

THE ABUSE OF A GENIUS



EDWARD MULLER KECE MNGANGA -1872-1945

The Story of Father
EDWARD MNGANGA
The First Zulu Catholic Priest

By

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INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I was at the home of my daughter, Phumla, and her husband Tutu Mnganga when Tutu told me that there was a Roman Catholic Priest in his family who had studied in Rome. I was interested because I had written a Ph.D thesis on the Theological Education of Africans in the Anglican, Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Ministers in South Africa during the period 1860-1960.

I visited the offices of the Roman Catholic Church in Durban where I contact Bishop Mlungisi Pius Dlungwane of the Diocese of Mariannhill. The Bishop welcomed Tutu Mnganga and myself warmly and introduced us to Father Raphael Mahlangu, a lecturer at St. Joseph's Scholasticate, Cedara outside Pietermaritzburg. Father Mahlangu gave me valuable information and many pictures which are included in this book as well as articles which appeared in a Zulu Newspaper, "*UmAfrika*". Many of these were written after the death of Edward Mnganga in 1945.

I am very grateful to Professor Philippe Denis of the University of KZN who passed on to me the unpublished Ph.D. thesis of G. S. Mukuka from which I have learnt a lot about the life and work of Father Edward Mnganga. Later Mukuka's thesis appeared in book form under the title "*The Other Side of The Story*". The book details the experiences of the Black clergy in the Catholic Church in South Africa (1898-1976) and is published by Cluster Publications (2008).

My thanks are due also to my friend Professor Paul de Cock of St. Joseph's Scholarsticate for his knowledge about Edward Mnganga and also Father Enrico Parry of St John Vianney Seminary in Pretoria who gave me information about Mnganga House which was an off-campus residence for Theological students which was named after Edward Mnganga.

I am grateful also to members of the Mnganga family for oral tradition stories which they gave me in many conversations.

The book begins with the development of an indigenous ministry in Southern Africa. Chapter two deals with the first four black Priests of the Roman Catholic Church in Southern Africa. The rest of the book deals with life and work and ministry of Edward Mnganga.

CHAPTER 1

TOWARDS AN INDIGENOUS MINISTRY IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Among all the missionary bodies working in Southern Africa, the idea that Africans could share with the missionaries in the propagation of the Gospel, took time to gain acceptance. The African was seen as primitive, uncivilized, uncultured, with no background of education or philosophy in the Western sense. Such religious ideas as did exist in Africa were dismissed as pagan or heathen. That this type of person could understand the basic concepts of a literary and philosophical religion like Christianity, to the extent of sharing in its propagation, was unthinkable.

According to J. du Plessis, the first African to be ordained in Southern Africa was ordained by the Dominican Fathers of the Roman Catholic Church in Mozambique. He was the eldest son of **Chief Kaprazine**, who was captured as a prisoner in a tribal war, was sent to India and entrusted to Dominican Fathers for instruction. He was baptized with the name of **Miguel** and ultimately became a Dominican Friar, and earned the reputation of being the most powerful Preacher in Southern Africa. In 1670 the General of the Dominican Order conferred on him the title of Master of Theology, which, according to J. du Plessis, is equivalent to our present degree of Doctor of Divinity. He died as Vicar of a Dominican Convent in India.

The first tentative steps towards an indigenous ministry in Southern Africa were taken when the London Missionary Society ordained **Arie van Rooyen** of Blinkwater near Fort Beaufort in the Eastern Cape, in 1849. Arie van Rooyen, born at Tsitsikama in 1812, was “remotely of Dutch extraction”. Today he would be called “Coloured”. He became a Christian at the Mission station of Theopolis, under the ministry of the Rev. Mr. Baker. About the year 1830, he moved to the newly formed Kat River Settlement where he later became Pastor. Here he built a congregation composed of Africans and “Coloureds”. He was ordained without a formal Theological education apart from the private training he got from the Missionaries such as Mr. Calderwood. By the time he died on the 7th March, 1880, the congregation had grown to about 300 members. His two sons; James and Timothy were educated at Lovedale and entered the ministry of the Congregational Church.

The next ordination of an indigenous minister in Southern Africa was that of **Tiyo Soga**. He was born in 1829, a son of one of the Chief Councilors of Xhosa King Ngqika, who reigned in the early 1800s over large tracts of what is now known as the Eastern Cape Province. Soga received his earliest schooling at the mission school at Tyhume, north of the present

town of Alice, and in July 1844, he proceeded to Lovedale. Then he was sent to Scotland. In November, 1851 he entered Glasgow University as a Matriculated student, where he received the same Theological training as all ministers of the Church of Scotland. He completed his Theological course in June 1856, and on the 10th December, 1856, he was licensed to preach the Gospel by the United Presbyterian Presbytery of Glasgow. He was ordained on the 23rd December, 1856.

Soga returned to South Africa with his Scottish wife, Janet Burnside, in April 1857. He worked as missionary in charge at Mgwali, in the centre of the growing Cape Province, where an emerging class of educated indigenous people was gaining a foothold. He was invited to take preaching appointments in a number of white churches throughout the Colony. Everywhere he felt the honour, the burden and the responsibility of being the first ordained black man in a Colony that had deep-rooted prejudices against black people. Here, Soga built a church and a school that continues to this day, and also at Tutura, in the old Transkei. He was a prolific hymn writer in the Xhosa language. Most notably he participated in the translation of the Bible into the Xhosa language in collaboration with other Missionaries in the Eastern Cape. He worked diligently on the translation of the Bible until his untimely death on the 12th August, 1871 at the age of 41.

Soga's Ministry left a legacy of work and Ministry that set the bar of achievement for many generations of African ministers and intellectuals.

The Moravians, who, with the arrival of George Schmidt in this country in 1737, were the first Europeans in the South African mission field. They set an example for other missionaries who were to come to the country. The Moravian missionaries hesitated to commit the preaching of the Gospel to recently converted "heathens". With their long experience they stated:

"When converts from among the heathen are established in grace, we would advise not immediately to use them as assistants in teaching, but to act herein with caution and reference to the general weakness of their minds and consequent aptness to grow conceited".(Moravian Texts)

The Methodists, who began their work in South Africa in 1816, followed the Moravian advice and example and made no plans for the training of Africans for the ministry. But two things shook them:

1. In 1865 at the Grahamstown District Meeting five African men were presented as preachers to be received on trial. They were Charles Pamla, William Shaw Kama and Petros Masiza from the Annshaw Circuit and John Lwana and James Lwana from the Peddie Circuit. Although there was no precedent for this, the District Meeting felt that

the applications of these men should be accepted and recommended to the Annual Methodist Conference in Britain which was the only body that could make decisions regarding acceptance of candidates for the Methodist Ministry in South Africa.

2. At the conclusion of his mission of 1866, William Taylor, an American Methodist Evangelist, strongly recommended that Africans should be used for the work of evangelism in the country.

When Taylor listened to the addresses of men like Charles Pamla, Boyce Mama, Joseph Tile, William Shaw Kama, he exclaimed:

“These are the men to evangelize Africa.”

With authority from the Methodist Church in Britain the first Methodist Theological School was established at the Healdtown Missionary Institution near Fort Beaufort in the Eastern Cape, and opened on the 7th October 1867, with the following as the first Theological students, Charles Pamla, James Lwana, John Lwana and Boyce Mama.

The first Methodist ordinations in South Africa took place at Healdtown on the 26th February, 1871, when **Charles Pamla, John Lwana** and **James Lwana** were ordained. **Boyce Mama** was ordained the following year.

The Scottish missionaries at Lovedale had from the beginning believed that it was part of their duty to train an indigenous ministry. Indeed this is envisaged in the Prospectus of the Glasgow Missionary Society.

R.H.W. Shepherd writes:

“Almost from the first, the Scottish missionaries sensed the importance of using Bantu agents for the reaching of Bantu hearts. In November, 1823, Thomson raised the question with the Directors in Glasgow of how far the Society would encourage and support Native teachers working under the direction of missionaries”.

An earlier event also had a bearing on later decisions to ordain Africans to the Ministry. In 1837 "the missionaries asked the Society in Glasgow that a Seminary be established 'for the upholding of Christ in this country when we are in our graves'".

The first Annual Report of Lovedale in 1841 looks into the dim future and declares prophetically:

“It is at least probable that a hundred years hence this will be a Christian country, and that Lovedale Institution, or some other to which it may give birth will be sending forth its hundreds of Africa's sons as messengers of the Cross eastwards and northwards into countries of which we know not as yet even the name”.

The Directors of the Glasgow Missionary Society then adopted a plan for training and employing 'Native helpers'. What the Scottish missionaries realized was

that Africans could best be evangelized by Africans who understood their people, their culture and their customs more than was possible for a foreigner.

