

# **The AMEC Schism in Namibia (1946)**

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## **1 Introduction**

The aim of this article are to discuss the historical-chronological developments of the AMEC schism from the Rhenish Mission Society (RMS) in Namibia during the year of the schism, 1946. It will show that there are a few Nama leaders who played a formative role in the founding of this important church in the country.

The most significant background elements to the schism, are the events related to Mangona Maahe Mokone's break from the Methodist Church in South Africa in 1892, the rising tide of the founding of African 'independent' churches in southern Africa, the RMS and the Nama people in the South of Namibia during the first half of the twentieth century, and the RMS during the period, 1914-1945. Before proceeding to the main focus of the article, I highlight some points related to this background information.

## **2 Mangona Maahe Mokone**

Toward the end of the twentieth century, the Ethiopian church became a very significant church, attracting ministers from other churches. Mangona Mokone played a significant role in the rise of Ethiopianism in South Africa.

Mokone was born in 1851 in Bokgaga, in the Pedi area. He left his home in the wake of a war with the Swazi's during which his father was killed (Madise 1994). In Natal he found employment as a domestic worker in the household of a pious woman, Mrs. J. Steele. At Durban he was in the service of the Methodist Church. He became a local preacher and applied for the Methodist ministry. He received his theological training at the Kilnerton training College in Pretoria. He also worked there as a teacher.

Why did the Ethiopian church come into existence? On this point Coan (1961:86f) observed that there arose,

a crop of young men who had failed to follow in the footsteps of their predecessors. The native preacher could no longer sit with his white brethren in the same gathering. The native preacher was to have his own black conference where he and his kind could convene and not always report proceedings for approval or rejection.

This was too, because they experienced petty discrimination. Coan continues to say,

On calling on his white brother, the native preacher could no longer enter by the front door as he was wont—the back entrance was good enough for him, no matter what the nature of his business. Many among the native ministers began to question the attitude by their white brethren. There grew a spirit of discontent, which eventually showed itself.

Many Black Ministers began to question the discrimination practices in the church. Discontent was widespread. This is a main reason why Mokone decided to break away from the then white controlled Methodist Church. On 24 October 1892 he handed his resignation letter to Rev. George Weavind the supervisor of the Methodist Church in the Transvaal. In it he stated:

I hereby give notice that at the end of the month I will leave the Wesleyan Church ministry and serve God in my own way. It is no use to stop for I won't change. If you like I can pack up all I've got and leave tomorrow morning before breakfast.

Your grumbling servant  
Mangena Maake Mokone (Madise 2000:267).

In his resignation Mokone was very clear to start his own church. He indicated that he wants to serve God in his own way. He asked the General Superintendent for a Certificate of ordination in the Wesleyan church, and that he was leaving on his own accord (Coan 1961:89).

The following is a list of grievances that Mokone sent to the Head of the Methodist Church and which also served as his 'declaration of independence'. Due to their founding significance, I list them all.

1. Our district meetings have been separated from the Europeans since 1886. And we were compelled to have a white chairman and secretary.
2. Our district meetings were held in a more or less barbaric manner. We were just like a lot of [criminals] before the landrost for passes. What the white man says is infallible, and no black can prove or dare prove it wrong.
3. This separation shows that we can't be brothers.
4. The wife and children of Native ministers have no allowance from the Society whatever. Only the whites have it. This is no doubt one of the reasons for the separation of the district meetings.
5. The Native ordained minister is of no use to his people. He cannot exercise his rights as a minister or be placed in a position of trust as one who is a fellow labourer in the Lord. But the candidates of the whites will be placed over the black man as superintendents.
6. Native ministers get from £24 to £50 per annum, while the white ministers get £300 per annum.
7. In the Transvaal, no Native minister has the right to use the Mission property, moveable or immoveable. All the whites are supplied with ox-wagons and furniture from the Society.
8. It is a great shame to see the homes of Native Ministers and teachers. A stable is preferable. At Waterburg I was obliged to build my own house, and, at Makapanstad I spent £3/12/0 on the house for reeds and skins, etc.
9. The Native minister holds class meetings and prayer meetings, visits the sick, pray for them, preach, bury and teach school, while the white minister's work is to marry, baptize, and administer communion. They will never go to visit the sick or pray for them, and when they die, your Native minister must go to bury your own people. This is not Christianity, nor brotherly love, nor friendship. If this is true, then white ministers are unnecessary among the black people.
10. The white ministers don't even know the members of their

circuits. They always build their homes one or two miles away from the congregation.

11. No Native minister is honoured among the white brethren. The more the Native humbles himself, the more they make a fool of him.

12. We have been in the Wesleyan Ministry for 12 years, and not one of us has ever received the Minutes or the Annual Report. We are simply ignorant of our own work. We are called 'Revs' but we are worse than the boy working for the missionary, for he will now and then see the missionary notices. What advantage is to be obtained by remaining in this Society?

13. As Principal of Kilnerton Institute, I was not esteemed as one who belongs to and has any say in the school. A student may be discharged, or may leave school, and no one would tell me anything about it until I hear it from someone else not in any way connected with the Institution.

