

Chapter 21: Final Conclusions

21.1 Reconsidering Hypotheses

At the beginning of this research (par.1.3) five hypotheses were formulated.

1. During the second half of the 20th century, the inhabitants of the eNkumane area formed a homogeneous, stable, traditional group of people.
2. During the second half of the 20th century, the Reformed Mission represented a homogeneous stable traditional Church denomination.
3. When the Reformed Mission started to work in the eNkumane area, the inhabitants of the area had no previous experience with the Gospel nor with Christianity.
4. The Reformed Mission exclusively sought to preach the Gospel without involving itself otherwise with the local community.
5. The Reformed Mission proved that 'mission' is the sole responsibility of a local church council to send an ordained minister to an area where the Word of God is not preached otherwise.

In the course of this research, these five hypotheses could not be verified on the basis of the available information. This will be demonstrated in the next paragraphs which summarize the research findings in the light of the hypotheses.

21.2 Rural History in the Context of Colonial Segregation and Apartheid

According to the evidence found in the research, the inhabitants of eNkumane can not be considered as a homogeneous, stable, traditional community. Instead, over the last one and a half century, most families lived transient lives continuously looking for work or for a place to stay. Their family histories illustrate the experiences of a rural South African people in the context of colonial segregation, Apartheid and poverty.

It was found that the earliest common memories relate to the flow of people from the northern parts of present day KwaZulu-Natal in a southwesterly direction escaping violence and repression during the first half of the 19th century. The migration flow was stimulated by the establishment of commercial farms established by immigrants from European origin who entered the southern parts of the present KwaZulu-Natal around the middle of the 19th century. In the course of the second half of the 19th century, the population influx was followed by a flow of people out of the area, migrant labourers who went off to newly developing diamond and gold mines, thereby leaving their families behind in the rural areas in the south.

In the process, most the eNkumane area was surveyed and granted as a commercial farm called 'Groot Hoek'. When in 1920, the farm actually started to be used for commercial purposes, the original inhabitants obtained the status of labour tenants: they were allowed to stay on the farm in return for their free labour during part of the year. The need for labour triggered the influx of more labour tenants from outside the area. A second social stratum was formed by tenant farmers who also came from outside the eNkumane area. They ran the farm during the 1930's. In 1940, the Government bought the Groot Hoek farm and transferred it into the Trust Farm Groothoek. Especially during the 1960's, a great number of displaced farm labourers

entered the Trust Farm as the result of the implementation of the Apartheid Laws. They formed a third social stratum in the area.

During the 1980's, the character of the area changed drastically with the relaxation and finally the repealing of the former pass laws. Whole families started to leave, causing unrest and friction in the area. The tribal authorities were unable to control the growing violence which became overtly political around 1994, the year of the first general democratic elections in South Africa. Waves of violence depopulated the less accessible parts of the area.

Around the turn of the 21st century, the area stabilized. The Government improved the local infrastructure with provisions of electricity, water, toilets, dust roads, schools, a mobile clinic, the maintenance of a mobile pay point for Government grants and small agricultural projects such as sugarcane plantation schemes. Despite these developments, the present population can be described as a 'residue population', those who are left behind, continuously drained of, especially, men and promising youth who try to find and maintain jobs in urban, industrial areas. Some, when they fail, come back and others return upon retirement. Many youngster who return are sick, especially those who suffer from AIDS. As a result, a substantial part of the population consists of old, sick and very young people. However, improvements in transport and telephone communication have concurrently contributed to the homesteads in the area functioning as the centres of, or nodes in social webs which stretch as far as Durban and Johannesburg. For many people, the rural homesteads (*amakhaya*) are stable points in their lives. A new split seems to have developed in the community between those who are able to take part in the new mobile lifestyle and are part of extended social webs and those who lack the expensive options of transport and cell phone facilities and so are left behind.