At a meeting of the Board held at Lovedale on the 14th August, 1845, it was decided unanimously that 'as soon as possible, provision should be made for completing the original design of the institution by adopting means for the preparation of students for the work of the ministry'.

When Sir George Grey, Governor of the Cape, visited Lovedale, in February, 1855, one of the agreements he made with the missionaries was:

“To raise up among them (the Africans) what might be called an educated class, from which might be selected teachers of the young, catechists, evangelists, and ultimately even fully qualified preachers of the Gospel”.

But believing as they did in high academic attainments before a person began to study Theology, it was only in 1869 that they started training their first candidates for ordination. In the 1879 Annual Report of Lovedale we find a rationale for the training of Africans for the Ministry. It declares:

“In connection with the course of Theological Training, carried on at Lovedale, and the supply of students, it is not too much to say, that it is full time for missionaries to overtake the wide spread native population of South Africa; perhaps they will hardly continue the present numbers beyond the lifetime of those who are now in the field, and there is therefore, an urgent necessity for raising up a Native Ministry”.

As Dr. James Stewart of Lovedale saw the position in 1869 the following considerations made training an indigenous ministry not just a theoretical priority, but a possibility:

- Their work of evangelizing, civilizing and educating had produced a group of Africans who could no longer be hindered from sharing with the missionary in the work of evangelism.
- There was by this time (1850 - 1870) a significant number of educated Africans who could be trusted with the work of propagating the Gospel.

The number of converts was growing to such an extent that the White missionaries from overseas could not alone cope with the number of people and churches to be cared for and the distances to be covered.

- An imported clergy come to a new country with a lot of obstacles to overcome.

- They have to learn the language, culture, outlook and way of life of the people before they can be reasonably sure that they are getting the Christian message across.
- Therefore, the most natural teachers of men of a certain race or nation, are, all other things being equal, men of the same race, language, and colour.

Similarly, it was the ideal of the American Board of Missions, working in Natal, “from the beginning to train Christian leaders and to ordain them to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments”. Their first African minister, Rufus Anderson, was ordained at Mzumbe, in 1870.

Dr. Stewart of Lovedale believed that because of the high mortality rate of European missionaries in Central Africa an African agency from South Africa might be better able to propagate the Gospel in those parts of the Continent.

The first ordinations of Black Ministers in South Africa by the Church of Scotland Mission were those of:

Mpambani Jeremiah Mzimba,
Elijah Makiwane,
Walter Rubusana.

We shall now give short accounts of their life and work.

MPAMBANI JEREMIAH MZIMBA(1850-1911)

Mpambani (called Pambani by whites) was born in 1850. He entered Lovedale in 1860. In May, 1865 he was apprenticed to the Printing Department. When the Theology classes started he attended them in a part-time capacity. On the completion of his apprenticeship he joined the theological class as a full-time student, and was noted for his diligence and exemplary conduct.

At the end of 1871 the Lovedale Education Board granted him a Special Certificate of Honourable Mention, the highest mark of approbation the board could give, “for the general excellence of his moral character and unselfish conduct”.

He completed his Theological studies at Lovedale at the end of 1873, and was ordained to the pastoral charge of the “Native Church” at Lovedale on the 23rd December, 1875. He thus became the first African to be trained and ordained by the Free Church of Scotland in South Africa.

He and his colleague, Elijah Makiwane, were, for a decade, the only African Ministers in their Church. As a minister with a country-wide reputation Mzimba exercised a considerable influence. He moved freely as

an equal of his white colleagues. In the ecclesiastical, social, educational and political matters of his day he exerted a great deal of influence throughout the country. He also attended the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland in Edinburgh.

Because of dissatisfaction with the Free Church Presbytery of Kaffraria he seceded in 1898, and formed the Presbyterian Church of Africa.

For years he contended for a high standard of education for Africans in general and for the ministry in particular. He died on the 25th June, 1911 at the age of 61.

ELIJAH MAKIWANE

Elijah Makiwane was born at Sheshegu, Victoria East, in 1850. He attended school at Ncera and Healdtown before going to Lovedale where he ultimately became one of the first students of theology. He was a diligent, able and successful student.

Like Mzimba, at the end of 1871, he received a Certificate of Honourable Mention. In 1875 he was licensed as a preacher by the Free Church Presbytery of Kaffraria and in July 1876, he was ordained to the pastoral charge of Macfarlan, north of Alice.

He played a leading role in the ecclesiastical, social, educational and political affairs of his day and was the first President of the Native Education Association. He was described by the *Cape Times* as “the most talented and most promising Native Missionary this country has yet produced since the late Tiyo Soga’s time”.

WALTER RUBUSANA

Walter Rubusana was born at Mnandi near Somerset East on the 21st February 1858. He went to Lovedale in February 1876, gaining the Elementary Teachers Certificate with Honours in 1878. After teaching for one year he returned to Lovedale at the end of 1880 to do the theological course which he completed at the end of 1882. He taught with great success at Peelton, near Kingwilliamstown, until he was ordained to the ministry of the Congregational Union of South Africa in 1886, and was stationed at Peelton where he exercised an outstanding ministry.

In the elections of 1910, he stood as a candidate for Tembuland in the Cape Provincial Council. He won and thus became the first African to sit on that body. He wrote a “*History of South Africa from the Native Standpoint*”, (A Xhosa version was entitled “*Zemk’iinkomo Magwala ndini*”) for which he was awarded a Ph.D. by McKinley University, when he visited the United States. He was the first African to serve as Moderator

of the Midland Missionary Committee of the Congregational Union of South Africa.

Anglican Bishops were forced "by sheer pressure of work and the shortage of manpower to use African agents either as catechists or as priests". In a pastoral letter 'to the Kaffirs connected with the English Church Missions', dated March 8th, 1876, the then bishop of Grahamstown wrote:

"...Calling in men to the fold of Christ is the work we 'have now in hand. This must be accomplished by Kaffirs preaching to Kaffirs... To this end we are going to begin at once to gather a Native Ministry Fund on all our missions. Towards this fund we hope that all Kaffirs who have an interest in mission work will do their best to contribute. It will be devoted solely to paying the needful salaries of Kaffir Clergy and Evangelists".

The first African to be ordained in the Anglican Church (The Church of the Province of South Africa) was **Peter Masiza** who was made Deacon in 1873, and ordained to the Priesthood on St. John the Baptist's Day in 1877, by Henry Callaway, Bishop of the Diocese of Kaffraria, now the Diocese of St. John's.

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN SOUTH AFRICA

The Roman Catholic Church, in the form of Portuguese sailors, existed in the Cape before any European missionary body. Ironically, they were one of the last Christian denominations to train and ordain indigenous Ministers.

In 1501-2 the Portuguese built a small chapel at the site of the present town of Mossel Bay. Although there was considerable Roman Catholic missionary activity in Portuguese East Africa the missionaries avoided the Cape since the murder of Catholic priest, Francisco d'Almeida, in 1510. The history of the Roman Catholic Church in Natal began in 1635 when a Portuguese ship ran aground near Umzimkulu River on its way from Goa in India to Portugal. There is evidence that there were a number of Catholics living at the Cape of Good Hope at the end of the seventeenth century.

The Dutch Reformed Church could be said to have begun at the Cape with the landing of Jan van Riebeeck at the Cape on the 6th April, 1652. The Dutch East India Company, which ruled the Cape at that time, declared that the Dutch Reformed Church was the official Church of the Cape Colony and the Roman Catholic Church was specifically forbidden to operate within the Cape Colony.

In 1814 a Benedictine Bishop, Dom Edward Bede Slater was appointed Vicar-Apostolic of the Cape of Good Hope. In January 1820 Father Scully was appointed to minister to the needs of the Catholic inhabitants. In 1826 a Dutch Roman Catholic Priest, Father Theodore Wagenaar, was appointed to minister to Catholics in Port Elizabeth, Uitenhage, Grahamstown, Bathurst and Graaff-Reinet in the Eastern Cape. In 1847 Pope Pius IX agreed to the appointment of Dr Aidan Devereux as the first Bishop of the Eastern Vicariate. Father Thomas Murphy was the first Catholic priest to be ordained in South Africa. The history of the Roman Catholic Church in Natal began with the arrival of Father Murphy in Natal, in November 1850. He ministered in Pietermaritzburg and Durban.

Bishop Jolivet who was then at Pietermaritzburg allowed some Trappists under Prior Francis Pfanner to establish a monastery in the vicinity of Pinetown, a short distance from Durban. Traveling on an ox wagon to the interior from Durban the wagon got stuck on a small hill near Pinetown. The Prior decided they would establish their monastery there. They called the place Mariannahill (Maria-Anna-Hill). On the 27th December 1885 Francis Pfanner became Abbot of the Monastery of Mariannahill. In 1909 Pope Pius X granted separation of Mariannahill from the Trappist order and approved the foundation of the Congregation of the Missionaries of Mariannahill.

