

Ministering on the Edge: Reflections on Mvumelwano Dandala, Pastor and Politician

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Abstract

This paper explores the contribution made by Dr Hamilton Mvumelwano Dandala during his time as chairperson of the Black Methodist Consultation (BMC). We begin with a brief look at church and state relations and the role of the clergy, followed by a historical background of Dandala and the making of a political priest. We then explore the BMC from Dandala's perspective and ministry from a perspective of the BMC. We reflect on Dandala's role in the building of racial bridges within the MCSA and the struggle against poverty. The paper concludes with a discussion of Dandala as a peacemaker, ecumenist and humanitarian. The author argues that Dandala should be hailed as one of the finest sons of the Black Methodist Consultation.

Keywords: Dr Mvumelwano (Mvume) Dandala; presiding bishop; BMC chair; pastor; politician

Introduction

This paper was first read as a lecture honouring the contribution made by Dr Hamilton Mvumelwano Dandala during his time as chairperson of the Black Methodist Consultation (BMC). Three reasons account for the uniqueness of the lecture. First, the public lecture was the first one to be held in the history of Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary (SMMS) in honour of a black leader. Second, it was the first to be held in honour of Dandala after his exit as president of the SMMS. Third, it was the first event organised by the BMC to be held at the SMMS and that marked the beginning of a relationship and partnership between the two institutions. People with full-time responsibilities in both pastoral and political work are not always common to find. They are a rare phenomenon. What are commonly found are active pastors with a pastoral role that extends to politics. In the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), Dandala comes out clearly as an example of a full-time pastor and full-time politician. The aim of this paper is to reflect on Dandala's ministry from a political perspective. We would like to identify the nuances that characterised his approach to ministry and the impact thereof on the political life of those to whom he ministered; how his ministry



was informed by his participation in the BMC, and how he then shaped the BMC later when he became its leader.

Church and State Relations and the Role of the Clergy

To understand Dandala's ministry one has to locate it within the broader debate on church and state relations. The relationship between the church and politics has always been very controversial from as early as the patristic period. According to Wei (2004), there are key theologians who appear to be in controversy regarding the nature of church state relationships. These are, for example, Eusebius, who argued that the church should cooperate with the state. Ambrose of Millan thought that the church must be independent from the state. Augustine of Hippo pointed out that the church and state are two different kingdoms. For Augustine, the church is the "city of God" governed by love; and the state is the "city of humanity" governed by selfishness (Rociz 2014). Martin Luther taught about the "two kingdoms"; one being of heaven and the other being of the earth. For him, the two had autonomy and independence from one another and did not need to be confused and brought into collision. The two kingdoms operated together in Dandala's life and ministry. This is not surprising, because he is a protégé of the BMC, which holds the two (church and the political experiences of black people) into a creative tension, with the aim of making the ministry of the church liberative for the oppressed masses.

The Making of a Political Priest

Mvumelwano Hamilton Dandala was born on 26 October 1951 in Dandalaville (named after his great grandfather) in Mount Ayliff (Emaxesibeni) in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. He was born in a priestly family where his father was a Methodist minister. He is the son of the Rev. Killion and Julia Dandala (umaBoyce). He grew up as a son of the manse and later in life, he and his brother became the men of the manse. Mvumelwano Dandala (hereafter Dandala) is the last born in a family of four children, and he was baptised when he was an infant. Given that he was the son of a Methodist minister, one of the prerequisites of the manse life was the initiation of children into this rite of passage, called baptism. In his narratives, Dandala argued that he was confirmed as a full member of the MCSA when he was doing form two (Dandala Interview, 23 February 2016). He was not supposed to be confirmed that year because he was still young. He remembers that in 1965 he went to request the warden, who was his class teacher, to process his confirmation. Immediately after confirmation at the age of 13, he was appointed a Sunday school class leader. He states that:

I was leading a class of 10 elder people. However, what captivated me was that these people loved and respected me. The following year, our class was the highest financially after raising two Rand the whole year.¹

For Dandala, his father was a source of inspiration and a role model. On the other hand, his sister was also married to a Methodist minister, making the Dandala family one of the most important families in the Methodist tradition in South Africa. When he was growing up, the

1 Dandala Interview, 19 February 2016.

name “Mvumelwano/Mvume” was not common. It only became common when he had come of age. As a young child, people always called him Hamilton.

Dandala did his primary and secondary education at Ndamase High School near Mtata. Apart from the Sunday school leadership, Dandala was also the leader of the Young Men’s Guild when he was still at school at the age of 14. The Rev. Mckernon, who was the white minister at the circuit, was not familiar with the black organisations of the church. Dandala told the Rev. Mckernon that his father was going help him.² Although the superintendent was unfamiliar with the group, he was the one who conducted the robing service of the members. It was during the same time that he offered himself for the Methodist ministry. Dandala failed to make it the first year and he went to drive taxis. The circuit wanted to continue processing his candidature but they were not writing the “Local Preachers’ examination” which was the entry qualification to ministry. The local minister proceeded with the process but some members of the church challenged the procedure and he was instructed to write the Local Preachers’ examinations. He recollects that he got 50 per cent and yet half of the exam was from the book he had used in preparation for his candidate exam where he got 68 per cent. Dandala stated that he wrote the exam under protest; maybe that is why he did not do very well. The most disturbing thing in the circuit was that some people were already calling him “Reverend” and yet he was still struggling with his studies. There are two incidents which Dandala regards as memorable in his life, which he thinks also pulled him towards loving the ministry. The first event was when he conducted a choir just a few years after his confirmation into full member. In his statement, Dandala recalled the remarks made by his mother when they went back home. His mother said: “Son, that was good but you must be careful of time. In life do everything, but don’t forget the fundamentals.”³ This comment, for Dandala, made a big contribution in his life. The second incident happened when he was 11. He recalls Rev. Zachariah Richard Mahabane coming to their home talking about the African National Congress (ANC). Dandala submits that it was his first time to hear about the ANC.⁴