21.3 Missionary Project by a Reformed Church in Kampen

According to the evidence found in the research, the Reformed missionary project in eNkumane during the second half of the 20th century, did not represent a homogeneous stable traditional Church denomination. In 1944, a split in the Reformed Churches led to the formation of the Free Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. One of the issues at stake was the belief that a local congregation with its own Church Council was a full representation of the Church. Accordingly, several Free Reformed Churches started their own missionary project, convinced that the church has to be a missionary church. One of these churches was the Free Reformed Church in Kampen, which established a missionary project in eNkumane. Initially, the project was strongly Sender and home church orientated and it stood in an old tradition of Reformed thinking about 'mission'. Yet, it was heavily affected by church developments in The Netherlands, including another schism during the 1960's and the growing influence of the evangelical movement during the 1970's affecting the cooperation of the missionaries in eNkumane who started to disagree about issues such as the importance of the Reformed Creeds and the gifts of the Holy Spirit in a missionary situation.

21.4 Early Christian Presence in eNkumane

According to the evidence found in the research, the inhabitants of the eNkumane area

had previous experiences with the Gospel and with Christianity, before the Reformed Mission started to work in the eNkumane area. Already during the population influx into the area during the first half of the 19th century, Christians also moved into the area, the most prominent example being a community around James Allison. This particular community of people with different backgrounds came from Swaziland and established the 'Indaleni Mission', a Christian working and training community south of what would later have become the Richmond Village. Other missionary projects in the immediate surroundings of eNkumane were the Springvale Mission (established in 1858) and the St Bernard Mission (established in 1910). In the course of the 20th century, several Christians moved into the eNkumane area as labour tenants. Most of them were related to the Methodist Church or to the Ethiopian Church in the western part of the Richmond district. For a short while, during the 1950's, evangelists of the Apostolic Church had been active in eNkumane and a pattern of home prayer meetings was maintained especially by some women in the area.

21.5 Reformed Mission in eNkumane

According to the evidence found in the research, it could not be confirmed that the Reformed Mission exclusively sought to preach the Gospel without involving itself otherwise with the local community. Even the very identity of the Reformed tradition would make the mere concentration on preaching and teaching very difficult. This identity can be summarized with the characteristic faithfulness to: the Bible as the Word of God; the *Reformed Creeds* as an orthodox formulation of faith; the *Dordtse Church Order*; the independent authority of local Church Councils; the ongoing process of reformation of the church and of the lives of the church members living in a covenant with God. The relevance of the Word of God for someone's daily life was something that might be expected from the Dutch missionaries themselves.¹

Almost from the start, the Reformed Mission became involved with assistance to members of the local population. The help took the form of, for example: a clothing project; a boarding school, a shop and a clinic at the Mission Post; the introduction of the telephone; the extension of roads; a project to protect a natural fresh water spring. With these projects, the Reformed Mission helped others and at the same time, established its own Mission Station. The Station became one of the major employers in the area, a place where help was offered and a major point of contact with the wider world. Gradually, the Reformed Mission turned from a Sender-based approach (the proclamation of the Gospel) to a more receiver-orientated approach (organization of church life and the relief of needs). All activities took place under the control of the missionaries. As the local population felt no ownership of the missionary project, it is difficult to establish whether it contributed to the development of an indigenous church or to the development of the community. The Reformed Mission followed a tradition set by other missionary projects which had been active in the surroundings of eNkumane for about a hundred years. These projects were known for their pattern of church, school, fields, shops and training facilities.

¹ The conviction that God's Word is not available in isolation is stressed in John 1:14: "The Word became a human being and, full of grace and truth, lived among us."

The members of the Reformed Church at the Mission Station were predominantly drawn from the third stratum of the population of the *Trust Farm Grootboek*, the families of labourers who had been evicted from neighbouring farms during the 1960's. The Mission also contacted labourers still living and working on surrounding commercial farms who, generally, had little certainty about their existence and not even about the place where and the way in which they would be buried. Otherwise, the Reformed Mission and the local population did not really integrate. Not only was the Mission a foreign project from the outset, but many of the inhabitants of the area themselves felt like 'outsiders', either tracing their origin to, especially, the northern parts of present day KwaZulu-Natal, or nurturing dreams of a future in more urban and prosperous areas.