Abbot Francis Pfanner condemned the social norms of South African Society which treated the African people as inferior. He condemned racial segregation, and defended the disadvantaged, indigenous population of South Africa. He said:

“I cannot stand discrimination between the races. What matters is what we are before God, not the colour of our skin.”

(A.L. Balling: *THE ADVENTURE-MONK*, p.39).

From the beginning he refused to separate whites from blacks in Church and at School. His school was for African and European children with a boarding department for black and white boys. He said:

“They sleep side by side, eat at the same table, get the same food, sit on the same benches. Why should a white boy be disgusted by a black or vice versa? Every child is given a hot bath before he is taken in and fitted out with new clothes. There are just as likely to be lice in the white head as in the black....”(A.L.Balling, op. cit, p.70).

However, the church has not always lived according to these ideals as may be seen in what follows.

From the beginning of its work the Church grew and developed in all the provinces of South Africa. It built famous schools and hospitals for the service of communities wherever it established itself.

In an article entitled *The Church under Apartheid*, written by Stuart C. Bate, as a contribution to “*The Catholic Church in Contemporary Southern Africa*”, edited by Joy Brain and Philippe Denis, (and Published by Cluster Publications 1999), Stuart Bate says that the Roman Catholic Church is “A racist Church Mirroring a Racist Society”.

He goes on to say that the Church existed as two largely separate entities; a white church and “a mission church for blacks”. He further says:

“The Settler Church reflected the racist attitudes of white people in South Africa. In 1947 racism permeated all aspects of white society (p.151). The separation of society and social institutions in a racially divided way was an unquestioned cultural value. White people did not want, nor expect, to mingle with black people on any level at all other than in a master-servant relationship at work or in the home”.

Bates gives examples of white racism in the Roman Catholic Church. He says that in 1952, there was a celebration of the arrival of the first Oblate Missionaries in South Africa a hundred years earlier. At this celebration “all the organizers were white”. Of the seven days of celebration only one day was given as “Africans’ day” where the African majority of Catholics had only one day of celebration devoted to them. He says that in 1947, the church decided to set up a National Seminary for the training of priests, but the South African Catholic Bishops Conference (SACBC) decided that “for the time being...it was not advisable” for the church to have one Seminary built for all the priests of the church. Instead “the Bishops built a **Black** National Seminary in Hammanskraal in 1963 only fifty kilometres north of the **White** national Seminary in Pretoria”. These and other examples prove that the church reflected the racist attitudes of white people in South Africa whose endeavour was to keep the church white at all costs.

This attitude permeated all levels of church life including the training of priests and relationships between black and white priests. The clashes between black and whites priests, as will be seen below, especially with the first four Roman Catholic black priests, have to be seen in this light.

CHAPTER 2

THE FIRST FOUR BLACK PRIESTS OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN SOUTH AFRICA.

The first four black priests of the Roman Catholic Church all came from the Diocese of Mariannhill, near Durban, the birth place of the Roman Catholic faith in Natal.

They were;

Edward Müller Kece Mnganga, (1872-1945)

Went to Rome in 1887 and was ordained in Rome in 1898. Returned to South Africa 1898. Died April 1945.

Aloysius Gugu Mncadi (1877-1933)

He was sent to Rome on the 24th August, 1894 and was ordained in 1903. Died of liver cancer 28th October 1933.

Andreas Mdontshwa Ngidi (1881-1951)

Born in 1881. Left for Rome on the 22nd September, 1899. He obtained Doctorates in Philosophy and in Theology. He was ordained in Rome on the 25th May, 1907.

Julius Mkhomazi Mbhele (1897-1956)

He went to Rome in 1899 and was ordained in Rome on the 25th May, 1907, at the same ceremony as Ngidi. Both were ordained in the Lateran Basilica by the Vicar of Rome, after being received by Pope Pius X.

Before returning to South Africa Ngidi and Mbhele visited Switzerland, Germany, Holland and England, and returned home in 1907.



Picture: Four first black priests: Ngidi, Mncadi, Mbhele, and Mnganga (seated)

It is very difficult to find details of the early life history of the first African Priests of the Roman Catholic Church in South Africa. In the histories of the Church rather fleeting references are made. They are mentioned occasionally in passing when something else is discussed.

The Missionary writers of books on this period seem disinterested in the life story of these early African Priests. They are concerned mainly with recording their own exploits and successes. The official church records do not provide Obituaries of these priests as was often the case in many other churches. Yet, the life stories of the priests or pastors of any church denomination are important because they record the footprints of these early pioneers and serve as milestones of church history.

George Mukuka, who has conducted a lot of research into the first black Roman Catholics puts it this way:

“It is disappointing that, in the literature available on the black Catholic clergy in South Africa, none of the books and articles reflect a critical in-depth study of the early clergy; instead, they deal with the subject on a more superficial level”.

In an article written in 1950 by Thomas Respondek entitled, **“Die Erziehung von Eingeborenen zum Priestertum in der Marianhiller Mission,”** the only acknowledgment of black priests is to mention their presence in Mariannhill. They crop up again a decade later in William Eric Brown’s attempt to write the entire history of the Roman Catholic Church in Southern Africa, from its beginnings to 1960. Once more, black priests receive only scant mention in relation to the “problems they had with authority”.

The fact that all four first African priests had “problems with authority” casts a bad reflection on the attitude of the church authorities towards them. None of the books I have read attempts to explain the causes of the conflicts between any of the four Black Priests and their White Roman Catholic officials. It is strange that all four first Zulu Roman Catholic Priests should have clashed with their White “superiors”. It is reasonable to assume that their White “superiors” were jealous because these Zulu Priests were trained in Rome and had received the highest training that Rome could give. They all came back with doctors degrees in philosophy and or theology. Most of the White missionaries, however, were not that educated. In racist South Africa of that day this was intolerable. Faced with one of these Zulu Priests who had just returned from his studies in Rome, Bishop Delaille of Durban is reported to have said:

“Where do I put an educated Zulu Priest?”

He is also reported to have said that Blacks cannot be Priests because they cannot cope with celibacy.

One cannot help feeling that the fact that these four Zulu priests studied in Rome and were ordained in Rome, came back with Doctors degrees in Philosophy and Theology made the church hierarchy uncomfortable, to say the least. In Rome and in their travels in Europe they were treated as human beings, but when they came back to South Africa they were treated as “Natives” who must “know their place”. It seems that in spite of their training and academic achievements in Rome, back home in South Africa it was felt that they were not yet suitable candidates for the priesthood.

In his book titled, *“Mariannahill, A Study in Bantu Life and Mission Effort”*, Francis Schimlek devotes a chapter to Benjamin Makhaba who was a teacher and later a Catechist who, in 1884, wished to enter the Monastery. Schimlek says that Education in the African mission field could be effective if Africans themselves became agents of Education and that the Christian faith would be “strong and permanent” if education included the training of an African indigenous clergy.

He asserts:

“Mariannahill began early to think of training Bantu priests. As far back as 1887 the first candidate for the priesthood, a boy of ten, who had been baptized two years before, was sent to Rome to study, and several others followed in subsequent years”. (pg.236).

This “boy of ten” who was “the first candidate for the Priesthood” is obviously Edward Mnganga, but the writer does not think it is important to give the boy’s name. Similarly he produces a picture of the “First Zulu Priests in Mariannahill”, but he does not bother to give the names of these First Zulu Priests. This bizarre anonymity is mirrored in the lack of a picture caption below and is a metaphor for the desire that they remain invisible in the church. The picture is from Church archival material at Mariannahill.



Picture; First Zulu Priests in Mariannhill Charles Mbengane (left) Edward Mnganga (seated) and Julius Mbhele. The picture was taken in Rome.

One would have expected that the church would have been proud of this first crop of its labours and would have kept their names for the sake of the history of the church and for posterity. Yet, it is clear the Church at the time would rather not.

Established church history shows that the Roman Catholic Church sent several youths to Europe for training as secular priests. Secular priests were then understood to be local priests who were under the direct authority of the Bishop of the Diocese.

Schimlek also suggests that it should be borne in mind that, “these Zulu youngsters who left their homes and underwent strict training in a strange climate and unfamiliar surroundings showed exemplary courage and developed surprising qualities as students overseas”. (pg. 243)

Then he continues:

*“Yet all who have acquired some experience of missionary life and have observed the fate of those first four Zulu Priests with a sympathetic heart will admit that **it was scarcely the right thing to do**. Perhaps the time had not yet come for such an experiment, but it was definitely a miscalculation to send the boys for their training overseas”.*

Conversely, the excellent academic performance of the first four Zulu Priests in Rome shows that to send them to Rome at that time was precisely the right thing to do and that this act was definitely **not** a miscalculation.