14. When a student is sick, the poor [person] will be sent for to come at once to the classroom, shivering under his blanket. He is then asked in the classroom what is the matter, and is then told that he is lazy, not sick, and to hurry and get better. The boy who speaks rather straight will be considered a bad one. If all this is so, where is justice? Where is brotherly love? Where is Christian sympathy? God in heaven is the witness to all these things.

Mangona Mokone

Kilnerton, October 23, 1892 (Madise 2000:268f).

Mokone experienced and lists various forms of discriminatory practices. These relate to petty discrimination which all suffered, but also structural practices. For instance, the two synods, black and white, with the continuing presence of white ministers in leadership positions in the black synod, were for him an indication of discrimination. He fought discrimination in the church. However, he became convinced that had no other option but to resign from his post. He had come to the conclusion that the Church was not prepared to change (Madise 2000:270). At one point, and referring to the main Christian values he adheres to, he judges and says: 'This is not Christianity, nor brotherly love, nor friendship'. Toward the end, he says, 'Where is brotherly love? Where is Christian sympathy?'

In November 1892 while the white Wesleyans were having their missionary congress in Pretoria, Mokone and his followers held a protest meeting outside. It was then that he decided to break away from the Methodist Church and form an independent church, the Ethiopian Catholic Church in Zion. The first church, an old tin shanty, was dedicated on 2 November 1893, by Rev. J.W. Underwood. He preached from Genesis 28:19, the same text Francis Asbury used in July 1774, when Bethel A.M.E. Church, Philadelphia in the United States of America was dedicated (Pillay n.d.:1).

In his own inaugural sermon, Mokone declared that the establishment of an African Church is to be understood as the fulfilment of biblical prophecy concerning the final liberation of the African people. He referred to the words of Psalm 68:31 ('Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God') (Denis 1994:88).

### **3 The Founding of African 'Independent' Churches in Southern Africa**

The phenomenon of the rise of the independent church movement in South Africa signalled the coming into being of an ever-increasing number and variety of separatist churches under indigenous leadership and control (Coan 1961:418). Kamphausen (1994:83), for instance, describes this period as follows:

The making of an indigenous clergy in the last century and in the beginning of this century has to be understood in terms of a conflictual process which in many cases led to the establishment of African Independent churches and which found its first expression in the historical movement called Ethiopianism. The underlying conflict arose out of the fact that the missionary enterprise was interpreted by African Christians as an integral part of western colonialism, which was very often uncritically supported by European and North American missionaries.

This form of colonisation mainly centred on the fact that the missionary organisations did not draw indigenous Christian leaders into their ranks. Even though they were more than ready to fulfil all responsible leadership activities,

they were treated as not sufficiently qualified to, for example, minister the sacraments. This meant that in all activities and decisions, black Christians were treated as if they were secondary Christians who did not really qualify as such. Before I address this issue from the AMEC perspective in Namibia, I provide a brief overview of developments concerning the interaction of the RMS and the Nama people during the first half of the twentieth century.

#### **4 The RMS and the Nama People in the South**

The RMS worked in a number of areas in southern Namibia: Warmbad, Gibeon, Berseba, Hoachanas, Gibeon, Maltahöhe, Mariental, Stampriet, Kranzplatz, and Keetmanshoop. By 1889 it had 3 300 members on 10 mission stations, which increased to 6 500 by 1902 (Buys & Nambala 2003:83). Some of the churches were influenced by the Bondelswart rebellion against the German colonial government – losing members – while others were not. For instance, the people of Berseba did not partake in the 1904-1907 Nama revolt, with the result that the growth of the church was not disrupted (Moleah 1983:14)<sup>1</sup>. In 1922 a second revolt occurred, this time against the South African authority, due to a dog tax (Emmett 1988:224)<sup>2</sup>. In 1918 many members died due to the worldwide flu pandemic and in 1923 the work of the RMS was further hampered when many Hereros turned their back on the Rhenish Mission Church. They returned to their traditional roots as part of the Ethiopian movement, which flooded many parts of Africa during these years.

In some cases, the revolts meant that people would desert the stations. At other times, they would flock to the stations, and also provide labour for the development at the stations. Due to the changes in fortune of these stations, some served as main centre at one stage or another. Another issue

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<sup>1</sup> See the archival material at ELCRN, VII. 7.19, Windhoek, 1946/1947.

<sup>2</sup> Windhoek became the headquarters of the German government in 1890, causing many people to converge on Windhoek. Originally the Rhenish Missionaries served the whole community, but in 1895 the Germans obtained their own minister, Pastor Siebe. In 1904 missionary Meier arrived to minister to the Herero, and related groups. In 1903 the Peace Church of the Rhenish Mission Church in Windhoek was inaugurated, with 526 members. See the archival material at ELCRN VII. 7.19, Windhoek 1946/1947; and also Vedder (1946:19-22).

which divided the people and impacted on attendance at the stations was the allegiance of Hendrik Witbooi. When he supported the church, people attended church activities. For instance, Gibeon was evacuated by the Rhenish Mission after the departure of Hendrik Witbooi in 1887, and then served the people from Berseba. In 1894 Witbooi returned and started to rebuild the church. Also, after the revolts during the first few years of the twentieth century, the churches were deserted again (Kössler 1999:25f). However, only at Gibeon, at the handing over of this large district to missionary Fritz Meyer in 1939, the Gibeon Church had 5815 members with 2748 communicants in the Church.

