

# MY CALL TO MINISTRY

I grew up within the oppressed community, as part of that community where I fully discovered Yahweh's call to be one of his divine earthly instruments. I realised the Church ill-preparedness and reluctance to take up this prophetic witness, to identify with the oppressed, the down-trodden. It was not prepared and ready to be Christ-like, it was not prepared to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

In 1980 I registered as a theological student at St. Bedes College in Umtata. What shocked me was how the structural sin of apartheid had already pervaded our college, which reflected how much the Church has, unfortunately also lived as part and in support of this sin. These are some of the examples.

- a) Spying by students for the staff. Most students involved had academic problems and this proved to be their hope for ordination.
- b) Theological courses were abstract — The courses were not contextualised and they failed to relate to our rich historical culture of religious worship and the obtaining political situation in the country. Jesus ceased to be the advocate and liberator of the oppressed, but the protector of the oppressor, and this was a distortion of the Gospel.
- c) Some students spied for the Trankeian Security — The entire college was monitored and our prayers were reported to the security.

The ANC Chaplain, Reverend Fumanekile Ncutshe Gqiba relates his call to Church ministry, his subsequent political involvement and joining the ANC in exile.



It was within these socio-political factors that I decided to challenge the status-quo. And this work started right at the college, which in the name of Christ had to be turned upside down.

Although very few black students secretly supported and encouraged this religious witness, but the majority including all white students branded this trend as political agitation and marxist. In one of our hottest meetings, one white student stood up and accused me of being a political prophet of doom, asking how I reconciled marxist tendencies with church ministry.

The holy struggle was tough and painful, but God was on our side, Subsequently, the entire staff and student body began to see the light, and find meaning in liberating message of the Gospel.

The Gospel started assuming its meaning by among others the commemoration of historical political events. However, this led to a confrontation between the message of the true Gospel and the 'state' and 'Church' theology which sought to justify the sinful and corrupt system of apartheid. A political crisis was inevitable.

When it finally exploded I was a student at the University of Transkei and I was fetched from there for interrogation about events at St. Bedes. I was asked about my visits to St. Bedes, my past political activities there, about 'political' prayers and my involvement with the SRC at UNITRA.

The looming political crisis reached its peak with the introduction of a new unqualified and reactionary principal at St. Bedes in





1982. He was a karate expert from Port Elizabeth. He was anti-liberation theology and tried to suppress the democratic church movement sweeping St. Bedes. I was singled out for manipulating the college (the staff and students) for my own political ends. The political crisis deepened, St. Bedes was in turmoil. The new principal was opposed by the staff, the majority of the student body including the white students.

He wrote to Bishops in South Africa distorting the events and truth about what was happening at St. Bedes. In one of his letters, he asked the then Arch-Bishop of Cape town Phillip Russel to withdraw me from the college because he as the principal was convinced that I was not called by God to ministry.

In his evidence, he alleged that, I used the college as a transit base for the ANC. His request was rejected. The political turmoil at St. Bedes was worrying the Anglican church, as a result delegations and individuals were sent to investigate the cause of the problems. The student body asked for the removal of the principal and he was replaced by a progressive and much more enlightened principal.

In 1982 I finished my theological studies at St. Bedes and I moved to the University of Transkei (UNITRA) in 1983. In

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UNITRA we were confronted by a very corrupt pro-Matanzima Students Representative Council. After relentless political spade work at UNITRA, the SRC was replaced by a progressive one in which I became a publicity secretary.

When I left UNITRA in 1983, there was a completely democratic SRC accepted by other universities in South Africa. UNITRA had also among other academic institutions become a bastion of political activity. I was ordained in late 1983 and became a curate at St. John's Church in Crawford, Cape Town.

In 1984 both UNITRA and St. Bedes were once again in the lime light of political turmoil. St. Bedes was closed and all non Transkeian students and lecturers deported. UNITRA also experience the same fate with many students detained. Once again I was implicated, although no more at the university. The then minister of education in the Transkei, Bhubhu linked the upheavals to an educational

tour that the SRC organised to Maseru in 1983.

Bathandwa Nondo, an intimate friend that I was with in the UNITRA SRC was brutally murdered by the Transkeian police in 1985, while Zamkhaya (Slender) Mbalu a UNITRA SRC president in 1984 has since disappeared without any trace. In Cape town I became a victim of constant police harrasment and intimidation, however, this did not deter me from my revolutionary duties as a priest. I found little political support from my fellow priests whose main pre-occupation had become petty squabbles about positions in the church.

I felt very frustrated and angry, perhaps I was too much impatient. At the same time threats from racist security police were mounting, hence I decided to leave South Africa to do research at Lesotho university. I was finally impounded by Lesotho security police on the allegations of running ANC cells in the country. I went through gruelling torture, where I was forced to strip naked. The humiliation of being beaten up in bare nakedness, brutal methods of interrogation will always remind me how despicable apartheid is, where the pride of an independent African states can even be relegated to being a police force of the hateful apartheid regime.