It is unfortunate that a missionary who was a leader of the church should think like this. Due to this kind of thinking in the church, the programme of sending black priests to study in Rome was suspended. No black priests were sent to Rome for study for a quarter of a century, presumably because these first four black priests turned out not to be the kind of priests the church wanted.

Under pressure from some black priests

“St John Vianney Seminary named *an off-campus residence* after Edward Mnganga. “**Mnganga House**” was named after this local priest when the bishops purchased Fatima House, a residence for unmarried pregnant girls and young women, in Pretoria North. The post-intern students, or the third year theology students lived there with three formator-priests from 2001-2002. The bishops then sold “**Mnganga House**” to private developers. *Sadly, the name was not taken up into main campus in Waterkloof again, where in the meantime, two blocks of students residences were added*”.

(This is an extract from a letter written to me by Fr. Enrico Parry, Rector of St. John Vianney Seminary, dated 3 April 2009, the italics are mine). This again is a sad story which shows that the church had no interest in preserving the memory and the history of its own pioneers.

By contrast let us take the story of Tiyo Soga. Soga was the first Black South African to study overseas and the first to be ordained as a Minister of any of the Church Denominations in South Africa. He was sent by the Scottish Missionaries to study in Scotland in 1846, and he returned to South Africa in 1857. He was appointed as a Minister in his own right to start a Mission Station at Mgwali, in the Eastern Cape. He began his work there as a Minister in charge, not as an assistant to anybody. The United Presbyterian Church which sent him overseas trusted that he had been trained for his job and could make his own decisions. At Mgwali he built a church and started a school which continues to this day.

The relationships between Soga and the Scottish Missionaries were such that they regarded him as a colleague and in correspondence among themselves they spoke of him as “Our brother and friend Soga”. After more than ten years at Mgwali he was invited as “first Missionary” at Tutura, in the Transkei where he served until his untimely death in 1871. To show the regard that his Church had for him, one of the Scottish

Missionaries, the Rev. J. A. Chalmers, wrote a full biography of the Rev. Tiyo Soga. Later other biographies of Soga were written by Donovan Williams and another by Gideon Khabela. It is worth noting that Chalmers and one of Soga's sons, Tiyo Burnside Soga, wrote a biography of Soga in the Xhosa language. This shows that the Scottish Missionaries who trained and developed Soga were interested in his growth and development as a Minister of the Church.

This does not mean that Soga had no problems as a pioneer black Minister in the South Africa of his day. But it does mean that his church recognized him as a Minister and pioneer on an equal footing with other Ministers in his church. I could write about the experiences of other early black Ministers in other church denominations. But I have chosen to write about Soga as the first ordained black minister of another church in South Africa and compare his experiences and treatment by his church with the experiences of Edward Mnganga, the first Zulu Catholic priest, and his treatment by his church. It is worth noting also that Soga went overseas in 1846 and returned in 1857. Mnganga went overseas in 1887 and returned in 1898 (but according to Helen Gamble in "*MARIANHILL a Century of Prayer and Work*" page 151, Mnganga went overseas with A.T. Bryant in 1885). Both Soga and Mnganga spent about eleven years overseas, and there is a difference of about forty years between the ministry of Soga and that of Mnganga.

Some of the early black clergymen in other church denominations had problems with some missionaries in their churches, and some broke away from their churches to form their own churches. But none of the major church denominations ever stopped the training of their black clergymen for that reason. By contrast no indigenous Roman Catholic priest was ordained between 1907 and 1925. During that period there was no training of indigenous priests in the Roman Catholic Church in South Africa until 1925. After the ordination of the first four Zulu Roman Catholic Priests, the training of black Catholic priests for the Priesthood resumed only in 1925, after Rome had issued an instruction regarding the training of indigenous clergy in the *Encyclical Maximum illud* of 1919.

In this *Encyclical* Pope Benedict XV stated:

“Notwithstanding the Roman pontiff's insistence, it is sad to think that there are still countries where the Catholic faith has been preached for several centuries, but where you will find no indigenous clergy, except of an inferior kind...[and] to all appearances, the methods used in various places to train clergy for the missions have, up to now, been inadequate and faulty.”

Charles Pamla, one of the first Black Methodist ministers to be ordained on the 26th February 1871, is given many pages in John Whiteside's *History of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of South Africa*. There is a short biography of Charles Pamla and a Mission Station called Pamlaville, which shows the church's appreciation of his life and work.

The official policy of the Roman Catholic Church was that indigenous clergy should be trained and be used in the evangelization of the local people. However, in some cases, the white missionaries were very uncomfortable with what they were doing. For that reason they delayed the ordination of the local clergy and ordained them "at a later date when it seemed expedient to do so" (Brain, p. 253).

In keeping with the official policy local clergy were sent to Propaganda College in Rome, but when they came back their lives were made miserable. They were rejected and frustrated, they were discriminated against and they were never given their status as priests. Having studied and ordained in Rome and having been treated as human beings in Rome, they came back and were treated as "Natives" in the country of their birth. Although they had received full training in Rome, equal to any in the world, when they came back to South Africa they were made "assistants" to the white clergy.

In the words of George Mukuka, a Roman Catholic priest, they were made "perpetual assistant priests and were never put in charge of any missions". They were treated like "glorified altar boys or second class priests... In fact all four black priests were treated with suspicion, as if the missionaries believed they were not ready to be priests. This is evident in the way they were always spied upon and tested for their vocations". They were also subjected to false accusations.

Father Mncadi was accused of talking "wildly about a massacre of all the Whites except the missionaries of whom he was to become the Bishop". He was also accused of "inciting the Blacks to revolt". In *"Catholics in Natal 11"* p.253, Joy Brain writes about two of these men and says:

"Both these young men had considerable trouble in settling down in Natal after their experiences in Rome which did not differentiate between seminarians on grounds of race or background. Once back home they were brought face to face with the colour bar".

George Mukuka states that:

"When Ngidi went to visit the Mariannahill missions with another white Priest, he was told to sleep in the Kraal and eat with the female domestic worker in the kitchen. He was called a *kaffir* on numerous occasions. In Mbhele's case he was suspended due to the

fact that he owned a farm, and asked not to say mass until he left the Diocese of Mariannhill and Zululand and went to live in Swaziland.”

Mukuka continues to say:

“ The fact that Mnganga was arrested and taken to an asylum clearly shows that he had no protection or security within the Church... Ngidi continually felt alienated because he was treated differently from the white Priests. Mbhele was continuously alienated from the other Priests because he owned a farm; in addition other allegations concerning alcohol abuse and philandering with women were also levelled against him. In most cases, these Priests felt ‘homeless’ in that they did not belong to the Church. They always had to apologise to their superiors rather than assert themselves. ‘They were not treated as insiders who belonged to the Church in a way equal to that of white missionaries’... From the day Mnganga was ordained in 1898, up to the time Mbhele died in 1956, these Priests lived a life of continuous struggle, a struggle to be part of the Church to which they belonged ... They had been to Rome and acquired the doctorates in Theology and Philosophy, which, in itself created some problems. Most of the missionaries were not that educated and so, very likely, there were ‘feelings’ of jealousy towards these Priests ... Tragically, these ground-breaking, intelligent achievers found themselves rejected, isolated and alone in a kind of cultural no-mans land”.

On the 22nd January, 1970, the Rev. Dr Anthony Mabona who was on the staff of St. Peter’s Theological Seminary at Hammanskraal and four other black Roman Catholic priests, published in the *Rand Daily Mail*, a Manifesto expressing their grievances against the Roman Catholic church. They wrote, inter alia:

“In spite of our ordination to the priesthood we have been treated like glorified altar boys”.

Father Raphael Mahlangu reports that Bishop H. Delaille, OMI, said that blacks can’t be priests because they could not cope with celibacy.

It is to the credit of the first four indigenous priests of the Roman Catholic Church in South Africa that they did not break away from the church to form their own churches as some of the indigenous ministers of the other churches did. In spite of the difficulties they had with their church they retained their faith in God and remained priests in their church to the end of their days.

FATHER EDWARD MNGANGA

Against this background let us look at the **Life and Work of Father Edward Mnganga** about whom Joy Brain says:

“Father Mnganga, after a few years in Zululand, had a mental breakdown and had to spend many years in an institution receiving treatment”. (p.253). People who knew Mnganga testified that he never had a mental break-down. In writing about Edward Mnganga the historian has to depend on sketchy details that are gleaned from histories of the church or Missionary records and from personal testimonies of those who knew him in the days of his flesh. Looking at these the following facts can be stated about the life and work of:

EDWARD MÜLLER KECE MNGANGA -1872-1945

According to Linda Nicholas Mnganga, father to Tutu Mnganga, the area called Mangangeni in Mhlatuzane, near Mariannahill, was their home until they were driven away by the missionaries when they came and established a Mission Station which they called Mariannahill, near Durban in Natal. It was here that Edward Mnganga was born in 1872. According to information from Father G. Sieber of Empangeni the Baptismal Register of Zululand has his names appearing as Edward Muller Kece Mnganga. It appears as if as a student in Rome Mnganga used the name Müller as may be seen in correspondence with a former fellow student later. G.S. Mukuka says:

“As most of the missionaries could not pronounce his surname Mnganga, when in Rome, adopted the surname Müller. In some archival sources this name is sometimes used.