With Keetmanshoop, it was different. In 1866 a male mission was established here. The local Christian Chief had a strong influence on the people and succeeded in staying clear of tribal conflict. After the first church building was washed away in a flood in 1890 a new building was inaugurated in 1895. Gradually this town became the Southern headquarters of the government, resulting in many people of all kinds assembling at Keetmanshoop. By 1903 the Church had 1400 members, the largest congregation in Namaland at the time. In 1907 missionary Niemeyer was appointed for a hundred Herero people in Keetmanshoop. By 1910 the congregation had 3500 members (Baumann 1967: 11-119).

## **5 The RMS in the period 1914 – 1945**

In the period 1922-1957, the Rhenish Mission Church in Namibia experienced severe decline due to two factors: war and secessions. The two main secessions were those of the Nama (who formed the AMEC) and the Herero (who formed the Oruano Church<sup>3</sup>). However, it also suffered severely during and after WWI (1914-1919) and again during the period of WWII (1939-1945).

During WWI, most of the Rhenish Church Centres were replaced or closed down. The Augustineum training College at Gaub was closed in 1914,

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<sup>3</sup> The tribal chiefs, under the leadership of Chief Hosea Kutako, were the driving force behind the founding of the Oruaano as a Herero Independent Church in 1955 (see Sundermeier 1973; and Mbeunde 1986 for further information).

only to reopen again at Okahandja in 1923. Vedder's plan to establish missions for Kaokoland were halted, and, where missionaries had to be moved out of dangerous territories, the churches in these areas, basically dissolved. Many congregations also had to move around during the war and at times lost all property. There was no support from Germany, no normal growth of work, with only some financial support from the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC).

Martial law during WWII, after 1939, disrupted the church again. Six missionaries were detained, while another six were under house arrest. They could not make or receive pastoral visits. No meetings could take place, not even of the church executives. Ministry on farms was also prevented by the mentioned military regulations. The closing down of the Paulinum Seminary for the training of Evangelists and pastors immediately after completion of the first three year program (1938-1940) came as a severe blow<sup>4</sup>.

Paulinum was closed after its principal, missionary Fritz Pönnighaus was detained by the South African military. The Rhenish Mission Church, which already had a backlog with respect to the training of indigenous leaders, would have to wait for another 8 years before pastoral education could resume. The financial needs of the Rhenish mission were severe. It was only partially relieved by donations from South Africa and the U.S.A. This financial crisis during the war motivated deliberations between the Rhenish mission and the DRC about the possibility of the DRC taking over the Rhenish mission in Namibia, in a similar way to its take-over of Rhenish Congregations in South Africa. The Nama people were against this move (Menzel 1978).

## **6 The RMS and the Nama Leaders Before 1946**

In order to just point to some of the main items necessary to understand the dynamics which were important during this period, I refer to some archival material, and summarise them under headings of dates.

### **6.1 1900 - 1909**

There are two main actors referred to during this time, namely Captain Hendrik Witbooi and the teacher and minister, Petrus Jod. As already stated,

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Dr. Pastor W.A. Wienecke, Windhoek, Namibia. 20 November 2002. (Dr. Wienecke is a retired Pastor of the RMS.)



Captain Witbooi broke away from the RMS during the time of the revolts against the German occupying forces, but that he was readmitted later again. In a brief attempt at a historical survey of the AMEC and these events, it is stated:

It was in fact, about 1900 that the Ethiopian Movement was felt in Namibia. The *Missionary Review* of April 1905 reported that the leader of the Nama insurrection, Hendrik Witbooi was a Christian that they trusted. But he had been convinced that the Ethiopian Movement leader in that region was a prophet sent by God to free the blacks from white domination. Hendrik Witbooi had thrown himself heart and soul into the plans of those who are preaching a Black church for black people in Africa. Although at one point Witbooi was excommunicated from the RMS, secession did not take place. He was readmitted into the church by sympathetic missionaries. The Namibian mission work continued to be stable for a long time. But stability does not mean the absence of injustice and discrimination. Black church members continued to be discriminated against by the missionaries. The church leadership remained solely reserved for the missionaries, whereas Africans served at best as evangelists and workers of the missions<sup>5</sup>.

Reflecting on Petrus Jod and his collaboration with the revolt, the author of the same document said:

These ideas were not without effect on the missionaries. Many of them had become strong representatives of the German colonial establishment. In 1909 Präses Fenchel rejected the employment of Petrus Jod as a teacher in a mission school, because he was part of the revolt against German occupation, 1904-1907.

In his 1946 document to Dr Vedder and the other 'revered elders of the Rhenish mission', where he reflected on his service of 37 years in the RMS,

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<sup>5</sup> Box SWAA 1423: A216/6. Rhenish Mission General. A brief unknown attempt at a historical survey of the AMEC with a focus on education and a few perspectives on white rule in SWA/ Namibia. Since the document quotes from the Windhoek Observer of 26 January 2002, it is of recent origin.