When it was time to go to college, he pointed out that he was not prepared. He remembered his father fighting hard with him to “behave like someone called for ministry.” He stated that his father talked to him the night before going to the seminary; and that night became a transformative evening. When the time came for Dandala to go to the seminary a kombi and a car came to pick them up. Rev. Gqubule travelled with Dandala in his car. Along the way, he motivated him to continue with his matric studies. In 1971, Dandala passed his matric examination. During his third year of training, Dandala applied to Oxford University. However, he claimed that the forms were very difficult to fill in and they required a lot of things—some of which were beyond his reach. He changed his choice to go to Kentucky University; unfortunately the university wanted someone with a degree in theology. Then he decided to apply to Cambridge University in 1974 through the Fits Wilhelm College. The college was an associate institution for Cambridge University. His major challenge was

2 Dandala Interview, 19 February 2016.

3. Dandala Interview, 19 February 2016.

4 Rev. Zachariah Mahabane was a Methodist Minister who became the third president of the ANC. He led it for two terms and was then honoured to be appointed as life president of the organisation.

getting a scholarship. He shared his dilemma with Rev. Stupper who was teaching at John Wesley College and was on his way back to Switzerland. Dandala requested Rev. Stupper to help him find a scholarship for his studies, which Rev. Stupper did. In his interview narratives, Dandala mentioned that the Cambridge University offered him another scholarship. He then made arrangements with Rev. Stupper's scholarship to support his family, since he was newly married. According to an interview conducted by Oatey (2014), Dandala stated: "Wesley House offered me a community of prayer; the intellectual rigour of the tutorial system; and the opportunity to be a black student in a mixed student body together." Dandala went to Cambridge University with a Diploma in Theology from the Federal Seminary, one of the ecumenical colleges of his time. At Cambridge University in the United Kingdom Dandala obtained both the Bachelor of Arts Honours degree and Master's degree. After completing his Masters he wanted to proceed in doing his PhD. He sought advice from his father who told him that "if you pursue PhD studies and acquire the degree you will be an academic and your work will only be at universities. You will never be a minister in South Africa."⁵ Upon these words, Dandala returned home for circuit work. In 2003, he was granted an Honorary Doctorate in Philosophy by the University of Transkei, now called Walter Sisulu University. In 2005, he was granted another Honorary Doctorate in Theology by the Cameron's Protestant University, based on his contribution in the society.⁶

He married Phumzile Ntukwana on 15 December 1973.⁷ Together they were blessed with three children. Hlomla, and Gqibelo are the surviving children. The third one was a daughter who survived for three days only.⁸ During the interview, Dandala sadly attributed her short life to the apartheid regime. He argued that he was under police surveillance and this situation robbed him of most of his family time. Dandala stated that he was detained in police custody in 1985 when he was stationed in Empangeni Circuit.

Black Methodist Consultation from Dandala's Perspective

Dandala is a product of the BMC, therefore his story cannot be told without telling the story of the BMC. The BMC was formed in 1975 as a movement from below and was led by Rev. Dr Ernest Baartman (Foster 2014, 11). The BMC was established as a movement arising from the oppressed. Its formation was necessitated by a number of factors. On the one hand, Hofmeyer and Pillay (1991, 253) argue that from the beginning Methodist work was multiracial, while some churches and mission organisations concentrated almost exclusively on one racial group—either working among the white settlers or the indigenous African people. The Methodist Church established joint works and this led in part to the MCSA having more blacks than any other mainline denomination. On the other hand, De Gruchy and De Gruchy (2004, 14) note that the Methodist Church also became the largest English-speaking denomination in the country. From these two observations, one can conclude that

5 Dandala Interview, 23 February 2016.

6 Dandala Interview, 23 February 2016.

7 In recognition of these living and past servants of the of the church, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in Umtata/Ncambedlana Circuit honoured the great work of Mvume's father by naming a society after him. (Dandala Interviewed by Martin Mujinga, 19 February 2016, Pietermaritzburg).

8 Dandala Interview, 19 February 2016.

the growing numbers of the two racial groups culminated into two elephants fighting in one undivided room, namely the MCSA. Foster (2014, 5) remarks that it is difficult to deny that the rise and implementation, and the eventual demise of the racial ideology of apartheid was one of the most significant social and political forces that the church had to contend with in South Africa during the twentieth century. Moreover, Grassow (2015) points out that the BMC was founded in response to a Methodist Church that was a mirror image of the apartheid society in which it laboured.

