nationalistic sympathies, he left the church in 1882. Two years later he formed the "Tembu Church", with Ngangelizwe, the Chief of the Tembu, as its visible head. The cause of this important secession was not only opposition to European control, but also a positive desire to adapt the message of the Church to the heritage of the Tembu tribe. As the Queen of England was the head of the English Church, so the Paramount Chief of the Tembu should be the *summus episcopus* of the new religious organization. When Ngangelizwe's successor, Dalindyebo, got into difficulties with the Government authorities of the Cape Colony because of this Church, he withdrew his support and returned to the Mission fold. Of a similar character was a secession from the London Missionary Society at Taung, Bechuanaland, in 1885.

The tribal chief Kgantlapane took an active part in the founding in that year of the Native Independent Congregational Church, and he appointed ministers of his own choice to lead this tribal Church. In 1889 a young and over-zealous missionary of the Berlin Mission to the Bapedi, J. A. Winter, anxious to give the African Church leaders more responsibility, formed a secessionist church, the Lutheran Bapedi Church. And in the same year an evangelist of the Anglican church in Pretoria, Khanyane Napo, formed his own organization, the "Africa Church".

These few attempts, within various tribes, to found national or tribal religious organizations, as distinct from the denominational and inter-tribal Churches organized by the missions, were so far, however, sporadic. When these ideas spread to the Witwatersrand the whole movement took a new momentum. Among the thousands of African labourers who were attracted to the work in the gold mines there were also small groups of Christian workers, mostly Wesleyan local preachers. In 1895 there were in Johannesburg no less than sixty-five such voluntary preachers of the Wesleyan Church, coming from various parts of the country.[3] Some of them had had relatively responsible positions in the rural districts from which they came. In the Golden City they were unknown and grew restless. One of their leaders, a Wesleyan minister, Mangena M. Mokone, opposed what he regarded as racial segregation within the church, as seen by there being one conference for European leaders, and another for African leaders.[4] He resigned from the Wesleyan Church in 1892, and together with other malcontents in Pretoria formed a new religious organization (ministers, evangelists, teachers and ordinary adherents of the Wesleyan Church). The name of the new Church was of great significance —the "*Ethiopian Church*". Mokone's group was not limited by any mere tribal interest. The Church leader on the Rand had a wider horizon and appealed to many tribes. There was a programme in the very name of the new Church. Mokone had heard missionaries who referred in their sermons to Ps. 68: 31, "*Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God*", and to other references such as Acts 8: 27, and who interpreted this as a promise of the evangelization of Africa. Mokone took this to mean the self-government of the African Church under African leaders. Among Mokone's colleagues were some of those destined to take a leading part in the future of the Ethiopian movement, such as Khanyane Napo, S. J. Brander, Jonas Goduka (Tile's successor), and James M. Dwane.

The one outstanding leader among them was Dwane, a Gaika of a chief clan. Like Tile and Mokone, he was an ordained Wesleyan minister (born 1848, ordained 1881). Gifted as a speaker, he was sent to England in 1894–95 to represent his Church and solicit financial support for the work. On his return to South Africa, he quarrelled with his mission authorities about the disposal of this money, and left the Mission Church. In 1896 he joined forces with Mokone and Brander, and because of his ability and forceful personality, at once became the leader of the new movement.

Both Mokone and Dwane had through different sources heard of the African Methodist Episcopal Church among the Negroes of the United States. At a conference in Pretoria in 1896—a momentous year in the history of South Africa and the Rand—all the independent Church leaders met, and they decided to seek affiliation with this Church. Dwane was chosen to go to America in order to obtain such affiliation. A few facts should be mentioned here about the Church in question.

The African Methodist Episcopal Church was founded in Philadelphia in 1816 by the Negro preacher Richard Allen († 1831) who already in 1787 had withdrawn from the White Methodist church because of the colour bar practised there.[5] Allen is said to have been consecrated to the episcopate when the new church was founded in 1816. Allen's church started mission work in Liberia in 1820. At the time of Dwane's visit to the United States this Negro Church in America had grown to include some 800,000 communicants. It was relatively well organized, and its church paper, *Voice of Missions*, was read by Ethiopian leaders in South Africa. Through Dwane's representations the Ethiopian Church was formally incorporated in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Dwane was appointed General Superintendent of the South African work.

