

The Missionary Institute of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa: Origin, Development, and Function

Natie Philander

<https://orcid.org/-0000-003-381-1511>

University of Stellenbosch, South Africa

nphil@sun.ac.za

Abstract

The Missionary Institute of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in South Africa, founded in 1877 in Wellington, played a unique role in the theological training of brown and black ministers. This article examines the origin, development, and function of the Missionary Institute within the broader context of the Dutch Reformed Church's missionary and theological policy, with a specific focus on its relationship with the Theological Seminary of Stellenbosch. The analysis shows how the Mission Institute was both a space of practical empowerment and a symbol of canon and academic segregation. The article discusses the critical tension between academic and pragmatic training, authority, and calling, and its impact on the Dutch Reformed Church's missionary communities. The history of the Missionary Institute provides a lens through which to understand the Church's engagement with inequality, colonial influences, and the struggle for inclusivity, and forms a starting point for contemporary conversations about theological training and missional calling in South Africa. The article seeks not only a descriptive history, but a critical interpretation of the Missionary Institute's function and legacy. Considering contemporary conversations about decolonial theology and inclusive theological training, the Mission Institute provides an important historical lens through which to rethink the DRC's engagement with inequality and its role in the formation of missional identities. The article argues that the Mission Institute was at once a space of empowerment and a space of limitation, an institution that shaped the calling of many students, but which was also embedded in structures of inequality.

Keywords: Mission Institute; Dutch Reformed Church; Stellenbosch; theological training; canon law; missionary policy

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Introduction

The history of the Missionary Institute of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), established in Wellington in 1877, is an important key to understanding the DRC's missionary policy, its relationship with congregations of colour, and its approach to theological training in the colonial and apartheid era. The Mission Institute was not only a training centre for future missionaries, evangelists, and ministers, but also a symbolic space where the tensions between church, state, and community came to the fore. The Mission Institute embodies both the DRC's idealism about missionary work and its institutional compromises with segregation and inequality (Du Plessis 1911,45; Van der Watt 1980,221). The genesis of the Missionary Institute must be placed within the broader development of the DRC's missionary vocation during the second half of the 19th century. By that time, the Church was already deeply involved in missionary activities in the interior and Northern regions of Southern Africa. Missionary organisations such as the London Missionary Society (LMS) set the tone in the early 19th century, but as the DRC sought to expand its self-reliance and influence, the need for its own training centre for missionaries became clearer (Elphick 2012,109; Hofmeyr 1989,76). A key figure in this development was Andrew Murray, minister of Wellington and later moderator of the Cape Synod.

Murray's missionary vision and his belief that the DRC should train its own missionaries would eventually bear fruit in the establishment of the Missionary Institute (Giliomee 2003,242; Hofmeyr 1989,77). From the beginning, the Missionary Institute was a product of its time. It offered theological training that was more accessible and practically oriented than the academic formation offered at Stellenbosch's Theological Seminary. Where Stellenbosch placed a strong emphasis on the classical-academic formation of ministers who would serve in the DRC, Wellington instead focused on biblical knowledge, catechism, music, and missionary skills that could be directly applied in pioneering situations (Van der Watt 1980,226). This approach was pragmatic and considered the reality of missionaries who would work under difficult conditions and in remote areas. Yet it also created a form of "second-rate" education, as the Missionary Institute was seen from the outset as an alternative, and not an equal, theological seminary (Adonis 1982,65; Pont 1986,164). The introduction of this article aims to state three important research points that will be further elaborated throughout the rest of the study. First, the Missionary Institute is understood as a missiological project, embedded in the DRC's vocation and expansion strategies during the late 19th century. Secondly, it is conceptualised as a social-political institution, embedded in the colonial and later apartheid context of South Africa, which directly influenced its functioning and limitations. Third, it was approached as a theological training space, within which questions of authority, vocation, race, and class were constantly at the forefront.

