

The role of Mission Councils in the Scottish Mission in South Africa: 1864–1923

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Abstract

The role of Mission Councils in the growth and development of the Scottish Mission in South Africa is a confusing and vexing one. Whereas they were conceived and established as a means of facilitating mission, they often hindered this by drawing distinctions between agents of mission and delineating spheres of authority through exercises of power, even in opposition to expressed mission policy derived from Scotland. In essence, they were an integral part of the hegemonic missionary world-view, which frustrated progress towards the formation of the Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa in 1923.

Introduction

The Scottish Mission in South Africa originated in a decision taken by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1796 in the following terms:

To spread abroad the knowledge of the Gospel amongst barbarous and heathen nations seems to be highly preposterous, insofar as philosophy and learning must in the nature of things take the precedence: and that, while there remains at home a single individual without the means of religious knowledge, to propagate it abroad would be improper and absurd (Du Plessis 1911:182).

The Scottish Missionary Society and the Glasgow Missionary Society were formed in response to the 1796 Assembly decision. These were lay voluntary societies formed as the result of the inability of people to stimulate the institutional churches' interest in foreign mission (Hewat 1960:8). Yet, Walls (1996:246-7) claims that missionary societies developed because of the organisational and operational inability of the churches. They had no "machinery ..., to do the tasks". In this way, missionary societies may be

considered subversive (Walls 1996:249). As a result, missionary agencies frequently took the form of voluntary societies (Walls 1996:260). The Glasgow Missionary Society sent its first missionaries to the eastern Cape in 1821 (Shepherd 1971:1-2), but it was only in 1824, as the result of the efforts of these voluntary agencies, that the Church of Scotland General Assembly gave its blessing to foreign missions. However, all was not well in the Scottish church itself.

The Scottish “disruption”

The “disruption” in Scotland occurred in 1843 as the result of a ten-year dispute concerning the Establishment principle, i.e. established by the church by law (Burleigh 1960:266), and those who followed the voluntary principle. So the dispute concerned the relationship between church and state. The two presenting issues concerned patronage, the right of Scottish landlords to impose ministers on congregations, and the “Claim of Right” (Burleigh 1960:349-350), which maintained the spiritual independence of the church. This resulted in a separation of those who objected to the privileges of establishment from the established Church of Scotland, and the formation of the Free Church of Scotland (Cheyne 1993). The significance of this for mission was that it led to a split in missionary work. The Free Church of Scotland took up the mission cause with great enthusiasm, having its source in the voluntary movement (Burleigh 1960:355). In 1845, the Glasgow Missionary Society transferred its work to the Free Church’s (FCoS) Foreign Mission Committee (FMC). In 1847, in Scotland, the United Secession Church and the Relief Church came together to form the voluntary anti-establishment United Presbyterian Church of Scotland (UPCoS) (Burleigh 1960:362). Each church had its own missionary work in South Africa, which had a clear impact on the development of mission work in the country.

From 1843 until 1900, the South African Mission was under the direct control of the FCoS, the UPCoS, and from 1900 on, the union of these two churches, the United Free Church of Scotland (UFCoS), and was answerable to the General Assemblies in Scotland. This made it different from churches whose mission work was always done by mission societies.

The origin of Mission Councils

The history of Scottish Presbyterian church policy during the period 1898-1923 was largely influenced by a minute of the FMC of the FCoS of October 1864 relating to South Africa, which stated:

That the ordained European missionaries reared in the colony or sent from this country be constituted into a Missionary

Council for the regulation of the affairs of the Mission (National Library of Scotland [NLS] MS 7801:80, 81; cf. Brock 1974:438. Appendix A:2).

In other words, Mission Councils were formed for “the maintenance, administration or independence of our Mission in South Africa” (*Our Mission in South Africa*, MS 14849, Rhodes University[RU], Cory Library). This minute had its origin in Alexander Duff’s visit to Kaffraria, and the recognition of a need for change in the organisation of the Mission arising out of confusion that emanated from an earlier decision that “all matters connected with the management of the mission in Kaffraria devolve upon the Presbytery”. This, of necessity, included the affairs of missionaries. Duff was the Convener of the FMC of the FCoS. He had been a missionary in India, where he had instituted substantial educational reforms in the Indian Mission. He had also inaugurated an innovative educational regime that combined the intention “to train as preachers such young men as may be found intellectually and spiritually fit for such work” (Shepherd 1971:35), as well as the general upliftment, in Shepherd’s (1971:35) words, of “a large number of subordinate agents of different grades”.