In his book “*MARIANNHILL – A Study in Bantu Life and Missionary effort*” Francis Schimlek writes:

“It was decided to send one of the Zulu boys with him (A.T. Bryant) to the Propaganda College in Rome to study for the priesthood. The boy was Edward Mnganga, one of the Shozi boys who had been sent to the Mariannahill school. His father Jamkofi, gave his consent to this choice of vocation, but when it was whispered into his ears that the father of a future priest should think of becoming a Christian himself, Jamkofi followed Dambuza into exile rather than submit to the demands of the Christian faith”.

However, according to oral tradition among the Mnganga family, Edward Mnganga’s father was one of the first two Zulus to be baptized at Mariannahill two years after the mission was established.

Bishop Mlungisi Pius Dlungwane of Mariannhill writes:

“Abbot Francis had asked the teachers to look out for boys who might have a vocation to the priesthood. Young Edward showed zeal for prayers and great devotion at Mass. In the morning he attended school, and in the afternoon he worked and learned in the blacksmith shop”. (*First Four African Priests pg 3*).

Edward Mnganga was a pupil at the “Latin School” at Mariannhill, from 1884 until 1887 when he was sent to Rome by Abbot Francis Pfanner to study for the Priesthood. A Church historian says: In November 1887, “a promising boy” (Edward Mnganga) from the ‘Latin School’ at Mariannhill presented himself, as a candidate for the Priesthood. He was sent to Rome in 1887 by the then Prior Franz Pfanner to study for the Priesthood at the Urban University of the Propaganda Fide, also called Collegium Urbanum.

The college had been established in 1627 and placed under the direction of the Congregation of Propaganda. Its main purpose was to train candidates from all nations all over the world. The Pope had established the College in order to ensure that young clergymen could be trained not only in countries with no national colleges but also in those that were endowed with such institutions. He thought that it was desirable to have in every country, priests who were educated at an international institution where they could get to know one another and establish future relationships. To this International University young Mnganga was sent for his philosophical and theological studies. At first he had to study Latin, the language of instruction at the College, and then proceed to study Philosophy and Theology.

Mnganga travelled to Rome with a young Mariannhill Priest from England who had been given by Abbot Franz Pfanner the name “David” after he admitted him to the novitiate. On the completion of his course Mnganga was ordained in Rome in 1898 and returned to South Africa the same year as a Doctor of Philosophy. He was the first Zulu Catholic Priest. In fact, he was the first black Roman Catholic priest in the whole of Southern Africa. The Archives at the Mariannhill Monastery describe “the astonishment and the joy of especially the girls at a Mission school in Pinetown, when the Prior of Mariannhill arrived with the Priest”. This was the first Zulu Catholic Priest they had ever seen.

Mnganga was a very clever man. He had begun studying Latin while at the Latin School at Mariannhill. When he got to Rome he had to continue studying Latin as that was the medium of instruction at the Urban University of Propaganda. Thus an article in *Izindaba Zabantu* of

7 September 1928, reports that when Mnganga returned from Rome he spoke Latin, English, Italian, German, Greek “like his mother tongue”. He was a genius. In Rome he excelled in his studies of Philosophy and Theology obtaining the degree of Doctor of Divinity (D.D). A.L. Balling, in his brief biography of Abbot Francis Pfanner, reports that:

“Among the first black children who came to school at Mariannahill was one who later became Dr Edward Müller Mnganga, ordained priest in Rome around the turn of the century”.

Articles that appeared in “*UmAfrika* of 21 April 1945, after his death, refer to him as “Rev. Fata Edward Mnganga, D.D”. Thus he became the first ever Black Doctor of Divinity (D.D) of any church in Southern Africa.

FATHER EDWARD MNGANGA AND FATHER DAVID BRYANT

On his return to Natal Mnganga did not find favour with Bishop H. Delaille, OMI, of Durban, who did not know where to place a black priest who was a Doctor of Divinity. So the Bishop appointed Mnganga as assistant to Father David Bryant at Ebuhleni in the Diocese of Eshowe. Father Mnganga was to take charge of the Boarding School as well as a number of outstations as far as Nongoma. This is the same Bryant who had travelled with Mnganga on their way to Rome in 1887.

Here is a brief biography of Bryant: Anthony T. Bryant was born in London on the 26th February, 1865, the son of a printer whose business was situated near London Bridge railway station. He was well educated at a private boarding school in Blackheath, Kent, before going to Birkby College, London, to study history and languages. He was recruited by Father Franz Pfanner of Mariannahill in Natal who was then visiting London trying to get people who could work in his Mission in Natal.

Bryant left London in August 1883 and arrived in Durban 35 days later. Father Franz Pfanner admitted him to the novitiate, conferring upon him the name “David”. While working on the Mission Bryant studied Philosophy and Theology in his spare time. He was appointed “Director of Education” and acted as Head of the educational projects of the Mission. In time Bryant learnt the Zulu language. In 1887 while on a trip to Europe he was asked to take with him young Edward Mnganga who was going to Rome to study for the Priesthood.

But now Bryant had become an important Social Anthropologist. He was the first to write the history of Mariannahill. He became “one of the greatest authorities on the Zulu peoples and their lifestyle”. He had been in the Transkei for some years. In October 1896 he moved from the Transkei to Zululand. During his stay in Zululand he had collected material for his Zulu Dictionary, his study of Zulu Medicine and the History of the Zulu

people. He published the first Zulu newspaper “*Izwi labantu*” and also edited the first Zulu Catholic newspaper, *Ndabazabantu*. He compiled the first Zulu dictionary which was published in 1903. He made the term “Nguni” referring to Zulu and Xhosa-speaking people fashionable in academic circles. In recognition of his original and distinguished work in the fields of Zulu literature and language Bryant received the Degree of Doctor of Literature from the University of South Africa in May, 1939. For about three years he was appointed Lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg. He was supposed to know Zulus better than Zulus themselves. This is the Bryant to whom Edward Mnganga was appointed to be an assistant.



Father David Bryant - Picture from *Mariannahill A Century of Prayer and Work* by Helen Gamble

Being the first Black Priest in his church, having been highly educated overseas, having been treated as a human being overseas a clash was bound to occur when working with a white missionary who claimed to know Zulus better than Zulus themselves. To appoint a highly educated Mnganga and make him an assistant to Bryant was a recipe for conflict. He could not tolerate a white man who claimed to know Zulu and Zulus better than himself. Mnganga was made an assistant to Bryant in translating the Bible into Zulu. With his knowledge of Greek and presumably Hebrew, he was equipped to translate the Bible into Zulu from the Biblical languages and also from the Vulgate because of his knowledge of Latin.

When Mnganga was appointed as an assistant to Bryant he was appointed to take charge of the school which was reasonable in view of his academic qualifications. He went from house to house to get boys to attend his school. Mnganga was very successful in the running of the school, as well as in the running of Mission stations in the area, much to the dislike of Bryant. Natalis Mjoli reported to the researcher (G.S. Mukuka) as follows:

“I still have few people to testify to the fact that when Mnganga had to go out to the stations which extended as far away as Nongoma on horseback, he had to be away for two or three weeks. Whenever he returned, some of his best students had been expelled by Bryant. Mnganga took exception to this, because he could not understand. If the students had misbehaved, Mnganga thought, Bryant should have waited for him so that they could decide the issue together. To his surprise, whenever he returned from the outstations his best students had been expelled for no apparent reason. When he inquired, he was not given an answer...he was also neglected to his status, after all, he was nothing.”

This went on repeatedly for some time until Mnganga could no longer tolerate it. Mnganga worked at this mission station from 1898 to 1906. As would have been expected there was a lot of conflict between Mnganga and Bryant. According to Vitalis Fux in *Vergissmeinnicht*, the difficulties Mnganga faced were **“white racism, human faults, passion and jealousy.** These dangers grew so much that it managed to destroy his soul. His ideas of a priest and holy faith on one side and the difficulties from the outside and a cruel reality on the other side fought a dangerous battle against his existence...He had to go all this way, till the height of Calvary in deep darkness. He no longer worked as a priest. Instead, he had to stay in a mental institution for seventeen years...He, nevertheless, fought a good battle and still believed in God.” (G.S. Mukuka: *The Other Side of the Story* pg 51).