The situation described above drew a line between two races serving the undivided Christ. There arose a situation of the inferior and the superior, the haves and the have-nots, the powerful and the timid, the oppressor and the oppressed; leading to the MCSA having the whites being the leaders and the blacks being the members of the church. According to Grassow (2015), despite black majority membership, the MCSA was dominated by white financial clergy, white financial administrators and white financial muscle. As Balia (1991) concurs with Grassow, while racism continued to permeate much of religious life like a monster, the church was characterised by relentless discriminatory practices. Black Methodists were increasingly feeling the need to strive for freedom from ecclesiastical injustice and from oppression; and they were seeking recognition in a church that was rightfully “theirs.”⁹ This, for Balia, was the only way to deal with the Methodist Church that for a long time had been controlled by white decision-makers. It is a fact that the Methodist system is white and capitalist. The feeling of the BMC was that it needed to be overhauled.¹⁰

Foster (2014) agrees with Balia (1991) and adds that more than 75 per cent of the MCSA members are black; and yet in the 1970s, the leadership in the church did not reflect this reality. In addition, Theilen (2003, 28) also adds weight to the ongoing debate by pointing out that, of the 12 districts in the MCSA at that stage, 10 were led by white Methodist chairmen of the districts, while only two districts were led by blacks. This situation, for Theilen (2003, 28), explains the purpose in the forming of the BMC to ensure that white domination was progressively reduced and entrenched hierarchy transformed.

When the BMC conference met in 1976 in Bloemfontein, they observed that although blacks constituted the majority membership in the church, 75 per cent and more of them were “carefully” excluded from the decision-making courts of the church. In that year, Balia (1991) comments that 12 “servants of Christ” pledged themselves to work for the dismantling of all old traditions and customs, racism and the structures of injustices in the life and witness of the MCSA. Balia (1991) further argues that the ministers who decided to form the BMC agreed that they should not divorce themselves from the politics of the church. This point was buttressed by Dandala, who confirmed that he heard about the BMC a few months after its formation in 1975, since he was in Britain busy with his studies. Upon his return on 14 September 1977 he attended the BMC conference for the first time and was warmly

9 Balia, D. *Black Methodists and White Supremacy in South Africa* (Durban: Madiba Publications, 1991), 87.

10 Madise, M. “Struggle from within: Black Caucuses’ Quest for Recognition,” in *Orality, Memory and the Past*, edited by P. Denis (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2000), 261.

welcomed and recognised by the then chairperson, Rev. Baartman.¹¹ Dandala was elected to be the secretary and later the chairperson. Dandala confirms that Rev. Baartman made it clear that the BMC was meeting without the intention of breaking away from the church, but to proclaim that “we need to have a multiracial church that is described by our experiences and the hopes of the black people and what they have been going through” (Dandala Interview, 17 March 2016).

Dandala started to be involved with the BMC in 1977. He would end up in leadership first as general secretary under the chairpersonship of Dr Stanley Mogoba in the years 1979–1981, and he became chairperson in 1990–1994. The aim was to address the predicament of the black people in South Africa.¹² This predicament was described by Pityana (1995, 74) as one of the conditions of the blacks, who had been oppressed and living in the injustice of nothingness and insignificance in a world of theology of non-personhood. Dandala observed that the BMC was founded to counteract apartheid within the Methodist Church. It sought to fight for the black people within its space. By space Dandala meant the informed political set-up of the day. He further expounded: “We were fighting for the black people in the church to get their right in the church” (Dandala Interview, 17 March 2016).

Foster (2014) notes that the first mainline church to be led by a black person was the MCSA with the election of Rev. Seth Mokitimi as the President of Conference in 1964. Sadly, however, Foster decries the reality of the internal racial struggles in the church and its inability to follow through. According to Dandala, the election of Rev. Mokitimi was the result of pressure from the blacks; however, Mokitimi was not elected by the blacks, but the whites made sure that they elected people at their mercy. Balia (1991) points out that the time had come for some clergy “to embark on a critical programme to turn the tide.”¹³ These clergy had a vision of a church with equal representation at all levels of power sharing, where black Christians would claim privileges and rights in God’s family. For Dandala, this church is a church where blacks who were subjected to a lot of things, were to be regarded as equal before God. The BMC was founded on the principles of going back to ask pertinent questions of life. According to Dandala, “the BMC does not believe that since the white missionaries brought ‘the gospel’ to South Africa, blacks should think like them. But the whites should think about their relationship with the blacks and have compassion for their feelings.”¹⁴ For Dandala, the BMC emphasises what is in the life experiences of black individuals. When the BMC was founded, people were dealing with burning political issues, and the BMC was focusing on the real issues that affected the black people of that time; and is still affecting them today. Dandala reiterated that the BMC was always emphasising that they would not fight the whites just because they are whites, but to say leadership also belongs to us as blacks—together with the whites—as the members of one church.