The implication of the 1864 minute was that Presbytery should keep to its “proper functions”, i.e. discipline, where relevant; that general policy should be determined solely by whites in the Mission Council; that all bodies involved in the mission – Presbyteries, Mission Councils, Financial Board, and Educational Board of the Seminary – should communicate with each other concerning areas of mutual interest that fell within their remits; and that each should relate directly to the FMC on all matters requiring approval or confirmation. It had become clear that, from an early stage, some means of conducting the affairs of the Mission would have to be arranged in order that mission policy could be devised and executed.

In fact, the minute referred to was not enacted immediately. It was held in abeyance until Dr James Stewart arrived in South Africa, having been appointed to serve at Lovedale Missionary Institution, founded in 1841 near a site that later saw mission work develop and advance from 1824. Under the guidance of its first Principal, William Govan, “it grew steadily with the philosophy that aimed to educate a few to the highest possible limit” (Shepherd 1971:28). James Stewart became its second Principal in 1870. He had served in central Africa and was deeply influenced by the educational ideas of Alexander Duff. This led to conflict with Govan, who subsequently resigned and, consequently, Stewart was appointed Principal of Lovedale.

The formation of Mission Councils confirmed that Scottish Presbyterian church policy was not “the product of an indigenous organisation”, but was “informed certainly by those on the spot” (Brock 1974:24), who were white. There was a significant difference between the FCoS mission in South

Africa and other missions, which were largely autonomous, for example the London Missionary Society, and made less distinction made between black and white ministers. The FCoS was, therefore, less flexible. A further minute of the FMC was agreed in 1866 that confirmed the FCoS' support of the Three-Self principle. Henry Venn had recently formulated his Three-Self formula with a view to producing self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating churches, all of which are interdependent (Schenk 1977). This "reflected a greater optimism about the abilities of new churches planted by the missions to assume full responsibility for their own affairs in a short time ..." (Reese 2010:21). The FCoS felt it was appropriate that the mission church should be self-propagating, because as soon "as native congregations are formed, the care of them ought as speedily as possible to be consigned to the native pastorate" (Brock 1974:439). Missionaries were, therefore, to be pioneers "for the native congregations [who] were to be in time delivered over to additional native pastors" (FMC Minute, 27 October 1866). This would entail, of course, the training of an indigenous ministry. Brock (1974:61) questions the inability of blacks to achieve greater power in the Mission, because between 1881 and 1901 there were no Mission Councils to hamper their development. There were black ministers in the Mission, but they formed a minority in Presbytery. In addition, very few black ministers were ordained during this period: "Missionary enthusiasm for ordaining African pastors was declining by the 1880s as the arbiters of a segregationist culture began to separate church congregations and limit contact between white and black clergy" (Switzer 1993:125). Blacks, in most instances, supported the appointment of missionaries to charges as a result of poverty in congregations that could not support black ministers, and the lack of a central stipend fund. They, in turn, had the support of the missionaries in opposing union. Self-support implied growth towards financial independence. This led to a failure of policy in this regard. The FMC pressed the issue of self-support in relation to the authority of white missionaries. Rev John D Don, Presbytery Clerk of Kaffraria, argued that self-support implied self-government, and called this "evil" (Don to Smith, 4 September 1886, NLS, MS7797). The Presbytery opposed the challenge of self-government and, unfortunately, the FMC did not pursue it to its logical conclusion. FMC policy with regard to the issue of the union of Presbyterian bodies was consistent in the pursuit of a three-self church, but whether this issue could best be resolved in the formation of a multi-racial or black church would become a very contentious issue. Following their formation, Mission Councils were disbanded in 1881, having failed to find a relevant role. They were reintroduced in 1901 (under Act II, 1901 of the General Assembly) with the prospect of forming a black church (Brock 1974:57; Burchell 1979:148).

Mission Councils renewed

However, events moved on apace. In 1897, the Presbyterian Church of South Africa (PCSA) was formed after considerable discussion on the nature of the church in South Africa. Due to a lack of unanimity, the PCSA emerged as a predominantly white church with mission work among the black population. Almost concurrently, in 1898, Rev Pambani Mzimba seceded from the Free Church of Scotland to form the Presbyterian Church of Africa (PCA). These events necessitated a review of mission policy in South Africa.