Petrus Jod made a few important points on his experiences. In his explanation of his own activities during the time of the revolts, he said:

Through God's grace I have been working in the service of Rhenish Mission of 37 years.

In the year 1909 old missionary Spellmeyer referred me to the missionaries' conference at Warmbad and took me there for the former Präses Missionary Fenchel from K'hoop to examine me in front of the conference. At that time Präses Missionary Fenchel said, 'I cannot accept a Nama teacher from the tribe which rebelled against our German Government as a school teacher. Anyhow, all my experiences with Nama teachers have been bad.'

Because of this remark I went back home from Keetmanshoop. And so it came to be that up to today I carry this label: 'never had an education.' But I as a young guy of 21 years, I had to bear these difficult words the Präses said. Only because of old Missionary Spellmeyer I stayed in this service<sup>6</sup>.

He then reflects on how he had to start his teaching and ministry work without any infrastructure or support, i.e. except Rev. Spellmeyer's support. Such conditions continued throughout his career. He also asserts that he has been 'neither a hindrance to a missionary nor a counter-worker .... [However] If you are not white, then all [these assertions] will not help'<sup>7</sup>.

## 6.2 Early 1920s

As elsewhere in Southern Africa, there was widespread fears of a 'native uprising' during this time. Amongst many other examples, I quote the following.

This meeting assembled for the purpose of securing arms and ammunition for the European population of the town and district as the police have become nervous of news received of a contemplated

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<sup>6</sup> Documents on the AMEC, RMS archives, Wuppertal, Germany. Letter by Petrus Jod addressed to Präses Missionary Dr. Vedder. 1 July 1946.

<sup>7</sup> See previous note.

Native Rising. Informed them that their fears were groundless and whatever intentions natives had or contemplated the government was fully alive to the conditions<sup>8</sup>.

This issue also relates to the suspicion of insurrection from Nama people who possessed weapons<sup>9</sup>.

### 6.3 1922

Finally, the next quotation provides a sample of the kinds of issues which the Nama experienced as problems during this time. It is these, and how they relate to farms and property, that is important for understanding the general condition which the Nama evangelists and teachers trained by the RMS and who would become the leaders in the schism, shared.

We WITBOOI BEOPLE desire and request that farms be given us for our own property, for life .... The following are the farms which we have chosen: GIBEON as capital. RIETMOND, as the promised legacy of our late Father and Chief Hendrik Witbooi, JAKALSFONTEIN, VISRIVIER .... These are the farms which we as natives know ...<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Box 1851: A396/8 Native unrest in Gibeon (1915-1954). Letter by Maltahöhe magistrate to Secretary for SWA. 28 May 1921. The insightful document, Box SWAA 489. A50/227, Letter by the Superintendent of Krantzplatz, Gibeon, addressed to the Native Commissioner, Mariental, on 'Native unrest' of 14 November 1948 is also headed by: 'Onrus en Propaganda onder Nie-Blankes in Namaland'.

<sup>9</sup> Box SWAA 1851/ 1396/8. Response by the Secretary of South West Africa. 19 February 1921.

<sup>10</sup> Box SWAA 1122A158/6 Native Reserves (1918-1931). Memo by Nama leadership addressed to an unidentified senior official in the SWAA Administration. It deals with the grievances of the Nama leaders on farms and property and is signed by I. Witbooi, H. Witbooi, P. Witbooi, C. Lambert, J. Witbooi, Jephtha Kuhanga, Andreas Keister, Jakob Stebe, Filleppus Karigumab, Niklas v.d. Westerhuis Didrik Keister, Jakobus v.d. Westerhuis. 22 September 1922. Note that these farms originally belonged to the Nama.

The other issues the leaders complain about, concerns the under availability of branding irons to the Nama, but especially the paradox in which the Nama are caught with the government requiring taxes and the farmers they work for only paying in stock.

.... Wherewith shall we pay these taxes? Will the law accept our taxes in cattle, goats, clothes and drink with which we are paid our wages at the store? We have no cash, only the white people have this. We can only get it by working and now we cannot even get it in that way<sup>11</sup>.

#### **6.4 1925**

From government documents during this period, it is evident that there was a continued fear of 'native unrest' and 'indigenous resistance', and that these were to be controlled through the pass law system. There is a continuous scrutiny of people and their movements. The possibility of the Nama acquiring weapons and rising against the government, was also related<sup>12</sup>.

#### **6.5 1939**

In his letter informing Vedder of his intended break away from the RMS, Petrus Jod refers to the fact that the RMS has made numerous promises, but never kept them. Amongst others, this relates to better education and schooling, also for himself. Worse is that, where he headed a practical school, there were decisions taken to close the school without even consulting with him. He also asserts that he and his fellow ministers and teachers, will, together – and presumably together with the AMEC to whose leadership they will become subject – attempt to turn these promises into reality. There is a general sense of malaise in his letter.

As far as my strength went I had wanted to serve together and I know that my colleagues have the same longing. We only want us and our people to get on. All we got, however, was promises and our own

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<sup>11</sup> See previous reference.