In other words, Mnganga was crucified by his fellow priests who would not commit adultery but were bold enough to defy their Lord’s command to love their neighbour even if he is black.

These things go to the heart of the problem. Bryant and some of his missionary colleagues were racists although they would deny it. They hated Mnganga with a passion because of the success he had both at the school and on the mission stations. There was jealousy because of his academic qualifications. It should be remembered that Mnganga was trained and ordained in Rome. He had not been sent to Rome or ordained by any of the local bishops. These factors were enough to destroy his soul.

In oral testimonies conducted by G. S. Mukuka, Mnganga's anger is explained in the following ways:

- Mnganga was angry because Bryant ill-treated him as a Black Priest.
- Bryant touched Mnganga on a sore point, that is, he interfered unnecessarily with the running of the school. Whenever Mnganga was away for long periods, visiting his outstations, on his return he would find that Bryant had expelled some of his best students without any reference to Mnganga.
- Mnganga's vestments were burnt and buried by Bryant.
- "Mnganga found Bryant pointing to the private parts of a naked Zulu woman while studying Zulu ethnography".
- Oral testimonies from some other sources report that Mnganga translated the whole Bible into Zulu, but this Bible, together with other writings of his, was burnt by Bryant who presented his own translation of the Bible into Zulu.

Because of these problems Mnganga clashed with Bryant. He got angry. He assaulted or threatened to assault Bryant who ran to the police and reported that Mnganga was mad. Since Bryant was a white man the police believed everything Bryant reported about Mnganga without investigating the truthfulness of the charges. They went to the mission and, after much humiliation and assault at Umtunzini by the police and the magistrate, Mnganga was arrested and committed to a government mental asylum in Pietermaritzburg as a mad man where he stayed for seventeen years. G.S. Mukuka reports that according to Bishop Khumalo a priest who had been in charge of Greytown and the surrounding areas told Bishop Khumalo that Mnganga was a big tall man. He was brought to Court in Greytown to stand trial for assaulting Bryant. The magistrate felt ashamed of trying the case as evidently Mnganga was a very highly educated man.

There is no evidence that the church or the mission ever investigated the situation to determine whether Mnganga was in fact mad or "mentally disturbed". There is no evidence also that the Church ever investigated the causes of the clash between Mnganga and Bryant. Evidence from people who knew Mnganga and Bryant at the time, as well as priests and parishioners who were living at the time shows that Mnganga was not mad and not mentally disturbed. In fact, Bishop Biyase is reported to have said:

"At the end they discovered that he was very much sane...he too, was already disillusioned and angry about it. He had said that he would never go out of the asylum until the man who brought him there comes".

Mjoli reported that:

“the institution officially recognized that Mnganga was not mad. They referred the matter back to the Diocese requesting that they collect Father Mnganga. Father Mnganga was adamant, he wanted the then Bishop of Durban and Father Bryant to collect him. He wanted the people who had committed him to the asylum to come and declare that he was sane. Since they failed to do this, he stayed there. When he eventually came out he was then assigned to a mission station in the diocese of Mariannhill, later to Marianthal where I met him. I could have learnt much from him. I am sorry to say that, the people who knew much have since died”.

Many people, including parishioners, knew that Mnganga was not mad. They knew that he was a very intelligent man. Very little is known about Mnganga’s time at the mental asylum in Pietermaritzburg. He was arrested in 1906 and came out in 1922.

This is a sad story. We have little information about Mnganga’s family. We know only that he attended the ‘Latin School’ at Mariannhill and that in November 1887 he was considered “a promising boy” who presented himself to the Prior who, after consultation with his father decided to send him to Rome to study for the Priesthood. On his return from his studies in Rome nothing is said about his family or relatives. There are no records of any welcome to him on his return from Rome. We are told that when he left South Africa he travelled to Rome with a young Mariannhill Priest from England by the name of David Bryant. We learn also that Bryant was ordained the same year, that is, in 1887. If the date given for Mnganga’s birth (1872) is correct, Mnganga was only fifteen years old when he left his home. However, it is clear that he did have connections with his family as shown by the fact that in his will, which he drew before his death, he made provision for his relatives.

David Bryant appears to have been one of those missionaries who knew the African’s history, language and culture so much that they were interested in his past rather than his present. Bryant was interested in the Zulu of the past rather than in the Zulu of the present. To him Mnganga even after his return from Rome, in spite of his growth, his learning and experience, was still the fifteen year old boy he took to Rome in 1887, and he treated him as such, never as an equal and a colleague. He knew the Zulu of the past but could not face the Zulu of the present in the person of Father Edward Mnganga. Moreover Mnganga believed that:

“The salvation of the Africans must be worked out by Africans”.
(Francis Schimlek: *Mariannhill*, pg. 244).



Fr. Edward with children



**The Salvation of the Africans must be worked out by Africans
(Father Edward Mnganga).**

Picture taken from *Mariannahill-A study in Bantu Life and Missionary Effort*.
This was bound to cause conflict between Mnganga and Bryant who saw himself as Missionary as the one who brought Salvation to the African.

I had some experiences of this type of missionary.

I arrived at my new station to work under a White Superintendent. For the first six days of our stay there my Superintendent had a habit of arriving at our home when my wife and I were having supper. On the seventh day he said to me:

“You must be different; from my knowledge of black people, black men do not sit at table with their wives, they meet them in bed!”

I met a Scottish Missionary who was going to attend the same Ministers’ Fraternal meeting as myself. He asked me where I was coming from. I told him that I came from the Federal Theological Seminary. He asked if I was a student there. I told him that I was a Lecturer there. He asked where I was trained. I told him I was trained at Fort Hare, Rhodes University, Geneva, London, Edinburgh. He left me standing there and said:

“I have no time for the educated Native. Give me the red blanketed Native. Then I am at home. I have been with them for forty years”.

In other words he would have liked the Blacks at his mission station to have remained where they were forty years ago, and make no progress educationally or culturally. For blacks to improve from the state in which they were when he got there forty years ago would have meant that his position as a Missionary would have been redundant. I stood before him as a threat just as Edward Mnganga, being a Zulu, was a threat to Bryant’s knowledge of the Zulus. Having been educated and ordained in Rome and having received the best education and training that the Roman Catholic Church could offer, Mnganga was a threat to Bryant’s education as a priest, his reputation as an eminent anthropologist and as a missionary.

Bryant lost a golden opportunity of learning from Mnganga what being a Zulu in the present was like. Instead he regarded Mnganga as a dangerous competitor. Mnganga could have learned from Bryant how a European understands Christianity.

As a young Probationer Minister at Tsomo, in the Transkei, I worked under a White Superintendent and a Black Senior Minister. One day the three of us were at a Quarterly meeting of our church when the White Superintendent said something which irritated the Black Senior Minister. I had been told before that at the meeting I should sit between these two men of God, and I did. So when the Black Minister wanted to hit the White Minister I stood between them to separate them. Before we went to our next meeting my White Superintendent told me to take to the meeting a wet towel so that I could put it on his face when he got angry with the Black Minister. So Mnganga’s quarrel with his white “superior” was not something unusual. I could give many more examples.

I have said that the story of Mnganga is very sad. He was taken from his home as a young boy of fifteen and transplanted to a new world, a new culture and a new way of thinking. Being a bright boy he was able to adjust to the new situation and did well in his studies, mastering languages like Greek, Latin, German, Italian, English and spoke them “like his mother tongue”. He was so bright that some of his Zulu people, in their simplicity, thought he was mad. How can a person speak so many languages?

The church which had trained Mnganga as the first Zulu Priest in the Roman Catholic Church in South Africa, did not provide him with the kind of welcome that would befit the first ripe fruit of their missionary endeavour. Instead he was ill-treated and made miserable by a person who should have understood him better. He exercised a lonely ministry among his people and found joy in performing his missionary duties at a number of small mission stations. He found joy especially at the school which he ran, as he saw his students growing in knowledge. Being the first Black Roman Catholic Priest in the country he had no model to follow. Instead he himself became a model for the black priests that followed him. As a result of a fight he had with his White superior he was thrown into a mental asylum where he remained for seventeen years.

This great genius was thrown into a mental hospital, there to be made more lonely at seeing daily really mad people. When Bryant burnt and buried his priestly vestments he was saying to Mnganga even this priesthood on which you have spent so many years of study and sacrifice is meaningless to me. For Mnganga to whom the priesthood was everything, to burn his vestments was the very height of cruelty. If the allegation that Bryant burnt Mnganga’s translation of the Bible into Zulu (a life’s work), is true, then this must have been soul destroying and was the height of cruelty. It has been reported also by those who knew Mnganga, like his cook who died recently, that Bryant did not consider as valid sacraments that had been consecrated by Mnganga. She considered Mnganga as a holy man who triumphed over his persecution by prayer. His parishioners believed that Mnganga was a saint and a man of prayer, and that prayer was the source of his strength.