Following the union of the FCoS and the UPCoS in 1900 to become the United Free Church of Scotland (UFCoS), the 40 existing Scottish missions were reconstituted into three mission councils for administrative purposes (Lennox 1911:43-44):

In the area dealt with by the Mission Council of Kaffraria there are sixteen stations, which include the two institutions of Lovedale and Emgwali (the latter being directed by the Ladies' Kafrarian Society), four missions under European missionaries (Burnshill, Pirie, Emgwali and Gooldville), six under native pastors and evangelists (Lovedale Native Congregation, Macfarlan, Stuartville, Donhill, Port Elizabeth, and East London), and four colonial congregations in connection with which work is carried on among the natives in their neighbourhood (Tarkastad, Glenthorn, Adelaide and Somerset East)

The Transkei Mission Council area contains nineteen stations – namely, the institution at Blythswood, thirteen stations under European missionaries, Paterson (Mbulu), Cunningham (Toleni), Malan, Main, Columba, Duff (Idutywa), Somerville (Tsolo), Buchanan (Sulenkama), Miller, Gillespie, Ross (Ncise), Mount Frere, and Rainy, and five stations at Kidston, Ugie, Matatiele and Incisininde).

In the Natal Mission Council there are five stations (Maritzburg, Impolweni, Kalabasi, Polela and the Gordon Memorial).

At a meeting of the Synod of Kaffraria, held in King William's Town on 17 July 1901, the Clerk read a minute of the FMC:

At Edinburgh, 31 May 1901.

Which day the foreign Mission committee of the United Free Church of Scotland, being met and constituted:- (*Inter alia*)

4. Submitted the following Act of Assembly in reference to Mission Councils brought up by the Union Committee.

The Assembly appoint the following as the Act aenant Representation in the Assembly of Mission Councils:-

That a Mission Council shall be appointed in each Mission field where such a Council or Committee does not exist already exist.

That a Mission Council shall consist of:-

- (1) All the Missionaries from the Home Church, in the field, ordained and medical.
- (2) The Minister and one Representative Elder from each European congregation within the bounds.
- (3) Agents and friends of the Missions in the field nominated by the Mission Council and approved by the Foreign Mission Committee. (Minute 14, Synod of Kaffraria, 17 July 1901, UFH, HPAL).

The function of Mission Councils was to act with “full Presbyterial powers” for the purposes of oversight of missionaries, election of commissioners to General Assembly, overruling the General Assembly, giving the European congregations a locus of representation apart from the presbytery, and any other function that the General Assembly might delegate to them.

In addition, “any appeal from the Mission councils shall be to the Foreign Mission Committee in the first instance” (Minute 14, Synod of Kaffraria, 17 July 1901, UFH, HPAL). Here, there was a direct conflict with the function of presbyteries, one of whose main functions was the exercise of discipline.

On the following day, Rev Brownlee J Ross proposed that a meeting take place with “the missionaries of the former UPCoS to form a Mission Council or Councils, and to report to a special meeting of Synod” (Minute 16, Synod of Kaffraria, 18 July 1901, UFH, HPAL). The outcome of the receipt of the Act from Scotland was a decision of the Synod of their “desire to express their readiness to carry out heartily and loyally the policy therein indicated” (Minute 19, Synod of Kaffraria, 18 July 1901, UFH, HPAL). Two councils were then elected for the South Kaffrarian Mission and the North Kaffrarian Mission. It was stated that “the names of Missionaries lately connected with the United Presbyterian Church, and who now have ecclesiastical status in the South African Presbyterian Church” (formed in 1897) should be excluded from the Mission Councils as members (Minute 19, Synod of Kaffraria, 18 July 1901, UFH, HPAL). The Synod then raised a number of inquiries and statements. One of these was the assumption

that “the intention of the Act is to include only European agents and friends of the Mission” (Minute 19, Synod of Kaffraria, 18 July 1901, UFH, HPAL). It is not at all clear why they made this assumption, because they had already elected only white males in this capacity.

With regard to the relationship with Presbyteries, and noting the provision “for a certain section of the Mission Council to have Presbyterial powers”, the question was raised of what was embraced by the clause “the constitution and powers of local Presbyteries be left as at present?” (Minute 19, Synod of Kaffraria, 19 July 1901, UFH, HPAL). Was the intention that Presbyteries should only consist of, and be responsible for black ministers and elders, and what was to be the relationship of Presbyteries to the Mission Council and the UFCoS? These questions remained unanswered for the present. There was a further decision that the FMC be requested to establish a General Mission Council to meet annually.