21.6 African Reformed Mission

According to the evidence found in the research, it could not be proved that 'mission' is the sole responsibility of a local church council to send an ordained minister to an area where the Word of God is not preached otherwise. Exclusive responsibility is difficult to reconcile with missionary characteristics such as sharing and reciprocity. As a result of its narrow scope, much of the work of the Reformed Mission was done in isolation. Locally, the Reformed Mission presented itself as an exclusive alternative: it offered a new way of worshiping God based on the Bible and in opposition to traditional worship. It presented Jesus in opposition to the ancestors, not as their fulfillment.² It called the people into a new community which came together for Sunday services in buildings built by the Reformed Mission. It was left to this new community to find its own identity as a European Initiated Church among other European and African Initiated Churches.³ However, in their multi-denominational context the inhabitants of eNkumane experienced the Reformed Mission as a continuity rather than a discontinuity or a new phenomenon.

If the Reformed Mission Enkumane is to play a meaningful role in the 21st century, it will have to re-evaluate its position. It will have to realize that the context in which it operates, changed tremendously by the end of the 20th century, not at least because the isolated position of missionary projects in homelands is something of the past. If, as defended in this research, missionary work is the movement of a church beyond its boundaries into the margins of Gods Kingdom, these margins must be re-identified. For the Reformed Mission Enkumane these

² The categorical opposition to ancestral practice seems to contradict the attempts by the Church Fathers during the first centuries of Christianity to re-evaluate and integrate their traditional heritage: "In the thinking of the early Christian writers... the Gospel of Jesus Christ became... the heir to all that was worthy in the past" (K. Bediako, 1992, p.439-440). "[Jesus] is Lord over the living and the dead, and over the 'living-dead', as ancestors are also called" (K. Bediako, 2000, p.27); reference to Romans 14:9. An attempt to integrate "traditions orally received" into "higher and holier truths" was made by Rev. H. Callaway at the Springvale Mission (par.12.4).

³ European Initiated Churches well known in the eNkumane area are the Anglican, the Methodist and the Roman Catholic Churches. African Initiated Churches in the eNkumane area are the St. John's Apostolic Faith, several Zionist Churches and the *Ibandla lamaNazaretha*. P. Mwaura (2004, p.107) identifies the following characteristics of African Initiated Churches: "Pneumatological emphasis, spiritual call of a prophet, healing and deliverance, community, liturgy, the role of women, socio-political engagement and [not relevant for the *iBandla lamaNazaretha*] Christology."

margins were found in its existence among the people in eNkumane during a period in which they were purposely, politically and economically discriminated against. Whether or not the message shared in numerous sermons and lessons has made an impact, is to be assessed by others. Beyond doubt, a major aspect of this message was that its missionaries were sent by Jesus to share their lives. In reality, however, the Mission itself only entered the lives of the local people in a marginal way: at funerals, at prayer meetings and in occasional gatherings. In a similar way, the local population occasionally entered the lives of the missionaries, like, for example, when a church elder visited this researcher at his sickbed, read part of the book of Job and explained to him that he should not see his sickness as a punishment by God.

However, it has to be determined where these margins for missionary work are now to be found. Instead of being isolated, many people have become part of a new mobile lifestyle. New margins emerge where people from rural areas get lost in urban surroundings. Other challenges are formed when people return to rural areas, especially the old, the sick, and those who failed for other reasons to maintain themselves in urban surroundings. From its present position the Reformed Mission Enkumane is perfectly situated in the rural areas to form a refuge for these new groups of marginalized people.

