

A History of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in South Africa, 1875–2015,
by Halala P, Khosa MW, Makaana J, Masangu HD, Nwamilorho J, and Tshwane J

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Reviewed by Graham A. Duncan

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2583-1914>

University of Pretoria

graham.duncan@up.ac.za

Despite being part of a historic academic and literate culture, Presbyterians in southern Africa have been extremely slow to commit their histories to writing. This book is an attempt by one of the historic mission churches to remedy that deficit. This book was written to celebrate the 140th anniversary of the Swiss Mission (*Département Missionnaire*), now the Evangelical Church in South Africa (EPCSA, formerly the Tsonga Presbyterian Church in South Africa).

Like most histories of its kind, it focuses for the most part on the chronological narrative of the history. It does this competently.

This is not an academic treatise; rather it is a promotional volume which aims to explain the origins, growth and development of a particular church tradition while being accessible to a wider constituency. Unfortunately, no attempt is made to relate it to the very rich broader mission history of South Africa.

Historiographically, in one sense this is an exercise in avoidance of delicate and sensitive issues in the history of the EPCSA, particularly in the field of church-state relations. It offers an *apologia* for church collaboration in the homeland politics of Gazankulu, especially under one of its revered leaders, Prof. H.W.E. Ntsanwisi. As time passed, a virtual incestuous relationship developed between the EPCSA and the Nationalist government represented by the Gazankulu government and the Gazankulu



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Development Corporation (GDC). Notably, it is not mentioned that recent General Secretary of the EPCSA, Rev. Sydney Ngobe, was a member of the GDC. The issue of avoidance reaches its peak when the impact of the Standing for the Truth Movement (SFT) is eschewed. Sadly, this was the opportunity for the EPC to redeem itself towards the end of apartheid, and following the beginnings of democracy. Internally, this is blamed on the younger ministers who were trained at Fedsem during apartheid. It is shocking that this matter has not been resolved. The tension between conservatives and radicals is as deep as ever.

No commemorative history aims to reveal all the negative aspects of its history. However, it is astounding that the name of Rev. Prof Tinyiko Maluleke, a leader in the SFT and a leading international black theologian, is never mentioned, except for a bibliographical reference. Such is the price of challenging the authorities and the resulting demonisation! This story is well recounted in Jeanneval, C., Monier-Gerard, E. and Peclav, D. 2011 (*Embroided: Swiss Churches, South Africa and Apartheid*. Berlin: Lit Verlag, Dr W. Hopf). The closing words of the book do not hold out much hope for future reconciliation: “Several attempts were made to reconcile the two sides, but to no avail” (p.130).

Notwithstanding all of this, the EPC is to be congratulated for the production of this book. Half a loaf ...