With the move to operate anew through a Mission Council, it is strange that, in a presbyterian structure, discrimination should extend not only to blacks, but also to the European laity, other than medical missionaries (18 December 1901, First meeting of the Mission Council of Kaffraria, Minute Book 18 December 1901-17 January 1917, Lennox papers, UFH, HPAL). This group included all female missionaries and church members who were good enough to serve the Mission in many ways and were, perhaps, better able to deal with its administration and finance than ordained white ministers. Mission councils were thus constituted predominantly by white, male ordained persons. It is also noteworthy that the hierarchical Presbyterian structure was bypassed. South African Presbyteries met regularly, as happened following the inclusion of the Presbytery of Kaffraria as a Presbytery of the FCoS in 1857, and the subsequent formation of a Synod and other Presbyteries, i.e. in the Transkei (Van der Spuy 1971:13). Was it not possible for these Presbyteries to carry out the functions delegated to Mission Councils? Had this been the case, blacks would have been eligible contributors to the development of mission policy and probably its most able interlocutors. The South African Presbyteries were courts of the UFCoS and to have any real influence, it would have been necessary, and not at all impossible, for all members, black and white, ordained and lay, to have had access to the General Assembly meeting annually in Scotland.

At this time, only missionaries were members of Mission Councils, though the membership was later widened. However:

to maintain the distinct functions and independence of local Presbyteries and Native Churches it is inexpedient that pastors and office-bearers of Native Churches should be members of Mission Councils unless in exceptional circumstances (cf. Act I

of 1917 in *Rules and Methods of Procedure of the FMC*, 20 February 1923, RPCSA Archives, RU, Cory Library, 4).

This was a direct insult to blacks, who were to be heirs of a white-devised plan that would form a black church that would be beyond their control. The Councils would be equal in authority to Presbyteries: “it is desirable that the Mission Councils and the Presbyteries of the Church stand on the same footing” (FMC, 24 August 1908, NLS Minute 1103), but subsequent history would prove the Mission Councils to be more powerful. They would, in theory, have no formal connection with the sending church, other than having been established by it. The only direct contact would be between missionaries and the sending church (Brock 1974:57).

So, from this time, whites dominated the advancement of mission policy, in communication with the FMC of the UFCoS, and the way it was worked out in the field. It was their perceptions of the context in which they lived and worked that influenced and determined policy formulation in Scotland. From the beginning of the twentieth century, missionaries’ relationships with the UFCoS were regulated by Mission Councils rather than Presbyteries (*Our Mission in South Africa*, 4-5, Henderson Correspondence, MS 14849, RU, Cory). Burchell (1977:51) refers to a meeting of the Synod of Kaffraria held in 1900 where a decision had been taken not to exclude white missionaries. This decision relates to suspicion that had been present prior to, and was probably exacerbated by the Mzimba Secession from the Free Church mission in 1898, and was taken as a result of the ‘counsel of moderate Africans’. We are left wondering who the immoderates were, and what proportion of the Synod they represented? What were their objectives, and have they been suppressed or submerged? With the advent of “white Mission Councils suspicion remained and, consequently, a call was made to clarify their functions in the mission field” beyond “the regulation of the affairs of the Mission” (FMC of the UFCoS, October 1864 in Brock 1974:438: Appendix A.2).

Mission Councils were, therefore, the result of a clear policy of strengthening the relationship of missionaries and the sending church, as well as the desire, on the part of some, to prepare for the development of an independent black church. A statement of FMC policy arose out of the need to appoint a successor to Rev J Lundie at Malan Mission in 1913. When the Kaffrarian Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of South Africa (PCSA) recommended the appointment of a black minister, Rev SW Njikelana, the Transkei Mission Council sought guidance from the FMC, which stated that the Missionary-in-Charge was equivalent to a Superintendent under the Mission Council, and, as pastor of the congregation, is in “an interim arrangement” until “the young growing Native Church finds itself”. If that time has arrived, according to the FMC, let Presbytery approve a call to a

pastor whose work will not be related to the Missionary-in-Charge, Malan Mission, who will “advise and assist him in every possible way”. Referring to General Rules 8 and 9, the FMC states that: “the missionary is to aim at organising his converts into one or more congregations until a native pastor has been called”. Such congregations are to be formed into a Presbytery or connected to an existing one – “their powers to be carefully respected by Mission Council”. Here is a clear delineation of spheres of influence. When the Mission Council “is of the opinion that the time has come in any part of the field for constituting a congregation”, Presbytery is responsible for the act, with the Mission Council’s approval. Therefore, the relationship of Presbytery to Mission Council is crucial. Thus, a Missionary-in-Charge has to be clear about his relative powers, which were the general supervision of mission work and as assessor on a Kirk Session, of which the pastor is Moderator. It seems clear that, while the respective authority is clear, there was considerable potential for misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the regulations, especially when those concerned are both members of a Presbytery and a Mission Council, as was the case with the missionary, but not the black minister, whose only channel of communication was his Presbytery.