<sup>12</sup> Box SWAA 1851/ 1396/8. Letter on 'Native unrest in Gibeon' by the Magistrate of Maltahöhe to the Secretary of South West Africa. 19 January 1925.

hope, all those years. So I ask myself: With what enthusiasm should I still work on? ....

.... But my brothers and I do not do this work because of some white missionary pushing us but to help our people to advance .... Now the school has been closed again, without us getting to know this. We were not even told a single word about it, but nevertheless, it will be us whose fault it is that it has been closed.

Even with all this I was committed to the work of the Rhenish Mission. But what does all this help me?....

This is why—in the time, which I will still, live, if the Lord will give me this—I am looking for my people and me somewhere else for the things (+gona-!gû: I will go and beg for them) you have promised to me, to us, to our people, but which you have not kept until today<sup>13</sup>

Except for someone like Rev. Spellmeyer, there has developed a big gulf between the white missionaries and the Nama missionaries and teachers. It appears that the white missionaries had a different agenda than enhancing the lives of the Nama, or to do so only up to a point.

Apart from this general impression that Petrus Jod experienced from the RMS throughout his thirty-seven years of service, we also see that there were also political undertones among the Nama, with regard to their relationships with the government of the day.

It is definitely true that it is due to the fact that they did not experience political independence or collective governance, that such sentiments also fed into the schism as it was actively initiated in January 1946. We can say this because many of the religious leaders who initiated the schism were also politically active at some point in their careers.

## **7 The RMS and the Nama Leaders: January 1946**

In 1946, former graduates of the missionaries, under the leadership of Zacheus Thomas and Petrus Jod started to organize themselves in order to demand self-determination for the church. At a meeting at Keetmanshoop, the leaders of the schism developed a 'Protokoll über die bei der evangelistenzusammen-

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<sup>13</sup> See note 5.

kunft festgelegten Punkte', which outlined the procedures they would follow for the schism if the RMS does not allow black leadership – amongst the other concerns they had. In summary, the items in the 'Protokoll', which indicate that they felt that these were grounds for the schism – and were to be kept 'secret' – are:

1. That the Southern RMS congregations would be handed over to the DRC and an article in the 'Burger' of 31 October 1945, reporting that RMS - Congregations would be handed over to the DRC. (This was to be propagated in the congregations.)
2. That the Nama leadership 'will resist such an act .... [and] will not be guided any more by a white church, if the missionaries continue with this without consulting [them] and treating [them] with such contempt'.
3. That they 'will only stay with the RMS if the style of leadership changes, and they incorporate our guidelines for leadership'.
4. 'Cooperation between missionaries and [the Nama leadership] is non-existent, [and they] are only informed after [the White leadership] decided.
5. The development of 'mother tongue classes' for Grade 4s. So, they decided to 'compile stories from [their] tradition for [an illustrated] book'<sup>14</sup>.

The letter which was made public, was titled, 'Agitasie teen die blanke Genootskappe' (*Protest against the white Societies*). It has six paragraphs. In the first, it states:

On behalf of the non-whites and the non-white church members from the Southern part of SWA, that so far served under the spiritual ministry of the RMS, we wish to state that the congregations refuse to

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<sup>14</sup> Archival material. 'Protokoll über die bei der evangelistenzusammenkunft festgelegten Punkte', 12 January 1946. (This document is signed by Zacheus Thomas as chair, Petrus Jod as co-chair, and Markus Witbooi as secretary and assistant scribe. The others present are: Johannes Dausab, Jakobus Jod, Daniel Dausab, Johannes Josob, L. Snewe, E. Jager, and Hendrik S. Isaak.)

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further serve under the governance of any white Society, the RMS or the DRC. Our motivation will be clear from the following<sup>15</sup>.

The document then refers to the fact that the Nama has been served by the RMS for nearly one hundred years, that the RMS has failed to make them independent, and that the social and moral condition in which both the Nama and white people find themselves, are due to the policy of the RMS in SWA.

The third paragraph shows why the policy will never bring about upliftment and development (*opheffing en ontwikkeling*). It refers to the evangelists' and teachers' own experiences of the RMS missionaries, the difference in policy with the Finnish Missions in Ovamboland (which encouraged teaching/ training and independence), and RMS 'books' in which it is explicitly stated that it is not policy to uplift and develop the Nama people. The most serious however, is that the funds the church members provide were not used for church reparations and other expenses, and also that they were not spiritually served. It closes with the sentence: 'Therefore, we are not prepared to serve under the direction of this Society'<sup>16</sup>.

The fourth paragraph focuses on the humiliating attitudes of the whites towards non-whites. In the most important part, it says:

The reason why we refuse to serve under any white Society is: because of the degrading and humiliating attitude of some whites including some contemporary ministers, concerning non-whites. Though we do not wish to be whites, or even to be counted as their equals, we are nevertheless conscious that we are nevertheless human beings, people with eternal souls, human beings who, as far as it concerns the temporary, form a definitive part of society<sup>17</sup>

The last two paragraphs and the conclusion focus on the fact that the governance policy had to be based on the congregation and the church board.

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<sup>15</sup> The actual letter of the notification of the breakaway from the RMS, signed by the Nama leaders in Keetmanshoop. Pastor P.A. Schmidt handed the letter to Dr Vedder. 12 January 1946. Editor's translation. ELCRN archives.