Historical Background

The establishment of the Missionary Institute in Wellington in 1877 can only be understood within the broader historical context of the Dutch Reformed Church's missionary involvement and the socio-political circumstances of the 19th century. The Institute was not an isolated initiative, but part of a much wider movement in which the DRC began to position itself as a missionary church, while at the same time remaining trapped in colonial patterns of authority and segregation (Elphick 2012,109; Hofmeyr 1989,76). During the early 19th century, the London Missionary Society (LMS) took the lead in missionary work in the Cape Colony and surrounding areas. Famous figures such as Dr Johannes van der Kemp and John Philip took a strong stance against the discriminatory practices of colonial farmers and actively defended the rights of Indigenous people, Khoi, and slave communities (De Gruchy 1999,57). However, this approach has put the DRC in an awkward position, as many members have seen their own social and economic interests threatened by the LMS's criticism. The influence of the LMS indirectly compelled the DRC to develop its own mission policy. The Cape Synod established a Missionary Commission as early as 1824, but initially the DRC was still dependent on foreign missionaries for labour in the interior (Crafford 1982,155). By the middle of the 19th century, however, the DRC increasingly felt that missionary work should be part of its own identity, and that the Church itself should be responsible for the training of workers (Odendaal 1956,12).

The Role of Andrew Murray

Dr Andrew Murray (1828–1917) was an influential South African theologian, minister, evangelist, and missionary, considered one of the most prominent spiritual leaders of the 19th century (Choy 2005). He played a central role in promoting missionary work within the Dutch Reformed Church and was an outspoken advocate of sanctification and personal spiritual devotion (Murray 1901). Murray was born in Graaff-Reinet, South Africa, the second son of Andrew Murray Sr, a Scottish minister and missionary worker (Buys 1998). He and his brother John received their education in Scotland and then studied theology at the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands, where they were influenced by the Reveil movement (van der Watt 2013). They were ordained in 1848 and returned to South Africa to work in the ministry (Buys 1998). Murray saw the mission as the core of the Church's calling. He founded the Ministers' Missionary Union and the Bible and Prayer Union and organised the Mission Training Institute in Wellington (Murray 1901; Buys 1998). His work has had a great influence on the promotion of missionary activities in South Africa and internationally (Choy 2005). His best-known work, *The Key to the Missionary Problem* (1901), emphasises the necessity of deep spiritual commitment and dependence on the Holy Spirit for successful missionary work. Murray's theological focus on sanctification and a devout Christian life made him a prominent figure within the Sanctification movement (Murray 1901). In his later years, he campaigned for the unification of the Dutch Reformed Church and was active in church and social affairs (van der Watt 2013). He has received honorary

degrees from the University of Aberdeen and the University of Cape Town and has left an extensive literary legacy (Choy 2005).

Dr Andrew Murray (1828–1917), vicar of Wellington and later moderator of the Cape Synod, was the driving force behind the establishment of the Missionary Institute. Murray was deeply influenced by the evangelical revival movement of his time and had a strong commitment to mission and world evangelism (Du Plessis 1911,51; Giliomee 2003,240). For him, mission was not a fringe phenomenon of the Church, but a core mission. Murray began lobbying in the 1870s for a training school where young men, both white and brown, could be trained to serve as missionaries and evangelists. His argument was that the DRC could not suffice with foreign missionaries but with local workers who understood the language, culture, and social realities of the South African context (Adonis 1982,67). This approach would later form the basis of the Missionary Institute's curriculum, which emphasised Bible education, practical missionary studies, and pastoral work. He was convinced that the church should have its own training centre to prepare missionaries, rather than relying on foreign fellowships. In his preaching and writing, he presented mission as a non-negotiable part of the church's calling (Giliomee 2003,242).

Murray's view was that missionaries should not only be trained academically but also be practically and spiritually prepared for the challenges of pioneer situations. His role as chairman of the Cape Synodal Missionary Commission and his influence in Wellington paved a direct path for the establishment of the Missionary Institute (Du Plessis 1911,83). The second half of the 19th century was a time of colonial expansion and economic change in South Africa. The discovery of diamonds (1867) and gold (1886) accelerated urbanisation and industrialisation, which in turn created new social and missionary challenges. Growing black and brown labourer communities in cities and mines provided a new mission site, while the expansion of white colonial settlements increased the need for missions inland (Elphick 2012,215). The DRC saw this expansion as an opportunity to expand its influence northwards. Missionary work was established in Namibia (then German South-West Africa), Bechuanaland (now Botswana) and Nyasaland (now Malawi). These missionary fields made clear that the DRC needed a training centre for missionaries, which could prepare people to work in difficult, culturally diverse, and sometimes hostile circumstances (Crafford 1982,165).