When a congregation feels able to engage in evangelism itself, and the Mission Council agrees, it should petition the FMC to withdraw the missionary. This means that powers of decision and action were in the hands of missionaries who might disagree on the desirability of removing one of their number, or even themselves. The FMC was aware that difficulties might arise in the application of the principles of the policy (FMC, 29 April 1913, NLS Minute 2681). The FMC policy was not implemented as speedily and effectively as it might have been in this regard, for by 1905, Lovedale had only produced ten black ministers (Mission Council, 3 February 1905, File ‘Mission Council, 1902-1905’, Lennox correspondence, UFH).

This was important, because the Mission Council came to rival the Presbytery as an alternative locus of debate for all those involved in promoting the aims and objectives of mission. The Mission Councils’ Chairpersons and Secretaries were to have powers and duties akin to those of Moderators and Clerks of presbyteries in the UPCoS, and it was they who had powers to decide when new Presbyteries should be established (*Rules and Methods of Procedures of the FMC of the UFCoS*, RPCSA Archives, RU, Cory 4-5). The Mission Councils had the power of Presbyteries with regard to missionaries, e.g. discipline. This was necessitated by “the maintenance of Presbyteries of the Home Church in the mission field, hindering their development or union with churches formed by kindred missions in the same field” (*Our Missions in South Africa*, 1902, MS 14849, Cory Library). While missionaries continued to be members of presbyteries, they also had another locus for promoting their views. In theory, the Mission Council was a temporary expedient during the period that the indigenous church was being established

“providing a strengthened connection for the Scottish missionaries with the Home Church” (Burchell 1977:42). One might be led to wonder what was the need for a “strengthened connection” at a time when the role of missionaries was envisaged as declining? The pastoral care of its members was a specific role of the Presbytery, which appeared to be sidelined. It is clear that Mission Councils adopted a self-perpetuating role, for they favoured the creation of new black parishes while white missionaries would continue to control the mission (Kaffrarian Mission Council, Minute 241, 18 January 1922, 1917-1930, Lennox correspondence, UFH, HPAL). This would become a continuing source of tension as long as Mission Councils existed.

Missionaries were very keen to maintain the FCoS connection. Yet, the separation of institutions such as Lovedale from Presbytery control aggravated an already tense situation. The institutions were developing rapidly, and were draining financial and personnel resources, which could have assisted in the development of conventional mission and evangelism work. This, among other things, caused difficult relationships between missionaries, e.g. those who worked in institutions and those in extension work, and even between those who worked in different institutions, such as those who represented different church traditions, cf. UPCoS and UFCoS; those who represented more traditional views, e.g. James Stewart and those “younger” missionaries, e.g. Henderson and Lennox; and personality issues. Most of the problems concerned issues of power and control.

One area in which Mission Councils accumulated considerable power was in the control of property and finance, and in this they were considerably superseding their original remit. In addition, these Councils were expected to play an ever decreasing role in church life, and the fact that the opposite happened became an irritant to blacks who saw these white Councils becoming the only official channel to the Home Church (Burchell 1979:174), which in turn saw no need to transfer property to the young church (Burchell 1979:175). The Secretary of the Churches Act Commission and the law agents of the two churches (FCoS and UPCoS) recommended that “all grants and lands to Mission properties in Cape Colony are secured to the church or to the Mission, as such, and not to separate congregations” (FMC, 26 June 1906, NLS Minute 560). Earlier, the Transkei Mission Council, in considering a matter of raising cash for mission outbuildings, had affirmed: “they gladly accepted the principle of the Native Churches taking an increasing part in self-help, but felt that this should rather be for the support and extension of evangelistic work, church buildings” than for the missionary’s home. This occasioned the FMC being asked what kind of self-help was envisaged, but no response is evident. Instead of making separate grants to congregations, the FMC agreed to allocate funds to the Kaffrarian Mission Council, which then reported back to the Committee on monies given and work carried out (FMC, 25 September 1906, NLS Minute 631). This was in

accordance with a statement made by Henderson, which was recorded by Lennox (Lennox to Henderson, 24 May 1901, Letterbook of the Presbytery of Kaffraria, Lennox correspondence, UFH, HPAL):

The purpose of having the Mission Councils apart from Native Presbyteries which can control the entire funds sent out for mission work from the Home Church, and which can appoint assessors to the Native Presbyteries, giving these assessors less or greater powers needed, is nothing new.