<sup>16</sup> Editor's translation.

<sup>17</sup> See note 15 for the source. (Editor's translation.)

It says:

Finally, if the RMS continues to exist, and we have to remain under its spiritual governance, we refuse to continue with them, unless the current policy and management change. If this is the case, we demand that the congregation and church be managed by the congregation. The authority rests with the congregation, i.e. the church council, with the minister not having unilateral power.

Evangelists, elders and sextons form the church council, with the minister as chair. All church matters must be discussed and dealt with at semi-annual church council meetings. We may elect a secretary and a treasurer who will be responsible for the control of all institutional activities and income and expenses. No income will be accepted and no expenses paid without the knowledge and approval of the church council.

IF, IN FUTURE, THE CHURCH IS BASED ON THIS  
SYSTEM, THEN WE GO ALONG.

Otherwise not<sup>18</sup>.

For the AMEC which would come into existence later this year, it is significant that this policy proposal in the last two paragraphs effectively takes the decision making power out of the hands of the white missionaries (and also ministers), and puts it in the hands of the congregation. It is also important to note that the same is done as far as money is concerned.

From this time forward, Zacheus Thomas and some of the congregations in the South, especially Keetmanshoop, Mariental and Maltahöhe opposed the appointment of white ministers or chairs for meetings. This is evident from a letter by Dr. Vedder to Zacheus Thomas and his co-workers in the RMS-congregation Keetmanshoop. He responded to their rejection of such leaders during February, March, April and May, i.e. on their rejection of the committed Evangelist from Lüderitz and also other white

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<sup>18</sup> See note 15 for the reference. The document is stamped with the stamp of the 'Evangelists- and Teachers Association', Namaland, and signed by Z. Thomas, J. Dausab, D. Dausab, J. Jod, and M. Witbooi. (Editor's translation.)



missionaries appointed in the South (for example Neumeister in Keetmanshoop), in his letter dated 6 May 1946. Here he argues that the Nama must be grateful for such leadership, because it is sponsored from Germany!

Now I ask you: What supported your ministers and sisters all this time? Have they become an expense for the congregation? Do you not know who have supported you? Missionfriends in Germany did this<sup>19</sup>

The RMS was fully supported from Germany. After the First World War the Rhenish Mission was almost bankrupt, and the funds available were spent for German personnel rather than for institutions for the education of Namibians. Even so, the RMS continued to reject the request for equal Nama and German leadership.

Further, the missionaries under the leadership of Vedder did not show any reluctance to enter into the agreement with the South African government, which ensured government funding for the mission schools for the price of government control. The agreement ensured that schools for Africans should not offer more than four years of education (Lessing 2000:13). This meant that such basic schooling prevented further education, and only produced Namas with a basic schooling, fit for farm labour.

One needs to also point out and appreciate the pioneering nature of the early missionary endeavours in their education and training activities. Kössler (1999:20) observed:

The missionary stationed in Gibeon from 1903-1939, Christian Spellmeyer, occupies a quite special place in mission annals. At a very early date, Spellmeyer advocated financial autonomy of the mission congregations as well as a largely independent role for the 'eingeborene' evangelist and teachers. In particular, he had made considerable efforts from the mid 1920's onwards to push the missionary society towards consenting to ordain as pastors suitable persons among the chief evangelists. These efforts were frustrated by his superiors but appreciated by the locals.

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<sup>19</sup> Archival material. ELCRN Archives. Letter of Dr. Vedder. The content is in Afrikaans. Windhoek. 6 May 1946. (Editor's translation.)

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Another positive effect of training was that the local ministers were better acquainted with the customs and traditions of their fellow believers. They not only spoke the same language they could also easily speak to the hearts of the people. Training and equipping the local people were very important in the history of mission work. This makes it even more difficult to understand why the RMS prevented the ministers to take full control of their ministry.

Missionary work was also accompanied by increased infrastructure and facilities. Pastors, evangelists and teachers received training. Seminaries were built to produce capable co-workers to serve the community better. The church acknowledged her responsibility in the fields of education and health.

Despite such positive events in mission history, the missionaries were not prepared to accept African Christians as equals. For example, for many missionaries it was unthinkable that black Christians were capable of being in charge of their congregations, without any assistance from the white missionaries. For this reason, first the AMEC and secondly, the Oruaano Churches formed as members broke away from the RMS. They revolted against dependence on the RMS and the missionaries' refusal to ordain Africans as pastors.

## **8 The RMS and the Nama Leaders: May - July 1946**

The seed that was planted by Mangena Mokone in South Africa spread to Namibia. There is also evidence that Dr. Gow who was sent from America to South Africa and who was stationed in Cape Town visited Namibia shortly after the schism. From this it seems as if the leaders of the AMEC schism had contact with him but no direct proof could be found of this. However, in his report to the Native Commissioner of Mariental, the Superintendent of Kraantzplatz near Gibeon wrote on 14 November 1948.

The schism in the Rhenish congregation took place on 3 July 1946. After this, a certain Dr. Gow visited Southwest. He is the leader of the AME movement in the Union [of South Africa], and originally ... from America ....