When Mnganga was thrown into a mental hospital in 1906 he was 34 years old and came out at the age of 51, he was robbed of his ministry at the height of his powers. If ever there was cruelty, this was it. If ever there was sin, this was it. Mandela’s 27 years in prison are nothing to compare with the cruelty of putting an intellectual giant into a mental asylum for 17 years when in fact he was not mad and was declared to be sane by people who were qualified to know that he was sane.

CHAPTER 4
FROM MNGANGA'S RELEASE FROM THE MENTAL ASYLUM
IN 1922 TO HIS DEATH

In 1922, Jerome Lussy, a Mariannahill priest, residing at the monastery, negotiated Mnganga's release and pleaded with Mnganga to come out of the mental asylum. After his release from the mental asylum in Pietermaritzburg Mnganga went to Marianthal and worked as an assistant priest. After all the humiliations that Mnganga suffered under Bryant and at the mental asylum, he had to reckon with racism at Marianthal. Father Raphael Mahlangu reports that at Marianthal Mnganga worked with White priests, but they had their meals separately. They had their own cook and their meals in their dining hall while Mnganga who also had his own cook had his meals in the verandah in all sorts of weather. The White priests saw nothing wrong with this.

Why should these men of God treat another man of God so cruelly just because he was black long before the advent of apartheid? Why was it necessary for him to have his own cook and the White priests to have their own cook? So even when Mnganga was free from the mental asylum he was not free from racism within the church.

It is a tribute to Mnganga's integrity and faith in God that, after the cruel treatment he received, he was willing to continue serving His Lord (not an individual) in the church, with scars on his mind and soul, to the end of his days.

Retaining his interest in education he started a Catechetical School at Marianthal. He lectured at the Catechetical School to candidates for the priesthood who had come from Europe. He wrote books and articles encouraging young people to enter the priesthood. One of the books he wrote was *"Isiguqulo sama Protestanti siteka kanjani namazwe amaningi"*.

In 1928 he contributed two articles to the newspapers *"Umlando we Bandla"* and *"Nohambo lwabangcwele"*

This is one of the few permanent recognitions of Mnganga as the first black Catholic Priest in the country. He also served at St. Joseph's Ratschitz Mission, Waschbank in Natal, from 1925 to 1928, as assistant priest. He excelled in most of his duties. When Mnganga moved to Mariathal, Ixopo in 1922 he initiated and ran the Catechetical School with the support of Bishop A. M. Fleischer CCM. Mnganga was very interested in the education of his people. He worked tirelessly to further the training of young men as Catechists. He provided bursaries for future Catechists.

Mr. Reginald Myeza who went to school at Mariathal Mission declared as follows:

“People used to say that Mnganga should be canonized as a saint. The stories that we were told were that during mass, Father Mnganga having forgotten the key to the tabernacle, it would open on its own. Then there were some other miracles which were associated with this priest. There was so much talk about him being a saintly person. Mnganga was not mentally disturbed; we were told that it was persecution by the missionary priests-- the same kind of persecution which Benedict Wallet Vilakazi experienced. When Mnganga was working in Zululand he physically assaulted Father Bryant- - *wamshaya bambizela amaphoyisa* (“Mnganga physically assaulted Bryant who later called the police and he was arrested”)

In June 1938 he wrote his will in which “he left a huge amount of money amounting to 1,063 pounds, 9 shillings and 8 pence for fostering vocations amongst the natives”.

He wrote as follows:

“I devise and bequeath all my estate and effects, real and personal, which I may dispossessed of or entitled to absolutely unto the following:-
Ecclesiastical vestments, chalice (if any), books and similar things to poor Mission Station of the *Mariannahill Vacariate*. Clothing to be given to poor Natives, especially to relatives. Money to be given to the Native Seminary and Native Familiars of St. Joseph and especially to the Native Congregation of St. Francis of Assisi, all of them in the Vicariate Apostolic of *Mariannahill,...*”.

From 1928 Father Edward Mnganga served as minister at Marianthal, Ixopo, where he was involved in education at St. Mary’s Seminary until his death on the 7th April 1945 at the age of 73. Father Edward Mnganga and Father Alois Mncadi who was ordained in 1903, are buried in one grave at Marianthal near Ixopo.



CHAPTER 5

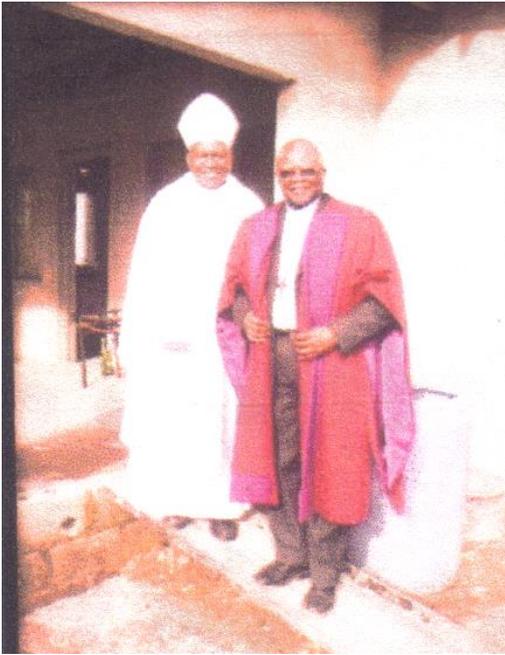
SOME RECOGNITION AT LAST.

After his release from the mental asylum Mnganga did a lot of preaching among the churches in the areas in which he served. The Catholic Directory records that he worked at Centocow Mission, near Umzimkulu, until 1924. In the church at Centocow there is a beautiful picture of Mnganga and others on a stained glass window in the church. We produce this picture below. It is the first recognition of his life's work.

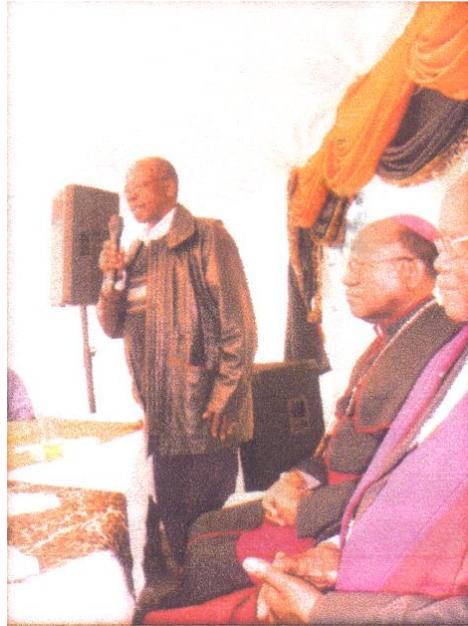


A picture of Edward Mnganga and others on a stained glass window of a church at Centocow Mission, Diocese of Mzimkhulu.

The next recognition was by the Mnganga family at Umbumbulu, South of Durban, in 2008. The celebration was as a result of a dream by a lady who was a member of the Mnganga family. She had never seen Father Edward Mnganga but dreamt that she saw him taking part in a celebration in a local church. The celebration was attended by the Bishop of Mariannhill, + Mlungisi Pius Dlungwane, Father Raphael Mahlangu and the Rev. Dr. Simon Gqubule, father in-law to Tutu Mnganga.



Bishop Mlungisi Dlungwane and Dr. Simon Gqubule



Mr. Mnganga Senior, Bishop Dlungwane and Dr. Simon Gqubule



The lady who dreamed



Phumla Mnganga, Bishop Dlungwane and Retired Bishop Simon Gqubule of the Methodist Church



Part of the crowd that came for the Celebration at Umbumbulu

Then on the 9th of August 2010, the Bishop of Mariannhill, Bishop Mlungisi Pius Dlungwane, launched the “Year of the Priests” at Mariathal Mission, Ixopo, Natal, to commemorate the memory of the First Four African Priests namely, Fr. Edward Kece Mnganga, Fr. Aloysius Gugu Mncadi, Fr. Andreas Mdontshwa Ngidi and Fr. Julius Mkhomazi Mbhele.



The grave of Fr. Edward Mnganga and Julius Mbhele at Marithal, Ixopo (Year of Priests 2010)



The grave of Frs. Edward Mnganga and Julius Mbhele and Memorial of Mncadi & Ngidi at Marithal, Ixopo (2010).

N.B. Fr. Ngidi's grave is at Inkamana Monastery- Eshowe Diocese.

The celebration was attended by many Priests from the area and many people from the surrounding congregations. The Bishop wrote:

“The courage that these priests had in focusing to their vocation to the priesthood never giving up even when the challenges were too heavy to bear, may they be a shining light to all of us priests, which is the priesthood of all baptised and the ministerial priesthood”.