Lennox claims this method has been in operation for two generations, and is well known to the FMC. In addition, titles to property were secured to the General Trustees of the UFCoS. Thus, control could be exercised over black congregations and ministers, especially at such a time when threat of secession was present. Subsequent history (post-1923) shows that Mission Councils accrued power in financial and property matters.

In the area of demarcation of congregational boundaries, the Mission Councils superseded the powers of the Presbyteries, e.g. in the case of the Kaffrarian Mission Council determining the boundaries arising out of discussion of the incorporation of Zoutspansberg into the Mission (FMC, 26 September 1911, NLS Minute 2155:6). Mission Councils even acted independently of one another, causing confusion in the Mission, e.g. over spheres of interest, as can be seen above. In 1910, a report of Deputies of the United Free Church of Scotland, Dr A Miller and Mr Wildridge, stressed the desirability of joint meetings of the Kaffrarian and Transkeian Mission Councils, but no specific proposal emerged. Their conclusion was that “We are satisfied that the main lines of policy and the general forms of enterprise are wisely adapted to the needs of South Africa” (FMC, 24 October 1911, NLS Minute 2164). This is strange considering the need for mutual consultation in the matter of church policy. However, notwithstanding this, joint meetings did occur, e.g. as reported to the FMC on 25 June 1912 (NLS Minute 2417:1,4). Here the matter of the transfer of Rev J Davidson as a Mission Council responsibility is discussed, along with the discussion of the joint issue of a Handbook in co-operation with the Presbyterian Church of South Africa (PCSA). The FMC responded that they “cannot denude themselves of the right to initiate proposals of any kind when they seem called for”. This indicates tension between the FMC and the Mission Councils in the area of policy formation. Eventually, the union of Mission Councils became an issue, e.g. in the matter of the transfer of the Mgwali congregation from one presbytery to another. The FMC recommended the union to obviate problems concerning the lack of unity in policy and organisation. The Transkei Mission Council concurred. The FMC agreed to the transfer, despite the Kaffrarian Mission Council’s concerns about the manner in which no account was taken

of the Mission Councils' interests in the proposal concerning the union (FMC, 29 April 1913, Minute 2681).

This development, overseen by missionaries was, in fact, contrary to the policy of the FCoS in Scotland. As long ago as James Stewart's appointment to Lovedale in 1866, their policy had been clear:

[F]inancially strapped parent boards of several mission bodies [including the FCoS] also began urging their missionaries to establish autonomous "self-supporting, self-governing, self-propagating African churches" opening up to them the most prestigious vocations open to the upwardly mobile elite during the colonial period (Switzer 1993:123).

However, there were reservations concerning this policy change. Stewart was unwilling to adhere to Scottish mission policy concerning the ordination of blacks. "In an agitated moment, he *seems* to have claimed that the main cause of Ethiopianism was to be found in the interfering European mission boards in the matter of the ordination of Africans" (Sundkler 1961:39). Further, Dr Lindsay, Convener of the FMC, claimed in 1901 that missionaries "do not seem to have grasped the idea of a Native Presbyterian Church" (Brock 1974:49). This demonstrates that this was an idea already present in FMC thinking, and that the missionaries were obstructing its implementation. The new method of forming three-self churches was introduced in the form of Mission Councils (Duncan 1997:120). However, missionaries continued to subvert this noble aim:

The projected ideal was that of a three-self church where extension work would be done by missionaries and consolidation of existing work by blacks. The missionaries turned this round, sending blacks to do the extension work while they busied themselves with consolidation (Duncan 1997:120).

The General Interests Committee of the FCoS determined that mission policy was the responsibility of the Mission Councils, and according to the Rev George Robson, Convener of the FMC (letter to missionaries in SA, 15 January 1908, MS 10711, RU, Cory), the FMC stated:

The courts entrusted with the direction of the South African Mission in the Cape Colony are the Mission Councils of Kaffraria and the Transkei, which include all the missionaries and act in co-operation with and under the authority of the Foreign Mission Committee ... It is obvious that within the Mission there are divergent views as well as important and

varied interests to be treated with the utmost consideration, and the Mission Councils must have a careful regard to these in advising on the policy of the Mission of our church. But it is to them that this function belongs.