Theological and Canonical Developments

The second half of the 19th century was also a time of important theological developments within the DRC. The establishment of the Theological Seminary at Stellenbosch in 1859 established an academic and office-oriented training model that was seen as normative for the DRC's ministers (Pont 1986,163). The Missionary Institute, opened in Wellington in 1877, was initially not seen as an equal counterpart but rather as a complementary institution that could provide a more practical and accessible model of training (Van der Watt 1980,226).

This distinction between Stellenbosch and Wellington would remain a focal point of

tension. Where Stellenbosch stood for academic status and ecclesiastical authority, Wellington provided the “workers” for the field. This separation later had profound implications for the DRC’s race-based training model and the way in which ministers and evangelists were formed in the DRC Missionary Church and related churches (Adonis 1982,65). By 1877, therefore, it was clear that the DRC could no longer continue without its own missionary training centre. The combination of internal theological drives (Andrew Murray’s influence), external missionary challenges (expansion into northern areas), and the social pressures of colonial modernisation converged in the decision to establish a Missionary Institute in Wellington. This decision was not merely pragmatic, but theologically motivated: it confirmed the DRC’s self-image as a church with a missionary vocation, while at the same time reflecting the limitations and inequalities of the time (Du Plessis 1911,83; Elphick 2012,217).

Relationship between the Mission Institute and the Dutch Reformed Missionary Church in South Africa (NGSK)

In 1903 the Synod of the DRC took over the Institute and from then on ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church were appointed as lecturers: G.F. Marais (1905–1911), J.Rabie (1913–1921), Henri Gonin (1913–1932), D. Lategan (1922–1925), David Wilcocks (1925–1932), G.B.A. Gerdener (1933–1937), C.F. Kies (1933–1962), J.H. Greyvenstein (1935–1962), P.B. Ackermann (1941–1942), A.C. van Wyk (1943–1962) and C.H. Badenhorst (1951–‘62). The latter was the first (and the last) graduate of the Mission Institute to be appointed to the staff (Crafford 1982,509; Kriel 1978,1920). During the NGSK Synod of 1937, which took place at “Z.A Gesticht,” Long Street, Cape Town, the representative of the NGSK on the Board of Trustees of the Mission Institute, Rev. J.M.N. Breedts, reported that the father of the residence, Rev. J.S. Louw, the scribe of the Board of Trustees, had died during the recess (1934–1937) (Acta NGSK Synod 1937,67). Rev. N.J. Bekker and his spouse were named as housefather and mother of the Missionary Institute during the synod. Rev. Stofberg, the DRC minister of Wellington, was elected as the scribe of the Board of Trustees of the Mission Institute. (Acta NGSK Synod 1937,68). Drs G.B.A. Gerdener and J.H. Greyvenstein had been appointed by the DRC as lecturers at the Mission Institute. However, Dr G.B.A. Gerdener accepted the position of professor at the Seminary in Stellenbosch and consequently only acted as a lecturer at the Mission Institute until the end of 1937 (Acta NGSK Synod 1937,68). From 1931 to 1936, 39 students completed their studies at the Mission Institute and in 1937, there were 23 students enrolled.

The admission requirements to the so-called Theological Classes (as they were then known) were increased by the DRC: a successful second-year BA dismissal was set as a requirement (Acta NGSK Synod,1937,68). Non-theological subjects, namely Sociology, Psychology, Ethnology and Education, are included in the course. At this stage, the Board of Trustees reported to the DRC Synod that the Missionary Institute could not cope financially. The expenditure over a period of five years was £16,000. These expenses were to be recovered by means of collections, legacies, interest and lodgings (Acta NGSK Synod 1937,68). During the 1942 NGSK Synod that took place

at Worcester, Rev. J.M.N. Breedts, Board of Trustees representative of the NGSK, reported on the Board of Trustees of the Mission Institute that no student at the Mission Institute had taken the previous year's final examination (Acta NGSK Synod 1942,50–51). This may have been due to the implementation of the increased Admission Exam requirements. The Board of Trustees of the Mission Institute confirmed that the Admission Requirements to the Faculty of Theology were completion of the second year BA.