11 Minutes of the BMC held at Bloemfontein, 14 September 1977, 26.

12 Dandala Interview, 17 March 2016.

13 Balia, *Black Methodists and White Supremacy in South Africa*, 88.

14 Dandala Interview, 17 March 2016.

The reality of internal racial struggles in the church and its inability to follow through with similar leadership choices at lower levels of the church government, meant that the racial transformation of church leadership was haphazard and slow. This legacy of white leadership was a result of the missionary movement of the nineteenth century. The BMC wanted to rise above this situation when the movement declared that the time had come for equal recognition of blacks. The MCSA had come of age and it was believed that it should come under black leadership by black people for black people. According to Dandala, the BMC was influenced by the Black Consciousness Movement, especially based on the slogan of Steve Biko that says: “White people you are alone” (Grassow 2015). Dandala would interpret the same statement as saying: “Black people, you are people on your own and you can do something” (Dandala Interview, 17 March 2016). The influence of the BMC by the Black Consciousness Movement was emphasised by former President Thabo Mbeki at the memorial lecture of Rev. Z. R. Mahabane. Mbeki argued that the BMC was part of the Black Consciousness Movement, which therefore defined the BMC as a conscious activity for the affirmation of black human dignity and the fundamental social transformation which South Africa needs (Mbeki 2013).

The BMC also saw the need for a political life of the church. According to Foster (2014, 12), BMC membership was open to both clergy and laity. Dandala added that the BMC developed in different ways; first it consisted only of men discussing what was affecting black people. Later they were joined by women and together they formed the Black Methodist Consultation (BMC). The BMC was started at first by ministers only, followed by black lay men and later woman. Balia (1991) contends that the BMC is an autonomous and independent movement and is not part of the church structures. This point was confirmed by Dandala, who, however, disputed that the BMC was a splinter group that was trying to break away from the church (Dandala Interview, 17 March 2016). This movement also laid a foundation for necessary self-examination and for a black awareness. Its aim was to undo any psychological oppression born out of the existing structures. While black Methodists were never “officially” unequal to white Methodists within the church, the reality was quite different on the ground (Foster 2014).

This reality of the BMC is still present today. First, the BMC is truly significant because they engage in the process of more adequately representing and reflecting the voices of black South Africans. As such, Foster argues that by 2008, the MCSA had nine black bishops of whom one was a woman and three were white. Second, they have helped to re-appropriate the values, traditions and religion of Africa in the Methodist Church. Sadly, missionary imperialism often sought to eradicate elements of African tradition and religion from the Methodist Church. Third, the BMC have helped to re-appropriate the values, traditions and religion of Africa in the Methodist Church (Foster 2014, 12). The BMC has helped the MCSA to reinvent itself as an African Christian denomination through education, publication and presentation of value and necessity of black and African theology. Fourth, the BMC has ensured that politics are dealt with as part of the official agenda of the church (Foster 2014, 12). Although Grassow (2015) feels that the BMC is a caucus within the church, Foster (2014) has a different understanding. For Mlotshwa (1999), the BMC is a movement that

arose within the church to fight the injustices that existed within the church.¹⁵ Dandala emphasised that the impact of the work of the BMC in transforming the MCSA has been felt by the church, so that it will not remain the same as it was in the past before the establishment of this organisation. Responding to the interview question, which says: “Can we attribute the black leadership in the church to the BMC or to the independence of South Africa?” Dandala stressed: “Yes! The BMC has to be commended for the job well done.” However, he bemoaned the claim that because there is black leadership in the church, the BMC must die a natural death. For Dandala, the major challenge is that blacks have an inferiority complex which they think must be dealt with. According to Dandala, the focus is for the church to save *all* the people and to be owned by *all* the people. The church is the church of Jesus Christ, who welcomes all people, so it belongs to all people—not to a few individuals with power to control it.

Dandala went on to argue that there are a number of things that have to be understood—which the BMC did not emphasise—but things that were emphasised by black theology, and which were clearly unwanted. For example, James Cone commented on the Black Power Movement, saying that “if Christ was not to be found in black people’s struggle for freedom, if he were not found in the ghettos with rat-bitten black children, if he were in rich white churches and their seminaries, then I want no part in Him” (De Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio 1983, 174). Dandala disassociates the BMC from such thinking, but emphasises that the BMC looks on the history of the church and asks, can one promote a feeling of blackness and where can we see the contribution of black persons, because it was not being felt.

For Dandala, the BMC is still relevant, because blacks have not yet arrived. He comments that in life one does not arrive by simply going into something, but you arrive by being there.¹⁶ Black people must continue moving until such a time that they feel they are being accepted and there is equality in the church. This statement is in contrast with the points raised by Grassow, namely that the BMC has seen its days. In his contribution, Grassow (2015) notes: “What I am seeing is not a black led church, but a black Methodist Church. White members of the MCSA are a dying breed; literally we are getting older and greyer with our white membership dwindling to insignificance. White young members are leaving some of the churches and some go to no church at all.” Grassow adds that “white people no longer feel they belong and they feel excluded by the MCSA because the ethos of the MCSA has been black, as argued previously.” Grassow emphasises the negative impact of the BMC, especially as he argues that “white members have withdrawn into white local churches and leave the national church to the black majority” (Grassow 2015).

Dandala does not sing from the same hymn book as Grassow on this claim. In refuting this assumption, Dandala argues that “the BMC is not looking for a black church, but a human church that cuts across all—reaching everybody’s crisis.”¹⁷ It happened that black people had

15 Mlotshwa, T. *Black Caucuses. The Black Methodist Consultation* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1999), 46.