Robson continued by clarifying the position regarding presbyteries from the time of union in 1900: “The Presbyteries ceased to be courts representing the Home Church, and their place in that respect was taken by the Mission Councils.”

Another matter that caused concern was the continued existence of two mission councils in Transkei and Kaffraria. Rev Frank Ashcroft, Secretary of the FMC, inquired about the possibility of forming one council on the grounds that “this will be as great [a] help as the one Native Church” (Ashcroft to Lennox, 22 September 1909, file ‘synod’, UFH. HPAL). The Transkei Mission Council was reticent and the FMC delayed any action. Transkei instead favoured the formation of sub-councils attached to presbyteries. Its position was essentially conservative, as can be seen from its attitude towards the place of women in the church, the idea of which is “neither practicable nor greatly desired” (FMC, 21 December 1915, NLS Minute 3642:4). In any event, the FMC pressed ahead and approved the union of the two mission councils, to be named the Kaffraria Mission Council (FMC, 17 July 1917, NLS Minute 4151:5). But there was also a need to clarify the position of the Natal Mission Council, which was prepared to unite with the Kaffrarian Mission Council, though it was concerned about being swamped by the greater number of missionaries and black elders in the Cape. The Kaffrarian Mission Council had 24 missionaries with 15 379 members, while the Natal Mission Council had just four missionaries and 6 490 members (FMC, 20 September 1921, NLS Minute 5669). After some discussion regarding the possibility of proportional representation, the Natal Council agreed. However, as a result of issues raised concerning the attitude towards polygamy on the part of the Natal Council, the place of the Natal Mission council was not resolved until after the formation of the Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa in 1923.

In the meantime, discussions had been in process regarding the union of the two FMCs of the former denominations. It was proposed that male and female members should be members of mission councils with equal rights, as it was perceived that there was no longer any need to separate the work. Mission Councils had been dealing with proposals dealt with by two committees “differing in their point of view when one committee consists mainly of men and the other mainly of women” (FMC, 16 January 1923, NLS, Appendix: Report of Special committee on ‘Assembly’s Remit on Amalgamation’).

By this time, another major advance had taken place with the decision of the Kaffrarian Mission Council “that the time has now come in South Africa to invite certain outstanding natives to sit as members of the Mission Council” (FMC, 16 July 1918, NLS Minute 4397:1). It is assumed that the missionaries would decide who qualified to be designated as “outstanding”. By this time, formal discussions were well under way to form an autonomous Native church, so the Kaffrarian Mission Council proposed adding one member of the soon to be established church to represent each presbytery on the Mission Council “and that it be the concern of the Council, as sanctioned by the Foreign Mission Committee, to devolve progressively upon the highest court of the Native Church the duties heretofore belonging to the Council” (FMC, 17 April 1923, NLS Minute 6407:8). Discussion on this matter was delayed by the Commission on Union as they thought this could best be dealt with after the formation of the BPCSA.

In 1920, two Deputies from the FMC of the UFCoS, Rev Frank Ashcroft and Mr Andrew Houston, visited South Africa with a view to resolving the future of their mission work by attending a conference at Blythswood Institution. In sum, they concluded and recommended in their report that “control of the future must be with the Native church and not with the Mission Council” (FMC, 15 February 1920, NLS Minute 5386, Appendix 1:3-4). They highlighted the problem that the Mission Council that they had hoped would be the unifying bond of their South African missions “proved unequal to the task, torn as it was, by controversies over the question of our union”. They also commented on the “highly unsatisfactory state of affairs in Natal where overlapping was much in evidence”. The conference resulted in a proposal to unite the Synod of Kaffraria with the Presbytery of Kaffraria in a body that would take over much of the work of the Mission Council, including arrangements whereby the appointment of missionaries would be considered jointly by the Synod and Mission Council, evangelism would be allocated as a responsibility of the new body, and the reduction of missionaries would begin. This would facilitate the formation of an independent, self-supporting church. The same policy was to be adopted in Natal. The proposal was accepted and a Commission on Union was formed. Among a number of issues remitted to the Commission was the idea that Mission Councils should cease to exist or have black representation (Duncan 1997:146).