In 1942, only three new lecturers were appointed. The financial position of the Missionary Institute also improved (Acta NGSK Synod 1942,50). Support through the legacies and congregational collections in the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa was awarded to theological students. The Board of Trustees of the Mission Institute confirmed that the admission requirements to the Theological Faculty were completion of the second year BA. There were only 12 students in the Adoption class in 1942. A fund was eventually established to support the Mission students financially, and financial assistance was received from various sources. For example, the Board of Trustees of the Missionary Institute reported that “one of our brethren in the field pledged with his spouse £100 for this; another sends up his £50 each year for this purpose” (Acta NGSK Synod 1942,51). The DRC Synod honoured the lecturers at the Mission Institute with the title of “Professor.” The reason given for the decision was “the quality of work they had done and that the course of study required it” (Scheme of Operations NGSK Synod 1946,69). At the NGSK Synod of 1950, Rev. P.P. Joubert, the Representative on the Board of Trustees of the Mission Institute, reported that the number of students enrolled at the Mission Institute had increased. Rev. Joubert had been the representative of the NGSK since the Synod of 1946. He was also the scribe and curator of the Missionary Institute for eight years. In his report to the NGSK Synod of 1950, Rev. P.P. Joubert expressed concern about the rising cost of living, which made it difficult for students to stay afloat financially (Acta NGSK Synod 1950, 67). Furthermore, the report thankfully acknowledged the NGSK congregations that contributed to the Institute Fund. In the report, P.P. Joubert also expressed the wish that more of the NGSK congregations would support the Institute Fund financially (Acta NGSK Synod 1950,67). After the death of Rev. P.P. Joubert, Rev. C.J. Kriel was appointed in his place as a representative on the Board of Trustees of the Missionary Institute (Acta NGSK Synod 1954,74).

The student numbers in the Mission class of 1951–1954 were as follows:

Year	First Year	Second Year	Third Year
1951	19	13	14
1952	13	19	13
1953	12	13	19
1954	18	11	13

The representative, Rev. C.J. Kriel, reported that although things did not always go well financially, one of the most important goals was to enable students with very little outstanding student debt to complete their theological studies (Acta NGSK Synod, 1954,75). The congregations were once again called to full stewardship. Rev. C.J. Kriel further reported that the DRC had decided to appoint the following four professors: firstly, Dr C.H. Badenhorst, an alumnus of the Missionary Institute. (Rev. J.M.N. Breedts acted in his place until July 1, 1954, because Dr Badenhorst was affiliated with the Government Commission for Socio-Economic Development of Indigenous Areas for three and a half years.) The other three professors were C.F. Kies, J.H. Greyvenstein and A.C. van Wyk. The DRC had made the following decision: The Theological course had been extended to four years. Students who joined the theological classes from 1954 would therefore follow a four-year course like Stellenbosch and Pretoria. The syllabus had been revised, and essential subjects had been added to it. The curriculum as it stood certainly offered a thorough education to men entering the Mission under more difficult circumstances (Acta Synod NGSK 1954,75). NGSK Synod 1954 approved the following recommendations: The H.E. Synod expressed its appreciation for the contribution made by the late Rev. P.P. Joubert as a representative on the Board of Trustees for many years.