16 Dandala Interview, 17 March 2016.

17 Dandala Interview, 17 March 2016.

a crisis, however, they were never listened to but they were bundled aside and oppressed as non-beings. He further warns that people must not mistake the BMC for black majority rule because, for him, the BMC never controlled the majority of the church. The BMC is a group of people who are emphatic about what has to be done in order for the lives of the black people to be respected. The BMC must be reclaimed, because there is a tendency of seeing the majority rule and saying everything is right. Dandala emphasises that “we cannot say everything is right because we are blacks but things have to be analysed properly. We must think, analyse and reach a conclusion about that which is suitable for black people.”¹⁸

Dandala also does not agree with the sentiments that the BMC has become highly political, given the invitation of former President Thabo Mbeki in 2013 and Mrs Graca Machel in 2015. Dandala reiterated that the BMC is not a church, therefore it could never replace the Methodist Church but would rather influence the church. Moreover, politics have run through all the spheres and sectors of South Africa. The BMC is seeking ways to articulate the black position in the church. His response to those who think that the BMC must open its membership to whites, was to object by saying: “If we involve whites it would no longer be the BMC.”¹⁹ The whites have an influence over black people that cannot be resolved in a short space of time; they have to work jointly involving the blacks and respecting the blacks and understand them as the same people created in the image of God. Dandala concludes that if the whites chose to sit [quietly] because the blacks were meeting, there would be no problem; but if in meetings whites chose to oppose what the BMC was doing, it would mean they have a problem with the black agenda.

Dandala’s view is that most black church leaders in the MCSA are products of the BMC—whether they are conscious of that or not. This does not mean that all black ministers are members of the BMC, because people should feel free to belong where they want to belong. It is not about your colour, but it is about dedication to the work of the BMC. Dandala believes that the BMC as an organisation has a good future and a promising one. It will remain there helping the blacks to have decision-making powers in the church. The BMC is not a church, but its members are there to see that the decisions are carried out based on the black experience. Dandala asserted that:

Its only when the whites and the blacks start working together and taking the black experience seriously and genuinely that the end of the BMC would come, for then there would no longer be a need for it. But as long as the whites trivialise the experiences of black people, the BMC would remain necessary and active.²⁰

Ministry from a Perspective of the BMC

Dandala’s ministry was shaped by black consciousness and this can be traced from the way he approached his role as a pastor. This section will review the landmarks of his ministry to see how the black experience shaped it. As argued earlier, Dandala went to the Federal

18 Dandala Interview, 17 March 2016.

19 Dandala Interview, 17 March 2016.

20 Dandala Interview, 17 March 2016.

Theological Seminary of Southern Africa in Alice in the Eastern Cape Province. The Federal Theological Seminary was one of the strong ecumenical institutions of his time. It enrolled Methodists, Anglicans, Presbyterians and Congregationalists. During his years of study, Dandala became the local chairman of the South African Students Organisation (SASO). As the SASO chairman, Dandala was involved in the exploration of black and liberation theology and in developing programmes to assist communities with basic amenities. Dandala's inspiration for SASO was through Steve Bantu Biko. Biko—in his inaugural speech in December 1969 after being appointed the president of SASO in Durban—clarified among other things the aims of SASO. Some of the aims (especially items 4, 5 and 6) in Biko's speech were: 4) to establish a solid identity amongst the non-white students and to ensure that these students are always treated with the dignity and respect they deserve; 5) to protect the interests of the members' centres and to act as a pressure group on all institutions and organisations for the benefit of the non-white students; and 6) to boost the morale of the non-white students and to heighten their confidence in themselves, thereby contributing largely to the direction of thought taken by the various institutions on social, political and other current topics (Biko 2015, 5).

The spirit of black consciousness caught fire in Dandala. During his interview with Reitmaier in 2011, it became clear that Dandala's leadership in both politics and church was influenced by the Black Consciousness Movement led by Steve Bantu Biko and other key people like Barney Pityama, Mamphela Ramphele and Njabulo Ndebele. According to Parratt (1998, 2), black consciousness stressed the dignity of "blackness" in the face of exploitation by a white-controlled government, built on its conviction of the superiority of white people over black people. In his opening address at the twentieth World Methodist Conference in Durban, Dandala maintained that knowing Biko was a privilege, but reading his thoughts and convictions "always leaves one humbled and amazed by the depth and beauty of the man, in spite of the tender age."²¹

Building Racial Bridges within the MCSA

On his return from the United Kingdom, Dandala was first stationed as a circuit minister in Empangeni Circuit, KwaZulu-Natal from 1978 to 1982. According to Dandala, Empangeni was a pilot project of mixing a black and a white minister. In Empangeni Circuit, Dandala was ministering to 29 societies. His superintendent, Rev. Eldret Englesman, had no idea of the unique needs and dynamics of black ministry. In the circuit, Dandala introduced revivals during weekends in order to get momentum for the Sunday services. This situation impressed members of these societies. From Empangeni, he was then stationed as superintendent minister of North Circuit in Port Elizabeth from 1983–1985. At that time North Circuit was one of the largest circuits in the MCSA.²²

²¹ Minutes of the twentieth World Methodist Conference 2011, p, 29.

²² Dandala stated during the interview that he was the youngest minister to be stationed in such a big circuit. Though big, the circuit had no finances.