A special meeting of the Mission council was held on 30 March 1921 to consider a response to the proposal of devolution to black UFCoS Presbyterians (cf. FMC, 23 March 1921, NLS, Minute 5518). The Council aimed to challenge the process, which would culminate in blacks assuming complete power over their own church affairs, despite reservations concerning the timing. The missionaries felt that this step taken by the FMC was a reaction

to the failure of the attempt to unite the missions with the PCSA (Duncan 1997:149).

The power of Mission Councils is revealed clearly, even in the period preceding the formation of the BPCSA when, in January 1921, James Henderson, Principal of Lovedale, submitted a detailed statement to the Mission Council for approval concerning the state of property, the use of land, and the extent of the boundaries of mission territories (2 February 1923, Mission Council, 1917-1930, Minute 309, RPCSA Archives, RU, Cory).

It would have been reasonable to assume that the Mission Councils would be disbanded when the Bantu Presbyterian Church was formed in 1923. This represented the end of a process of granting autonomy to the UFCoS mission in South Africa. However, it was not to be so. At a convocation called in connection with the Union of Presbyterian Missions in South Africa (BPCSA) on 4 July 1923 to constitute the Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa, the Mission Council of Natal was represented (BPCSA Minutes of General Assembly, 1923 [GA]:6), but it had not had an opportunity to meet and decide whether or not to become part of the new church. An early item of business concerned relations with the Mission Council of Kaffraria which had also not yet become part of the BPCSA (BPCSA, GA 1923, Minute 60:32). It was agreed to appoint a committee to engage in a joint consultation regarding the relationship between the Council and the General Assembly of the BPCSA. A regular feature of the continuing influence of the Mission Councils was evident in the transaction of certain items of business in which the regular decision was “to send a copy of this minute to the Mission Council for transmission to the Foreign Mission Committee” (BPCSA, GA 1925, Minute 225. Pirie, 45). It was a matter of concern that an autonomous black church could not communicate directly with another church, but had to go through a white council. This situation remained until the dissolution of the Mission Council in 1981.

Conclusion

Mission Councils were established for “the maintenance, administration or independence of our Mission in South Africa” (*Our Mission in South Africa*, MS 14849, Cory Library, Rhodes University). However, their role was problematic insofar as they were meant to be bodies that would facilitate the growth of the Mission towards the formation of an independent church. They were self-perpetuating exclusive clubs, which prevented blacks, women, and certain members of the white male laity having a voice in the formulation of policy, and in being prepared to take over the organisation and administration of their own church. They operated more like mission societies funded from overseas than an authentic part of a growing church. UFCoS Mission Councils were even independent of one another.

Following the union of 1900, which produced the UFCoS, the powers of presbyteries were reduced as Mission Councils were reintroduced. This created a potential problem area, as one body was dominated by whites, and the other by blacks. Beyond the area of personnel, Mission Councils had considerable authority in dealing with property and finance, another potential minefield for racial misunderstanding. Mission councils were essentially conservative bodies that could and did easily obstruct progressive ideas and policies. Because they were relatively autonomous, they were not compelled to consult those who would be affected by the consequences of the decisions they made. Their comprehensive control of all matters related to missionaries enabled them to avoid being responsible to the presbyteries within whose bounds they served. One of their purposes was to develop fellowship amongst missionaries, and this made them even more exclusive.

It is important to consider whether or not Mission Councils were necessary in the first place. Early in their history they fell into disuse and were reintroduced with the specific purpose of facilitating the development of an independent black church, in addition to dealing with conditions of service relating to missionaries. It is doubtful if the Mission Councils performed any better than presbyteries had done in this regard, *vis-a-vis* the decision to establish them, to make up for any deficit in presbytery supervision. The report of the Deputies' in 1920 highlighted the failure of Mission Councils insofar as they had created a "them" and "us" mentality between black and white ministers, and this was evidently supported by FMC policy. The BPCSA that grew out of the Scottish Mission actually became subordinate to the Mission Council after 1923 as the result of its control of finance and missionary personnel. Its independence was restricted by the control exercised by the UFCoS through the Mission Council.

Because Mission councils were exclusive, they were able to exist without taking any great account of the views of blacks. These views were possibly not expressed in presbytery as the result of "intimidation" by missionaries who "knew better", but understood less. The position was worse in the case of women, who were not represented in any of the courts of the church. However, Mission Councils survived, in various forms, until 1981 in South Africa.

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