The H.E. Synod also expressed its gratitude and appreciation to the DRC for the training of its sons as ministers of the DRC. The H.E. Synod thanked the DRC for extending the Theological course. The H.E. Synod also expressed its gratitude and appreciation to the professors at the Mission Institute for their services. Prof. Dr Badenhorst was welcomed as a lecturer and offered a long and blessed service in the position. The Synod called on Church Councils to hold an optional collection for the Missionary Institute annually to contribute not only for the sake of finances but especially to the strengthening of the spiritual bond between the Institution and the NGSK (Acta Synod NGSK,1954,76). From January 1959 onwards, no new Admission students were admitted (Acta NGSK Synod,1962,52). All prospective students were referred to the Seminary at Stellenbosch. The numbers of students were as follows: In 1958, there were 49; in 1959, 42; in 1960, 31; in 1961, 18, and in 1962, eight students (Acta NGSK Synod 1962,52). Some of the books and collections of the Mission Institute were donated to the Seminary in Stellenbosch. The rest of the books and residence furniture were donated to the Theological School at Wellington (Acta NGSK Synod 1962,52). By the early 1960s, the situation had become unsustainable. In 1963, the Missionary Institute was formally closed, and its students were transferred to the new Faculty of Theology at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), where the Dutch Reformed Missionary Church provided training in partnership with the Dutch Reformed Church (Hofmeyr and Pillay 1991, 205). This move marked the end of the formal relationship between Stellenbosch's Seminary and the Missionary Institute but the historical legacy of segregation in training continued for a long time. A critical evaluation shows that the relationship between the Missionary Institute and the Theological Seminary was not merely an academic issue but reflected the canonical and theological legitimisation of apartheid (Coertzen 1992; Saayman 2007). The separation in training institutionalised

church inequality and placed the formation of black and brown ministers within a framework of “mission” rather than full-fledged church ministry. The irony was that both institutions functioned within the same Church family, but with fundamentally different premises about being a church, calling, and authority.

The Missionary Institute in Relation to the Theological Seminary

A core aspect of the Mission Institute’s history is its relationship with Stellenbosch’s Theological Seminary, where the DRC’s own ministers were trained. While Stellenbosch offered academic training at university level, Wellington’s education was considered “lighter” from the outset. Students at the Mission Institute did not have access to the same academic status or ecclesiastical career opportunities as their counterparts in Stellenbosch (Pont 1986,164). This division had a distinct social and racial dimension. Where Stellenbosch received mainly white students, Wellington was seen as the place where people of colour would receive their theological formation (Adonis 1982,69). This practice contributed to the institutionalisation of inequality within the DRC’s theological education and laid the foundation for the later development of separate theological faculties and ecclesiastical structures. The mission institute thus functioned as a mechanism of ecclesiastical segregation, legitimising the separation of the Church into hierarchical strata. This separation also implied a distinction between “academic authority” and “missional calling,” whereby the former was reserved for the white church and the latter assigned to communities of colour. In this way, the Mission Institute became a structural instrument of social control by restricting the access of people of colour to the full ecclesial status of the DRC.

Moreover, the relationship between Stellenbosch and Wellington also had implications for the DRC’s self-understanding as a church. Stellenbosch’s theological model affirmed the Church’s identity as an academically oriented institution, whereas Wellington reinforced a more pragmatic, mission-centred identity. This difference contributed to the development of a dual ecclesial culture, which later manifested itself in the separation between the “mother church” and the daughter churches. In this sense, the Missionary Institute was not only a training institution but also a site where the DRC’s racialised theology was produced and reproduced. The dual character of the Missionary Institute is significant for understanding the DRC’s missionary policy. On the one hand, it provided an essential training base for missionary work, producing ministers who were able to operate in multilingual and culturally diverse environments. On the other hand, it functioned as a system that upheld racial hierarchy under the guise of “mission.” This duality reflects the broader tension between the DRC’s religious ideals and its complicity with colonial and apartheid structures. The Mission Institute, therefore, can be understood as a space where the Church’s missional ambitions and social justice failures intersect. The relationship between the Mission Institute and the Theological Seminary ultimately reveals how theological education can serve as a vehicle for both empowerment and domination.

The Mission Institute as a Theological Training Centre

From its inception, the Mission Institute in Wellington has occupied a unique place within the landscape of theological education in South Africa. Unlike the Stellenbosch Seminary, which was held in high esteem academically and was closely associated with the University of Stellenbosch, the Mission Institute had a more pragmatic and missional focus. This approach was an answer to the concrete challenges of missionary work and created a training model that was both innovative and limited. The Missionary Institute's curriculum was deliberately focused on the needs of future missionaries and evangelists.