Upon his arrival in Port Elizabeth, he was met by two police officers who said to him: “We know you are from Empangeni. You should not mess up.”²³ According to Dandala, this statement was the beginning of problems. Police had created a condition that portrayed a situation as if the ministers of the Word were hated by both the people and the police. In his sorrowful remarks during the interviews for this paper, Dandala expressed deep shock regarding the way he was counted among the people who would be disappearing—some even being killed. While in Port Elizabeth, Dandala participated in the reconciliation process between two political parties, the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the African National Congress (ANC). In July 1985, a state of emergency was declared in South Africa and Dandala was detained in prison without trial by the apartheid government. He explained that, when the police took Rev. Soga (one of the political activists), they were proceeding to his home. Rev. Soga’s daughter phoned, advising him that the police were coming for him. Dandala’s major fears were for his children and wife. Instead, his wife bade him farewell saying: “Go well and if you die at least we know who took you.”²⁴ In his remarks, Dandala confessed that this was one of the most challenging statements to the police by his wife, who was pregnant and eventually gave birth to a child who survived only three days. One of the reasons given for Dandala’s detention was for working with the IFP; however, he had not associated himself with it.²⁵

The black community in Port Elizabeth lived in rural areas and would visit the town. One would need a pass to come to town and the pass was valid only for a limited number of days. For Dandala, that unfairness was supposed to be challenged. He got involved in their struggle. There was an association of black ministers called African Ministers’ Association of South Africa, Idamasa, which he revived. One of the major aims of this forum was to oppose apartheid head-on, because people were suffering. The clergy from the African Instituted Churches also participated in this organisation. Idamasa held services together, and the power of the church at that time was absolutely phenomenal.²⁶

One of the critical political involvements of Dandala was to intervene in the feuds between two strong political parties in Port Elizabeth, the United Democratic Front (UDF) and AZAPO. It could have been done by his fellow minister, Rev. D. M. Soga, but unfortunately, he was the vice president of UDF (Dandala Interview, 29 February 2016). In the struggle, he was also working with Rev. Andile Mbete. The church was identifying with people, although in contrast the church was fast losing membership to government because people were afraid of the government. People listened to the government more than the church. The government was very particular about ministers’ involvement in politics. In view of this, the police chose some fellow ministers to spy on Idamasa; unfortunately, Idamasa used the same men to spy the police.

23 Dandala Interview, 29 February 2016.

24 Dandala Interview, 29 February 2016.

25 Dandala Interview, 23 February 2016.

26 Dandala Interview with Reitmaier 2011.

Dandala confessed that at one time the church was surrounded by police. He told the police: “This is my home,” and the police accepted it and left the UDF (Dandala Interview, 29 February 2016). This incident happened when the police had come to arrest him. Dandala was threatened by the police in many ways. To deal with them, Dandala reflected: “I told them that the church sent me to preach. Even if you burn down the church I will not stop preaching. It is my preaching that makes me say the things that you don’t want me to say to the people. So even if you burn the church down, I will not stop preaching.”²⁷ This situation limited his troubles.²⁸ The other temptation Dandala faced was of young men and women wanting to be helped; they wanted to leave the country, and yet they were the police. Dandala and his team were able to identify these people and could offer them such assistance.

From Port Elizabeth, Dandala was transferred to the Central Methodist Circuit in Johannesburg from 1992 to 1996 as the superintendent. When he was leaving Port Elizabeth, police officers came to him and said: “We are happy to see you going before we arrest you. Go well!”²⁹ Kakaza (1999) supports Dandala’s observation by quoting him as saying, “apartheid taught me many things.” During this period, Dandala convened the Institute for Evangelism, both for the Southern African Methodist Churches and later a Pan African Institute for Evangelism for the Methodist Churches in Africa, held in Nairobi 1994. This culminated in the founding of the Pan African Methodist Leaders’ Consultation, which is held bi-annually. Dandala also served as the President of the South African Council of Churches.

Struggle against Poverty

From 1986 to 1991, Dandala served as the Mission Secretary of the MCSA. In this office, Dandala argued that he had an opportunity to tour the countries that make up the MCSA, namely South Africa, Swaziland, Malawi, Lesotho, Botswana and Mozambique. During his tenure of office, Dandala pointed out that he was instrumental in launching the Malihambe Missions. Malihambe was an encouragement for people to speak radically on the issues that affect them. This approach at that time was very a dangerous move. Its policy was of sending black ministers and white ministers to work in pairs. These ministers would go together and preach either in white dominated societies or black societies, including the townships in the rural areas. When one white minister returned from the rural areas, he confessed: “I developed a sore throat but I can’t compare it with the experience of meeting black people with their children and also to feel their experience.”³⁰

Dandala strategised a campaign to unite churches in Africa to speak with one voice. For example, he mentioned his trip to Zimbabwe where he went to find out how matters were for them and to discuss a probability of coming together in dealing with the affairs of Africa. Dandala stated that one of the reasons for this gesture was to urge the African church to speak with one voice and to respond together theologically on common matters. Dandala added that

27 Dandala Interview, 23 February 2016.

28 Dandala Interview, 23 February 2016.

29 Dandala Interview, 23 February 2016.

30 Dandala Interview, 23 February 2016.

the Mission Department felt that if John Wesley was never understood in Africa, the church should make it a point that Methodism in Africa needs to do that. Dandala emphasised: “It would seem as if Methodism came to Africa and people joined the church and never transplanted Methodism into the African soil.” The Mission Department also introduced the Zikhuliseni programme where people would bring food for the poor. According to Dandala, this was a gesture to show that blacks can fight poverty by themselves using the resources they have. The idea was to make South Africa a first line of concern.