On his return to South Africa he succeeded in persuading all the Ethiopian leaders to follow him into the A.M.E. fold. Together with Khanyane and Mokone, he approached the Government of the Transvaal for formal recognition of the Church, which was granted. Dwane's ambitions took him further. He asked Cecil Rhodes for the right to extend his church to Rhodesia and the Zambezi, and he planned to collect funds to be sent to King Menelik of Abyssinia in order to extend mission work to the Sudan and Egypt.[6] This expansion caused much upheaval in the work of the mission societies. Congregationalists, Presbyterians and others felt the repercussions of

Dwane's broad advance. Thus, to the unrest caused by war and rumours of war in South Africa was added the Ethiopian tension within the Mission Churches.

In 1898 the A.M.E. bishop, H. M. Turner, paid a five weeks' visit to South Africa. In this short time the Negro bishop was accorded a triumphant welcome by the Ethiopians. He managed to achieve some startling results: the work was organized in regional conferences, Turner ordained sixty-five ministers, consecrated Dwane as assistant bishop, and bought a site for a future centre for higher learning (in Queenstown). Through Turner's visit the membership figure of the church was more than doubled, mainly through affiliating malcontent groups and congregations from Mission Churches. The membership was suddenly inflated to over 10,000.[7]

In the following year, 1899, Dwane went to America once again. His aim was both to get financial support from the Negro Churches of the United States for the work in South Africa, and to have Turner's consecration of himself confirmed by the Negro Church as a whole. He was not content with being only an assistant bishop, a position which emphasized the inferior status of the African Church as compared with the Negro Church. He had discovered that the Ethiopian programme, "Africa for Africans", conflicted with the linking up of his church with an American (Negro) Mission Church. The fact that Turner's action in consecrating Dwane as assistant bishop did not receive the full recognition of the other Negro bishops made Dwane finally realize that he should break with the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

On his return to South Africa Dwane took an extraordinary step. He sought contact with the authorities of the (Anglican) Church of the Province, and was informed by them that the African Methodist Episcopal Church "could not hand on Episcopal Orders because they had never received them".[8] The outcome of Dwane's deliberations with the Anglicans was the formation in 1900 of the "Order of Ethiopia" as part of the Church of the Province. On the part of the bishops of the Province this step was an act of real statesmanship and of great promise. Dwane was eventually ordained a deacon and later for some years was Provincial of the Order. Energetic efforts were made to give theological instruction to those of Dwane's subleaders who had followed him into the Anglican Church. Dwane did not, however, succeed in carrying the majority of Ethiopians with him. The main stream of the Ethiopian movement

continued in the channels of the African Methodist Episcopal Church or of other independent groups that sprang up during and after the Boer War.[9] In 1908 the adherents of the Order were only some 3500.[10] Dwane died in 1915 and was succeeded by another African as Provincial. Generally speaking, the Order of Ethiopia can hardly be said to have succeeded in attracting the broad masses of Ethiopians. Furthermore, it has remained exclusively Xhosa. As an attempt on the part of a great Mission Church to tackle the Ethiopian problem in a spirit of understanding and deep concern, it is, so far, unique in the mission history of South Africa.

At the same time as Dwane left the Ethiopian movement, the importance of the American connexions of the African Methodist Episcopal Church was emphasized by the United States Negroes sending one of their ablest men, L. J. Coppin, to South Africa as their first resident bishop. The A.M.E. as it is called among the Zulus has had some good leaders, such as Bishops D. H. Sims and R. R. Wright. They have shown a keen interest in Native education. The Wilberforce Institute, near Johannesburg, with Teachers Training and Theological Departments, is aiming at becoming a South African "Tuskegee".

American Negro missionaries were, however, just as much foreigners and strangers in the eyes of the Ethiopians as the White missionaries. Therefore the same kind of propaganda was directed against the A.M.E. as against the "white" missions. Thus, for instance, Brander, one of the oldest Ethiopian leaders, claims that the A.M.E. "took, like the old 'Papae Romanorum', all moneys collected for the interests of the church in Africa to America, and there expended them obviously on purely American interests and not on Ethiopic interests".[11] Because of this, and for similar reasons, Brander founded his own church called the Ethiopian Catholic Church in Zion, in 1904, breaking away from the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Another important Ethiopian Church must be mentioned, the African Presbyterian Church founded in 1898 by P. J. Mzimba of the United Free Church of Scotland. Mzimba was, like Dwane, widely travelled. He represented his race at the Jubilee Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland in 1892, and after founding his Church he visited America in 1902. One of the reasons why Mzimba broke with his mission and with that great missionary statesman, Dr. J. Stewart of Lovedale, was that he had been given considerable sums of money in Scotland. On returning to South Africa, he claimed the right to allocate