It strongly emphasised:

i) Bible knowledge and scriptural interpretation: Students were required to have a thorough knowledge of the Old and New Testaments, with an emphasis on practical application in preaching and catechesis (Van der Watt 1980,227).

ii) Dogmatics and ethics: Basic doctrinal and moral formation was offered, but at a simpler level than at Stellenbosch, so that it was accessible to students with limited formal schooling (Pont 1986,165).

iii) Practical subjects: Catechism, evangelism, church history, and missionary studies took a central place, with special attention to the role of the church in multicultural and often hostile environments (Crafford 1982,192).

iv) Music and liturgy: Since many missionaries were responsible for leading worship services, the Institute paid particular attention to singing, music, and liturgical practices (Adonis 1982,71).

The pedagogical approach was more practical than academic. Students were trained to preach the gospel and minister to congregations under difficult social and geographic circumstances, rather than becoming academic researchers or systematic theologians. This focus led to the Mission Institute often being viewed as a "practical seminary," an institution that prepared people for service but did not necessarily enjoy the same academic recognition. In contrast to Stellenbosch, which received almost exclusively white students, Wellington's doors were open to coloured and black students who felt called to missionary work (Adonis 1982,69). This made the Institute unique, but also a source of tension within the broader DRC, which was often hesitant about the consequences of mixed theological training. Nevertheless, the Institute has succeeded in training many ministers, evangelists and missionaries for the daughter churches of the DRC. These students later played a decisive role in the establishment of the Dutch Reformed Missionary Church (DRC) and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA). This means that the Mission Institute was not just a training centre, but a germ school for ecclesiastical institutionalisation that eventually led to the establishment of separate churches based on race (Elphick 2012,202).

Although the Mission Institute made an important contribution, its training was long regarded as a “second-rate” form of theological formation (Pont 1986,166). The courses did not have the same academic status as those of Stellenbosch, and students often had few formal career prospects within the DRC itself. In practice, they were limited to service within the missionary congregations or the daughter churches, and they were denied access to the pulpits and structures of the “mother church.” These academic and institutional constraints reflect the broader racist structures of the DRC and of colonial society. Theological education became a tool through which the inequality of society was not only reflected but also reproduced. Where Stellenbosch prepared students for leadership in the “mother church,” Wellington prepared students for service within congregations that were considered “different” or “subordinate.” This educational segregation thus became a structural expression of unequal ecclesial citizenship. Despite these limitations, the Mission Institute has become a space of spiritual calling and empowerment for many students. Here they were equipped to share the gospel in their own cultural contexts, and many developed a deep sense of calling and identity that enabled them to serve congregations under extremely difficult social and political circumstances. At the same time, the Institute also provided space for critical thinking and resistance. Some students and lecturers began to ask questions about the fairness of the existing order, and the Missionary Institute thus became a breeding ground for the theological thinking that would later form the NGSC and the URSCSA.

The fact that students of colour were educated together contributed to a sense of solidarity and identity that prepared them for the struggle against apartheid in the 20th century (Sakupapa 2023,118). However, the road to the establishment of the Missionary Institute was not without resistance. Initially, the Cape Synod was reluctant to the idea of a missionary training school, partly because of financial considerations and partly because it would open the question of the equality of students of different racial groups (Van der Watt 1980,223). There were fears that a missionary training school could become a form of “parallel seminary” that could undermine the authority and prestige of Stellenbosch’s Theological Seminary. Nevertheless, Murray and his supporters managed to raise funds largely through international networks and local benefactors. The involvement of the Women’s Missionary League was of particular importance; they provided financial and practical support that made the Institute’s establishment possible (Hofmeyr 1989,83). In 1877, the Missionary Institute formally opened its doors with a first cohort of students and a curriculum that was mission-oriented and practical in nature.

The Missionary Institute within the Larger Framework of South Africa’s Colonial History

The Wellington Missionary Institute cannot be understood without placing it within the larger framework of South Africa’s colonial history and later apartheid. As an institution established in 1877, it has seen its existence and functioning constantly linked to the political and social dynamics of the country. While it was a centre of spiritual formation and calling, it was also embedded in structures of inequality and segregation that

profoundly influenced its development and legacy. The Mission Institute was born into a society where colonial authority, land ownership, and economic control were almost exclusively in the hands of the white minority (Worden 1994,83; Elphick 2012,203). This social structure also influenced the DRC's theological practices. Mission was often seen as "civilisation," according to which communities of colour and black people received Christianisation and education, but within a framework of white supervision and authority. The Mission Institute's curriculum and management reflected this paternalistic mindset. Although it provided access to theological training, students of colour were not considered equal participants in the DRC's ministry. Rather, they were trained for service within missionary congregations that were deliberately kept separate from the "mother church" (Adonis 1982,74). In this way, the Institute has played a role in the institutionalisation of church segregation since the late 19th century.