They [the leaders] think that, of all the churches, it would be the AME that would help them .... On a question to one of the leaders, as to the reason why he joined the AME, he answered: 'One should

not remain crawling among stones; one should also stand up and walk.<sup>20</sup>

Despite such possible contacts, it is certain that the grievances of the Nama leaders were authentic and focused on local experiences and concerns. From the available correspondence the events and perspectives around the three months of May - July 1946 can be listed according to these documents. These are as follows.

### 8.1 May 1946

Above, we have seen what Vedder's response was on the Nama RMS leaders' rejection of the white missionaries. He tried to make a case that the white missionaries were there to help, and, that since they were being paid from Germany, such money was only for them and not for the indigenous people<sup>21</sup>.

Since the schism leadership has also already communicated their intention to break away from AMEC already on 12 January 1946<sup>22</sup>, the RMS leadership knew about their intentions. In order to address this, Superintendent Rust who was stationed at Lüderitz wrote a general letter to RMS personnel and church members when it became evident that the schism is imminent<sup>23</sup>.

The newsletter of Missionary Rust to the brothers and sisters in Namaland heated the debate of administering the congregation. His newsletter from Lüderitz complains about the Nama evangelists' and the teachers' rejection of missionary Neumeister's appointment at Keetmanshoop. Rust thinks the Nama leaders complained because they wanted to have Zacheus Thomas as their pastor. He feels, however, that none of the Nama Evangelists were yet ready to represent the legal right of RMS in such a big place with such a high number of administrative problems as Keetmanshoop.

He also mentions the DRC-article in the *Burger* and the RMS's work among the 'heathens'. They say, if they are still heathen after 100 years of

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<sup>20</sup> Box SWAA 489. See above.

<sup>21</sup> Box SWAA 489.A50/227.

<sup>22</sup> See note 15.

<sup>23</sup> The documents on the AMEC in the holdings of the RMS archives, Wuppertal, Germany. Letter by F. Rust addressed to the RMS members in Namaland. 9 May 1946.

RMS, then they can well live without the RMS, and that the missionaries would not be able to bring them any further anyway. In other places they already have indigenous pastors such as in Ovamboland. Rust commented: 'Why did they not talk to us?' but he ignores that the Nama had a history in which they already sporadically complained about this issue<sup>24</sup>.

Rust met a delegation of 20 men who said to him: 'We do not want any white missionary anymore, neither Neimeister nor Eisenberg'. He quotes Zacheus Thomas who said to him (without being asked), 'There is a thing that is called communism, that goes through the whole world, and maybe it will also come to us'

Rust considers it would be good if Zacheus Thomas were to serve Warmbad congregation and Tötemeyer (when discharged from the internment camp) to serve Keetmanshoop congregation. This was the full report of Missionary Rust, during his visit to Keetmanshoop<sup>25</sup>.

In our opinion Missionary Rust wants to diffuse the hostile environment, which was prevailing. He also wants to restore the situation to calmness; but, because he reports to the RMS head office, he reveals the same blind spot they all conspired to uphold, namely not to acknowledge the reality of the Nama grievances. After receiving his report the Nama leaders sent the following letter to missionary Rust from Keetmanshoop:

The Superintendent  
Mr. F. Rust  
Lüderitz

Dear Superintendent

We have tried our level best to have the congregation change its view. However, we were unsuccessful.

The congregation clearly declares that, under no circumstance, will she stand under RMS governance. The church council came together and read Mr. Rust's letter and considered the issue.

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<sup>24</sup> Rust addresses the issues stated in the document, 'Agitasie teen die blanke Genootskappe', ELCRN archives. See note 15 for the reference.

<sup>25</sup> Archival material Berlin. 0098-0102. Newsletter: Rust to the brothers and sisters in Namaland. 09-05-1946.

After thorough considerations, opinion moved into a different direction, according to the votes. The council decided to follow the road of the congregation. So, since we follow the road of the majority, we the elders and evangelists, herewith give our final answer. And declare that, we secede unconditionally as from today, and will look for assistance from any other Church society.

We shall serve the congregation with the Evangelical Christian ministry in which we were educated<sup>26</sup>.

From the perspective of the AMEC, this letter of 13 May 1946, should serve as the historical one, indicating the date that the Keetmanshoop congregation broke away from the RMS. The others would follow later. The official recognition of the break was only acknowledged on 3 July by the RMS.

There are two further communications from the Nama leaders in Keetmanshoop during May 1946. The first letter is dated 27 May 1946 and is signed by five Nama leaders, including Zacheus Thomas.

Keetmanshoop  
27/5/1946  
To the Superintendent  
Mr. Dr. H. Vedder and Ministers  
Local

Dear Sirs

After our thorough deliberations, we returned to our previous decision<sup>27</sup>.