(Quoted from the *“First Four African Priests”* by Bishop Mlungisi Pius Dlungwane).

APPENDIX- (Taken from the internet).

On the 5th of September 1889 Abbot Francis Pfanner blessed a little chapel at the first outstation of Mariannahill, St. Wendelin. On that occasion he preached to the small congregation of Catholics a sermon in which he said: "We have built this chapel for you, and we provide a priest for you. But a real church will have to be built by you yourself, and what is more, you will also have to provide your own priest!. Take note and understand what it means that there is need for good Christian mothers and fathers who educate their children in such a way that God can turn them into celibate priests and dedicated teachers." (St. Joseph Magazine Sept. 1889 Nr. 4)

KECE EDWARD MULLER MNGANGA

From the Shozi Reserve at Umhlathuzane, a friendly, cheerful boy of 12 years, was baptized on the 2nd of February 1885, and receive First Holy Communion two years later,(Muller was the name of his godfather in Germany).

Abbot Francis had asked the teachers to look out for boys who might have a vocation to the priesthood. Young Edward showed zeal for prayers and great devotion at Mass. In the morning he attended school, and in the afternoon he worked and learned in the blacksmith shop.

In 1887 he was sent by Abbot Francis to Rome, together with David Bryant to study first Latin, and then philosophy and theology at the College of Propaganda Fide. He was ordained a priest in 1898 and returned in November of that year as a Doctor of Philosophy to South Africa, accompanied by Abbot Amandus Scholzig.

It is of crucial importance to note that Abbot Francis who had promoted this vocation, had been silenced and been put out of action.

In the story of Edward Mnganga the person of David A.T. Bryant turns up in an absolutely puzzling way. Bryant had been recruited by Abbot Francis in London and followed him to Mariannahill where he became a Trappist and the first head master of the school for boys. After the visitation of 1892, when Abbot Francis was suspended from office, Fr. David had to repeat his noviciate, as this was considered invalid, but he decided to leave Trappist Order and work as a priest in Zululand under Bishop Jolivet.

In 1897 Fr. Bryant wrote a 12 page article in the South African Catholic Magazine (vol. VII), published in Cape Town, in which he stated from his experiences as a teacher that African children, given a chance to education, show the same degree of intelligence as white children.

He even detected a stronger gift of memorizing. "The black child is endowed with a remarkably keen perception of sense, imbued with an inherited instinct of observation, and impelled by an unabating curiosity to see all, feel all, hear all; in a word, to know all that happens to turn up in his daily experience of life".

Bryant who accompanied young Edward Mnganga on the boat that would take them to Europe (November 1887) reports the following incident. Some passengers wanted to chase Edward from the dining room table, but Bryant protested, whereupon all passengers ostentatiously left the table.

A similar experience had Fr. Othmar, who took two boys to Europe to study in Rome in 1899. On the boat he protested vehemently, because "the same fare has been paid for them as for every white passenger". The administration gave in and straightened out the affair.

In 1889 Abbot Francis lashed out in a fierce article in the Forget-Me-Not Magazine (Nr. 5-7, April 1889): " Will the time finally dawn in South Africa when people will renounce this deeply ingrained and radically evil prejudice? As long as people are not willing to do this, they will indeed tame the black man but not convert him".

TWO QUESTIONS

What happened to the vision that Abbot Francis had and also his successor Abbot Amandus ?

Amandus Scholzig was a learned, saintly man who died of cancer in 1900. He had, in 1894, sent two more candidates to Rome. They were Aloysius Mncadi and Charles Bengane.

Five years later two more bright promising young men were sent to Rome: Andreas Ngidi from Centocow and Julius Mbhele from Lourdes.

What happened to these four Zulu priests after their return from Rome in respectively 1898, 1903 and 1907 ?

They were not Trappist monks, they were "secular" priests, and the question was raised : what is their position in relation to the institute that had promoted them and had sponsored their studies?

This question came up in the Monastrey Council meeting on the 25th September 1888.

Abbot Francis made enquiries with his former professor of Canon Law, then bishop of Brixen (Bressanone). "The propagandists" i.e. the priests who studied at the College of Propaganda Fide, must work for the missions. This they must solemnly pledge before higher ordination. They are at the disposal of their local ordinary."

The crux of the matter is that the Trappists had worked towards the realization of local priests, but as "secular" priests they were put at the door of the local ordinary of the Vicariate of Natal, who had not asked for them :

Bishop Charles Jolivet was not unfavourably disposed towards them, but his successor, Bishop Henri Delalle, after the death of Jolivet in 1903 certainly was

The Trappists and later the Religious Missionaries of Mariannahill (RMM) failed to grasp that "secular priests were not members of a religious community; that they were entitled to own property for their material support; that they kept close ties with their relatives and that they had the provisions of Canon Law to guide them.

Besides this lack of understanding there came to the surface some deeply human vices in some members of the institute, particularly jealousy.

These Zulu priests were far better educated and advanced in theology than the average missionary, since they had studied in Rome. The most tragic conflict, however, occurred in the form of power struggle.

Here a great enigma presents the gifted priest Alfred Thomas Bryant. After his ordination in 1898 Bishop Jolivet assigned Fr. Mnganga to work together with Fr. A.T. Bryant, the former Father David, in Zululand, near Emoyeni, where Mnganga was in charge of the boarding school.

In her book, 'The History of FMM (Franciscan Missionaries of Mary) in South Africa', Sister Alice Cox of St Anne in Umzinto clearly states that 'whilst in Rome, Fr Mnganga had presumably met Mother Mary of the Passion.' and that 'the correspondence shows that Father Mnganga wrote to Mother Foundress on the 28th June 1901 asking for missionaries. Father Bryant followed this up on the 9th July, reiterating the request. Both letters were from Emoyeni. Eventually on the 19th October 1901, Bishop Jolivet wrote to the Procurator General of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate Congregation, Fr Lemius, and asked him to go and see Mother Mary of the Passion at 12 Via Guisti, Rome.'

Although the process dragged on, Mother Foundress agreed to send Sisters to Ebuhlani in Zululand. This was a dream come true for Fr Mnganga who initiated the official request in June 1901.

This famous Zulu linguist and ethnologist who had been so protective of the boy Mnganga on their journey and during their stay in Rome, now saw in the adult Mnganga a rival who had to be eliminated by ruthless means.

After the quarrel Bryant had Mnganga institutionalized as a "mad man" in the Government Asylum for seventeen years :

IS it a piece of historical irony that Abott Francis Pfanner who had promoted the priesthood of Mnganga, suffered a fate similar to that of his protege? Pfanner was removed from the office and sent into exile in Emaus where he spent the last 15 years of his life in isolation.

Or does their fate illustrate the Gospel truth about the fate of the Master and the Disciples ? (Mt. 10:24)

Very little is known about Mnganga's condition as a "patient" during his stay in the Natal Government Asylum in Pietermaritzburg, except that he worked in the blacksmith shop of the Institution.

It must have become clear to the authorities that Fr. Mnganga was not insane, and he was declared a "free patient" in 1911, which seems to mean that he was allowed to leave the Institution.

Fr. Aloysius Mncadi told Fr. Joseph Biegner of Emaus that Fr. Mnganga wanted those who had committed him to the mental institution to come and collect him themselves. He wanted Bryant and Bishop Delalle to declare that he was sane. But they would not do it....

In the end it was thanks to a priest, Fr. Jerome Lyssy, who had left the Trappist order, that Fr. Mnganga came out of the Asylum in 1922.

From then on until his death Fr. Mnganga worked most zealously and fruitfully in various places, chiefly at Mariathal Mission, Ixopo, where he established a catechetical school. He lectured to priest candidates from Europe who were studying at Mariathal. Later on he taught at the first Seminary for Africans, Saint Mary's, Ixopo, and in between did pastoral work in a place called Maria Ratschitz near Ladysmith. During those years he bought a farm near Wasbank and erected there a chapel and a school.

When Fr. Mnganga became sick he was admitted to Christ the King Hospital in Ixopo where he died on the 7th of April 1945.

The funeral rites were held at St. Mary's Seminary and he was buried in the cemetery of Mariathal, in the same grave as Fr. Aloysius Majonga Mncadi, on which the C.A.U. erected a modest monument.

In his will Fr. Mnganga left a considerable amount of money to three institutions which Bishop Fleischer had established: that is St. Mary's Seminary in 1928. Also the Familiar Franciscans of St. Joseph (F.F.J. now T.O.R), and to the sisters, the Daughters of St. Francis of Assisi F.S.F.

All this shows the deep concern for local vocations and loyalty to the Church of this saintly first African priest who was highly respected, indeed, venerated by the faithful.

(This is recorded also in the *“First Four African Priests”* by Bishop Mlungisi Pius Dlungwane pp.3-8).