In 1992, Dandala was stationed at Central Mission in Johannesburg, replacing Rev. Peter Storey.³¹ According to Dandala, Central Mission Circuit is reserved for ministers working in the inner city. The society is grounded on the challenges faced by the poor. The church’s missionary activities go beyond that of the Wesleyans.

Dandala the Peacemaker

In his narratives during the interview, Dandala remarked that one day he was phoned by the dwellers of Selby and Jeppe hostels in the inner city of Johannesburg, who were involved in a brutal war fuelled by the fact that some belonged to the IFP and others were in the ANC. They needed Dandala’s intervention to bring about peace between them. That was the beginning of his peace-making ministry, whilst at the time being the superintendent of Central Methodist Church (CMC).

Dandala’s ministry, as discussed earlier, demonstrates that it was a ministry in and outside the church. He offered himself to peace initiatives. He had started working for peace-building from the time when he was at Empangeni; a very difficult and dangerous work that led to him being persecuted by the police. One of the worst things that happened to him was detention without trial, as discussed earlier. It showed police brutality in prison and attitudes of naïve white policemen who accepted propaganda to defend apartheid. Dandala described that period as the most demanding for the clergy because they had to patrol the streets at night to keep peace while the police were the perpetrators of violence (Kakaza 1999).

At the Central Methodist Mission in Johannesburg, Dandala’s mediation and conflict resolution skills were in great demand during preparation for the political transition in the late nineties. He found himself having to be at the forefront of helping to reduce violence in order to create an atmosphere where elections could happen peacefully. In his narrative, Dandala played a major role in facilitating peace initiatives between African National Congress (ANC) Self Defence Units and the Inkatha Freedom Party’s (IFP) Self Protection Units in the eastern areas of Johannesburg. During the interview, Dandala reluctantly demonstrated how he used the Methodist approach during a Holy Communion service of receiving the peace of God. He argued: “I said to the hostile parties, make peace with each other.”³² People were ready to reconcile. Dandala added: “I then said to the people, pass the peace to each other.”

31 According to Methodist records, this would not be the only time that Dandala would succeed Rev. Prof. Peter Storey. He would later take over from him as President of the Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary.

32 Dandala Interview, 23 February 2016.

He added: “I said to them, may the peace of God be with you.” People responded in sharing peace and the incident took almost 15 minutes of reconciliation.³³ For the hostel dwellers, peace was the only thing that they wanted at this point and they requested Dandala to remain with them. Lima (2005) confirms that Dandala’s initiative culminated in the signing of the Peace Accord of 1994, ending political violence in East Rand townships. This was a huge contribution by an individual in the transition from an apartheid government to a peaceful negotiation of democracy.

During his tenure of presiding bishopric, Dandala resigned and took the appointment of the All Africa Conference of Churches based in Nairobi, Kenya. Regionally, Dandala was also involved in peace talks in Kenya in early 2008, following that country’s post-election violence. In his statement on Kenya, Dandala argued: “To allow democracy to collapse in Kenya would have been to allow it to collapse around the continent.”³⁴ In May 2004, Dandala led an AACC delegation to Sudan. His subsequent report back urged the Sudan government to help end hostilities and human rights violations in Darfur. He urged the world to keep the whole Sudan in focus beyond Darfur, and said there were strong grounds for investigating and monitoring reports of crime against humanity in Sudan.

Dandala’s peace initiative did not end in Africa, but as the General Secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches, he was also instrumental in advocating for peace in South America. A case in point is his confrontation of an American Televangelist and one time American presidential candidate, Pat Robertsons. Robertsons had supported the call to assassinate the Venezuelan President, Hugo Chavez. Dandala condemned the call as an inexcusable call for brutality by a man who claims to be a disciple of Christ. Dandala observed that Robertsons could not reconcile his call for the assassination of Chavez with Christ’s call for us to be peacemakers in a world filled with violence (Dandala 2005). The peace-making initiative led by Dandala did not go unnoticed. He earned himself awards in his recognition. In 1993, Dandala was given the Bishop John T. Walker Distinguished Humanitarian Services Award. The award is presented annually by Africare, an American non-profit organisation to recognise those whose work has made a significant impact on raising the standard of living in Africa (Lima 2009). In 1994, Dandala was presented with the Peace Award by the World Methodist Conference for his contribution in the making of peace. In addition, Dandala also scooped the Rotary’s Paul Harris Fellowship Award for excellence in 1994.

Dandala the Ecumenist

During his days as the general secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches, Dandala was also appointed as the moderator of the Joint Working Group of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches. Dandala was appointed as the general secretary of the All Africa Council of Churches (AACC) in 2003, ending his term in December 2008. The AACC has 169 national churches in 39 countries in Africa with an estimated

33 Dandala Interview, 29 February 2016

34 Reuters/Tiso Group/whoswho/sa.

membership of 120 million Christians in Africa. The body was established in 1963 in Kampala (Dandala 2010, 102). In his acceptance speech as the general secretary of the AACC, Dandala called for the healing of the church in Africa. He noted that only a healed church would contribute to the healing of the continent (Odera 2003). According to Wamari (2003), Dandala laments that the division of the church, its divisive effects in communities and the wastage of meagre community resources to sustain a multiplicity of denominations, are scandals in the church in Africa. There are number of developments on political, theological and social issues that Dandala dealt with in defence of Africans. For example, during the heydays of apartheid, Dandala worked as a conflict resolution figure as earlier discussed. In 2002, he received the National Order of Baobab silver category for his role and involvement in the struggle against apartheid up to democracy in South Africa.