With the founding of the Dutch Reformed Missionary Church in 1881 and later the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa in 1963, the Missionary Institute played a key role as a training centre for ministers and evangelists who would serve exclusively within these daughter churches (Van der Watt 1980,231; Crafford 1982,201). These churches were not formed by chance but were the product of a systematic policy of segregation within the DRC, which institutionally separated its "mission" and its "mother church." Thus, the Mission Institute served as a training factory for segregation-ecclesiastical structures. While Stellenbosch was the hotbed of ministers for the white DRC, Wellington provided the leadership of the daughter churches. This division resulted in an unequal relationship in which the DRC was able to maintain its authority over the daughter churches, while at the same time "theologically justifying" the institutional separation of believers based on race (Pont 1986,168; Elphick and Davenport 1997,220). With the advent of apartheid in 1948, the role of the Missionary Institute became even more charged.

The apartheid state deliberately reinforced segregation in every sphere of society, and the DRC, at least in its official policy, largely cooperated with this order. The Missionary Institute played a dual role in this context: On the one hand, it made theological training possible for people of colour; on the other hand, it affirmed the apartheid logic of separate development by assigning students to a "separate seminary" (Adonis 1982,75; Giliomee 2003,425). This tension became particularly evident in the 1950s and 1960s, when international missionary councils and ecumenical bodies increasingly criticised apartheid and the DRC's support of segregation (De Gruchy 1979,111; Villa-Vicencio 1988,54). Yet for a long time, the Missionary Institute in Wellington clung to its original structure, which maintained the institutional segregation of students by race. Despite the Mission Institute's embedding in colonial and apartheid logic, it must also be acknowledged that for many students, it was a space of empowerment. Pastors and evangelists trained here returned to their communities as spiritual leaders, educators, and community organisers. They played a key role in shaping a Christian identity of resistance, which would eventually become an important theological counter-voice to apartheid in the 1970s and 1980s (Boesak 1977,33;

Sakupapa 2023,120). This dual character, on the one hand an institution that affirmed apartheid, and on the other hand a hotbed of resistance, makes the Mission Institute one of the most complex and significant institutions in the history of the DRC's mission and theology. The Institute thus becomes a key site for analysing how theological education can be used both to reinforce and to challenge social injustice, and how "social justice" can become a theological concern that emerges despite institutional constraints.

Critical Evaluation of the Mission Institute

The Missionary Institute of Wellington functioned over a period of nearly a 100 years as a centre of theological training, missionary preparation and spiritual formation. A full evaluation requires a balanced approach that puts both the positive contributions and the critical shortcomings into context. This evaluation can be discussed in four core aspects: institutional policy and segregation, curricular approach, social and community impact, and legacy in the post-apartheid era. The Mission Institute's institutional policy systematically maintained the segregation of students based on race and ethnicity. These policies provided for separate living, studying, and liturgical spaces, reflecting the apartheid logic of "separate development" (Adonis 1982,77; Van der Watt 1980,238). While it has often been defended as essential to "orderly training" and culturally sensitive ministry, it has also contributed to the reproduction of social inequality and the restriction of interracial dialogue within the church. Critics such as De Gruchy (1979,115) and Villa-Vicencio (1988,59) point out that the Mission Institute, through its policies, indirectly strengthened the structures of apartheid. At the same time, however, within this constraint, the institution has shown a degree of creativity and adaptation by giving students of colour access to theological education, something that was not always available in wider South African society. This tension between support of the system and empowerment of individuals forms a central point in the critical evaluation of the Institute. The Mission Institute has followed a curriculum that traditionally focuses on biblical studies, dogmatics, liturgical practice, and missionary strategies. This academic direction ensured a high standard of theological education, but it was often one-sided in terms of perspectives on social justice, political engagement, and cultural contextualisation (Crafford 1982,205; Pont 1986,172). A critical reading of the curriculum shows that there has been limited exposure to theology that includes the issue of social inequality and race relations as a core theme.