New margins are also found on the borders between church denominations, especially on the borders between European Initiated and African Initiated Churches. Several African Initiated Churches have established themselves in the eNkumane area by the end of the 20th century. Contacts between churches of different denominations are rare and superficial. In these contacts the Reformed Mission with its long standing tradition of Bible studies might play a stimulating role. At the same time its (lack of) thinking and practice in relation to ancestors will be strongly challenged. Finally, the Reformed Mission might have a role to play in the racial divide which is still predominantly present in South Africa. The *Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika* were one of the last church denominations to integrate on the level of regional and national councils. On a local level the integration still has to start. With its presence as an overseas missionary project in a rural Zulu surrounding it gives a clear message about the inclusiveness of God's Kingdom and about the priority of the people who are counted less in the society as a whole. Whether this message will be understood will depend on all involved.

At present, the Mission does not play a part in the memories of old people about a former existence around the uThukela River, nor in the dreams of young people to go to Durban or Johannesburg. It has been accused of taking advantage of the people, ruling and misusing them. Nevertheless, in these things it has tried to uphold what is said about Jesus: "Of his own free will he gave up all he had, and took the nature of a servant. He became like a human being and appeared in human likeness. He was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death - his death on the cross. For this reason God raised him to the highest place above and gave him the name that is greater than any other name. And so, in honour of the name of Jesus all beings in heaven, on earth, and in the world below will fall on their knees, and all will openly proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."⁴

The future and survival of the Mission depends on the way it reorientates itself in a changing South Africa and in a changing Europe. As it works in the margins of several social

⁴ Philippians 2:7-11.

networks it is ideally situated for those people who come back home (*emakhaya*) for several often troublesome reasons. Its clinic is visiting people living in remote places along the uMkhomazi River and cares for victims of the HIV epidemic. Its Mission Station is equipped for youth and training work. The Mission's contacts form a wide web including several remote congregations totaling about 200 church members. The Station might be developed further, for example, as a study centre or as a care centre. In a rapidly changing world, it provides a unique opportunity for people from different backgrounds to live, work and worship together.⁵

21.7 Final Suggestions

Further research in the same or in similar missionary situations should take the following into account. Firstly, many inhabitants of rural areas such as eNkumane live transient lives. Some families manage to stabilize their position in rural areas, thanks to their social webs stretching into industrial, urban areas. These webs enable them to find the necessary jobs and incomes to maintain their rural homesteads. Other rural families continue to live transient lives looking for places to stay and for a livelihood from Government Grants or from temporary jobs in the forestry or on farms. The ongoing drain of especially men and youngsters from rural into urban areas is counterbalanced by the return of retired or sick people and people who for other reasons fail to find or maintain urban jobs.

Secondly, it must be taken into account that no church is monolithic or fixed. The international or intercultural missionary encounter should not so much be seen merely as an exchange of information, a message or money, but as an attempt to establish a relationship, it should be seen as an opportunity to share in each other's history. The quality of this relationship will be a message in itself.

Thirdly, it must be taken into account that Christianity is found in many forms and that it is difficult to assume that God is absent in any area. Instead, the focus of interest in a missionary situation should be the question as to where the margins of God's Kingdom are to be found and finally, in what form the sharing of the Gospel takes place in these margins.

⁵ E. van der Borgh (2009, pp.5, 13): "Racial, ethnic and national identities are unfinished ecclesial and ecclesiological business for Christian churches all over the world. In this respect, South Africa is an important case study that has global implications... One can fear that Sunday morning will continue to be the most segregated hour in South Africa... for a long time coming." B. Westerink (RMA, 2006#, p.15): "Er is een onderlinge band en kennis aan elkaar nodig om elkaar daadwerkelijk tegemoet te treden en te ontmoeten. De kerk beschikt daarover. Met de uit zending voortgekomen overzeese relaties heeft ze goud in handen. Een unieke band die vele fysieke en culturele grenzen overschrijdt, en in staat stelt om elkaar te ontmoeten en schouder aan schouder samen te werken."