As the general secretary of the AACC, Dandala was also concerned about the African Church being a prophetic church. He argued that the church had to accept the challenge to be an advocate of those who are suffering (Dandala 2010, 104). He re-emphasised this statement during the interview at his home when he stated that ministry requires one to suffer with the suffering (Dandala Interview, 8 March 2016). In his view, the church must ensure that it does not subscribe to the socio-economic and political positions that have made the ground fertile for conflict, but must constantly seek to apply the measure of life, justice and truth in the struggle of the continent today (Dandala 2010, 104).

Dandala the Humanitarian

Apart from peace awards, Dandala also won some awards for his humanitarian initiatives. Dandala contributed much to relieve the impact of HIV and AIDS in Africa. According to Dion Foster (Dion Foster Blog), at a MCSA conference in Mtata, Dandala spoke as the general secretary of the AACC. He argued:

If we South Africans and particularly churches in Southern Africa do not wake up to the crisis of HIV and AIDS, we shall be recolonised within the next generation. AIDS is killing many young people, skilled, gifted African women and men, so that we shall soon have very few people between the ages of 20 and 60, and even fewer skilled persons between those ages.

Dandala added that when that happened, it would be colonisation once again.

However, this time we shall not be colonised by a nation state such as America, China or England, rather we shall be colonised by multinational corporations who wish to exploit the natural resources of our fair lands. If we have the natural resources and a host of precious commodities, yet there is no one left to extract and use these resources, those who have power, money and skill from elsewhere in the world will do it for us and eventually they will do it in spite of us (Foster Blog).

Besides HIV and AIDS, Dandala had always been contributing to community development. In 1999, Dandala was crowned with the Prior Order of St Johns when he was the presiding bishop of the MCSA and the president of the South African Council of Churches. The Prior Order of St John, formerly Venerable Order of St John of Jerusalem, was first instituted in 1888 by the royal charter of Queen Victoria. It became associated with the founding of St

John Ophthalmic Hospital near the Old City of Jerusalem and the St Johns Ambulance (<https://www.sja.org.uk/sja/default.aspx>). This Order is found throughout the Commonwealth of nations with the world-wide mission to prevent and relieve sickness and injury and to act to enhance the health and wellbeing of people anywhere in the world. According to Kakaza (1999), Dandala was the first black South African to be awarded the Prior of the Order of St Johns, whose appointment is confirmed by the Order's head, Queen Elizabeth.³⁵ Apart from the St Johns award in 2002, Dandala was honoured with the Silver Order of the Grand Counsellor of the Baobab Excellence by President Thabo Mbeki. According to Lima (2009), the Order of the Baobab is awarded to South African citizens for distinguished service in the fields of business and the economy, science, medicine, and for technological innovation and community service.

Conclusion

In Dandala we see a man who is a typical protégé of the BMC. He was born in a Methodist manse, nurtured in the black church, joined the ministry under the guidance and tutelage of black Methodist ministers and lay leaders, joined the BMC at the beginning of his ministry, rose to the ranks of secretary and ultimately became its national chairperson. Dandala has been hailed as one of the greatest leaders of not only the MCSA, but also the SACC and the AACC. This can be attributed to the mentoring that the BMC has given to black people so that they can rise into the leadership of the church not only within the Methodist denomination, but also in the ecumenical family. It is also not surprising that his ministry is marked by being socially and politically relevant. It was always about the upliftment of people from poverty, oppression and racial segregation. He had a huge impact on both the church locally and abroad. Dandala contributed strongly to the freedom of South Africa today. He is fully pastor and fully politician. He ministered to the edges and sought to reach the whole person instead of just the spiritual one. He will go down in the annals of history as one of the finest sons of the Black Methodist Consultation, *Ifa labazali bethu*.

35 <https://www.sja.org.uk/sja/default.aspx>. The St Johns award was also given to the former South African President Thabo Mbeki in 2007. Mbeki was crowned the Knight of the Order. Mbeki expressed the importance of the Order in his acceptance speech. In his remarks, Mbeki demonstrated that the Order is drawn on theological parameters, especially from Jesus' teaching in the Book Matthew. Mbeki argues: "I shall always recall the moving words of the Grand Prior that we should always remember that the points of the Cross of the Order of St Johns represent the eight beatitudes representing virtues of humanity, sorrows for sin, meekness, thirst for righteousness, mercy, purity and suffering under persecution and that the whiteness of the Cross should always remind us of the purity of life" (Mbeki 2007). Mbeki further emphasised that the "Order gives the members possibilities to allow love to leave its holy temple and come to sight of many to liberate them into life, to wean ourselves from timidity to extend to the poor and the sick the love in whose train some permeate memories of pleasure and ancient history of pain" (Mbeki 2007).

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