This created a void where ministers of colour often had to develop strategies to understand and deal with the distress of their communities within apartheid only after their training (Boesak 1977a,36). This aspect emphasises the need for a more contextual approach to theological training, something that contemporary academic debate about the Missionary Institute often emphasises. Despite the critical shortcomings, the Mission Institute has had a meaningful impact on communities. Pastors and evangelists trained here returned to marginal communities where they played a key role in education, spirited ministry, and social organising (Sakupapa 2023,122; Elphick and Davenport 1997,225). These leaders often supported the first forms of organised community resistance to social and political oppression. This dual character of the

Mission Institute, an agency of segregation, but also a space of community empowerment, shows the complexity of institutional missionary work in historical contexts. This makes it difficult to give an unambiguous moral evaluation; rather, it requires an analytical, context-aware approach. In the post-apartheid era, the Missionary Institute's legacy is still being reconsidered. Historical research suggests that the Institute can be seen both as an instrument of restriction and as a space of training and empowerment (Adonis 1982,79; Giliomee 2003,430). Modern theological and ecumenical discussions view the Mission Institute as a critical point of study for the development of an inclusive theological education that promotes social justice, community development, and ecumenical dialogue. The experiences of students of colour, their strategic adaptation, and the community impact of their ministry constitute a learning point for contemporary theological training and the promotion of equality within church and society.

Conclusion

The research of the Wellington Mission Institute on its history, functioning, and impact reveals a complex and sometimes paradoxical picture of theological training within the context of colonial and apartheid South Africa. The Mission Institute functioned as a central agency of the Dutch Reformed Missionary Church and fulfilled several core functions: the academic and spiritual training of ministers and evangelists, the strengthening of mission strategies, and the formation of community leaders. However, these functions were never separate from the social, political, and cultural structures of the time. First, the Missionary Institute played a distinct role in the reproduction of institutional segregation, something that was in line with the apartheid logic of society and the church of the time (Adonis 1982,77; Van der Watt 1980,238). These policies limited access to theological training for students of colour and reinforced the social divisions within the church. At the same time, the Mission Institute has fulfilled a significant function in the empowerment of individuals and communities. Pastors and evangelists trained here often returned to marginalised communities and provided impactful ministry and social support there (Sakupapa 2023,122; Elphick and Davenport 1997,225). This contradiction between limitation and empowerment is a central theme in the critical evaluation of the Institute. The Institute's curricular approach ensured a high standard of biblical and dogmatic education but left limited room for contextual theology that included social justice, political engagement, and cultural diversity (Crafford 1982,205; Boesak 1977,36). This limitation meant that ministers often had to make strategic adjustments themselves to be relevant in the communities they served. The legacy of the Wellington Mission Institute cannot be viewed one-dimensionally.

It serves as a point of study for evaluating how theological education functions within a society of inequality. The Mission Institute played a dual role: On the one hand, it strengthened apartheid structures, on the other hand, it created space for training, spiritual formation and the development of community leadership. This complexity

provides valuable lessons for contemporary theological and ecumenical training, especially in promoting inclusivity, equity, and contextual sensitivity (Giliomee 2003,430; De Gruchy 1979,115). In the post-apartheid era, there is a necessary rethinking of historical missionary institutions and their role in social change. The Mission Institute's history provides a framework for the development of theological training programmes that not only provide academic and spiritual formation but also emphasise the social and ethical responsibility of Church leaders and ministers. This framework is relevant to modern theological institutions that seek to acknowledge historical errors and promote a more just, inclusive approach to training and ministry. Finally, the Wellington Mission Institute illustrates the intricate interplay between church, society, and education in a historical context of inequality and social tensions. It is an example of how institutions, even within restrictive and unjust structures, can have potential for empowerment and transformation. The lesson from this is clear: Effective theological training must focus not only on academic and liturgical formation, but also on social awareness, ethical reflection, and community involvement. This perspective is essential for the contemporary Church that strives for inclusiveness, justice, and social transformation. The Missionary Institute thus remains a critical case study of how theological education can both reproduce injustice and foster resistance, challenging contemporary institutions to prioritise social justice alongside doctrinal formation.

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