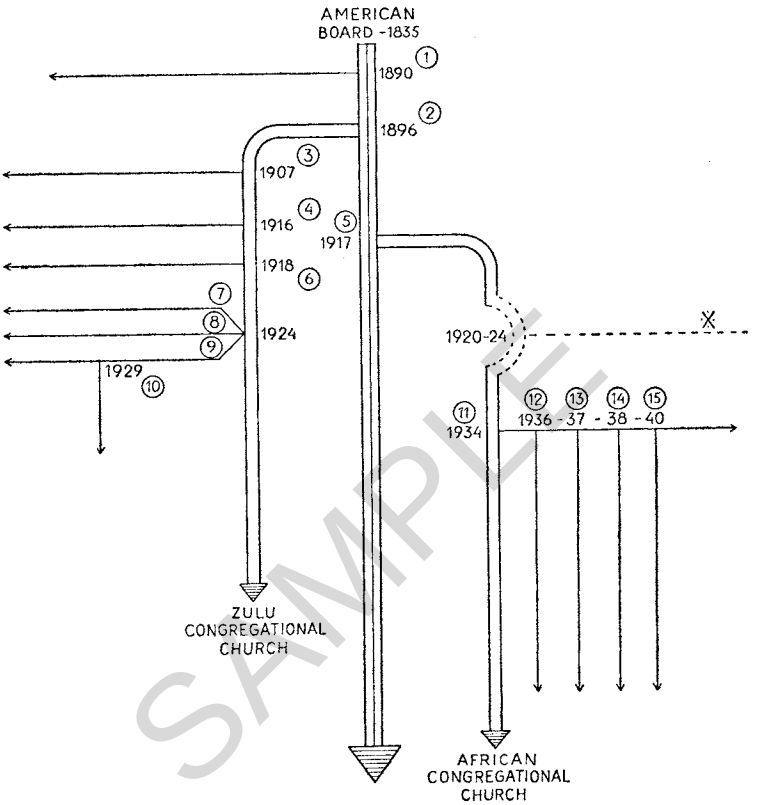
these sums to such objects as he pleased, without regard to the opinion of the Lovedale presbytery.[12] His position as a respected pastor of the Presbyterian mission congregation at Lovedale made his secession the more serious. Two-thirds of this congregation followed him. The fact that Mzimba—himself of the Fingo tribe—only carried the Fingo people with him, whereas the Xhosa section of the Presbyterian church remained unmoved by his approach, throws an important light on secessionism. Like Tile's Tembu church, Mzimba's organization was not only Ethiopian, but tribal.[13] Characteristically, the leadership of the Church was inherited by his son, L. M. Mzimba, who had had some years' education in America.[14] In parenthesis, one may mention in this connexion that a surprising number of Ethiopian leaders have for a shorter or longer time studied in America. A Natal Native Affairs Commission of 1906–7 found that up to that time at least a hundred and fifty Africans from South Africa, some of them with definite Ethiopian affiliations, had gone to America for studies. Of these, twenty or more were from Natal and were, presumably, Zulus.[15] Also in more recent times Zulu Ethiopian leaders, such as Walter Dimba and others, have had a background of some years of study in America. On this point, the Ethiopian movement opened the eyes of many Europeans in South Africa to the desirability of a Bantu centre for higher learning nearer home, and has thereby some relation with the decision to create the Bantu University College at Fort Hare, opened in 1916.[16]

Against this general background of the first beginnings of the Ethiopian movement in South Africa, I shall now sketch some of the main developments, in so far as secessions are concerned, within certain leading Protestant churches, giving special emphasis to such developments among the Zulus.

(2) GENEALOGICAL TABLES OF REPRESENTATIVE CHURCHES

"Few discoveries are more irritating than those which expose the pedigree of ideas", Lord Acton has said.[17] In seeking the root of the separatist problem we shall have to suffer such irritation. The problem in fact lends itself to a treatment in terms of genealogical tables of Churches. In a short period of time the growth of the number of Churches has been as if by geometrical progression. I choose three examples of such genealogical tables, two representing in the main Churches

which I shall describe as of Ethiopian type, whereas the third is an attempt to show the pedigree of "Zionist" Churches.



1. Zulu Mbiyana Church.
2. Zulu Congregational Church.
3. African Mission Home Church.
4. African United Zulu Church.
5. African Congregational Church.
6. Zulu of African Ethiopian Church.
7. Shibe's section of Zulu Congregational Church.
8. Zulu Shaka Church.
9. African Free Congregational Church.
10. African Free Congregational Church, competing section of.
11. Gardiner Mvuyana African Congregational Church.
12. African Congregational Church lika Mvuyana.
13. N. Laudon's section of No. 11.
14. African Native Faith Healing Church.
15. Native Primitive Church.

·X· Ephemeral union with African Congregational Methodist Church.