We do not see the possibility to continue on the basis of mere

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<sup>26</sup> Archival material. ELCRN archive. The letter is in Afrikaans. Windhoek 13 May 1946. 377. The letter is also available in Box SWAA 1423: A216/6. Rhenish Mission General. Letter by Nama leaders to Mr. F. Rust, Superintendent of the RMS based at Lüderitz, stating that they are breaking away from the RMS. (Editor's translation.) The letter is signed by J. Eipinge, Z. Hange, S. Pietse, E. Thomas, D.V. Neel, J. Jantse, J. Cloetë, J. Dausab, Th. Windstaan, J. Februarie, Z. Thomas, P. Bantam, A. Murine, and P. Gertz

<sup>27</sup> This is the one of 13 May 1946.

promises. Therefore, we stick to our decision, since we believe that the Lord will help us.

We do however thank the RMS for what she has done for us.

With best regards.

Signed: Salomon Pieters, Zach Thomas, John Dausab, Th Windstaan, and Dirk van Neel<sup>28</sup>.

Dr. Vedder reacted to this letter of the Nama leaders as follows. The letter is dated 1946, with no indication of day and month.

Beloved Co-workers  
Of our Rhenish Mission Congregation  
Keetmanshoop!

This letter is my last word to you before I leave [for overseas]. And with this I give you my hand again, and pray: 'If you will, stay in the Rhenish congregation and work with us under the governance of the RMS'!

Dr Vedder then refers to the sheep's need for a shepherd, that some of the members of the congregation do not want to support the schism, that these are simple people only looking for the word of God (and who do not receive the correct leadership from the schism leaders), and that the leaders must not lead the church astray. He says that he had asked the leaders repeatedly about their grievances, but that they only showed 'bad faith'. He continues to ask that they should forgive and forget, make a new beginning, and the says:

You asked for more: You wished more authority for the evangelists

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<sup>28</sup> Box SWAA 1423: A216/6. Rhenish Mission General. Correspondence between the Nama Leaders and Dr. H. Vedder. The letter by the Nama leaders is signed by five Nama leaders including Zacheus Thomas. The others are: Salomon Pieters, Johannes Dausab, Th Windstaan and Dirk van Neel. 27 May 1946. It is also present in: ELCRN correspondence between the Nama leaders of the 1946 AMEC Schism and Dr. Vedder and Superintendent Rust. Letter by Nama Leaders to Dr. Vedder. 27 May 1946.

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but cannot understand that we cannot put the administration of such a large congregation in Zacheus' hands. I say to you evangelist-brethren: Do not look for a greater responsibility than that which has been trusted to you.

This point is repeated, and with reference to 1 Peter 3: 14, he exhorts them to 'suffer' for the cause of justice, and not follow the 'liar from the beginning', who says, 'You do not need the Mission, and must take the leadership of the congregations into your own hands'. At present, he still uses evangelists and elders who must bring the majority to him. Later, the enemy of truth will rise up against the church and God's Word, in public and not only against the Mission management<sup>29</sup>.

Similar to Rust above, Vedder interprets the decision to break away as only the wish of Zacheus Thomas, to control the congregation. This is a blatant and conscious misinterpretation. It does not take into consideration the actual proposal for a policy change as found in the last two paragraphs of the 12 January 1946 'Protest' document.

In a confidential letter of 31 May 1946, Vedder nevertheless identified eight points or rules in terms of which the RMS internally should deal with those who participate in the schism. These rules are as follows:

1. Every person who wants to leave must hand in his congregational membership card in person to the missionary of the station; the members of the congregation were baptized and confirmed one by one, have received Holy Communion one by one and promised faithfulness towards God and the congregation one by one. So they can leave this commitment only one by one. If membership cards are collectively handed in this is not a declaration of leaving. Membership contribution cards and baptismal certificates will not be handed in.
2. Like before, services will take place regularly in the church. It is the property of the Rhenish Mission, which will not allow resigned

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<sup>29</sup> Box SWAA 1423: A216/6. Rhenish Mission General. Correspondence between the Nama Leaders and Dr. H. Vedder. I give the abridged version as present in a summary that Minister Mayer prepared for a 'deputation' meeting in Keetmanshoop on 4 September 1946.

preachers to take services therein. If numbers are small we will think of Jesus' word, in which he promised those who come together in his name to be near them, even if there are only two or three.

3. Only faithful members of the congregation will be allowed to take part in baptism and Holy Communion, not those who resigned.

4. The membership cards, which were handed in, will be kept safely and will be given back to those who ask for them, if they admit they did wrong to leave.

5. From the day of his declared resignation an evangelist will not receive a salary any more.

6. Teachers who have resigned will stay employed. The education administration (school board) will not permit the mission to dismiss them. The children of members who have left will stay in school as long as their parents send them; as even the children of heathen are accepted in our schools.

7. Our teachers will continue their teaching as usual, likewise our nurses. They are not to ask whether somebody is a member of Rhenish Mission or not. Their service is for everybody.

8. Churches, schools and living quarters, which are not on land that is registered in the name of the Rhenish Mission, will stay the property of this society in every respect.<sup>30</sup>

These rules were obviously used in practice. They could also serve to prevent some from leaving.

## **8.2 June 1946**

The preparation for the schism since January 1946 triggered the growing resolve among the Nama to control their own affairs. This relates to the schism from the RMS, although political undercurrents were active. It was the first time that such a strong voice of protest was heard from the indigenous church in Namibia, i.e. to gain independence from mission control.

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<sup>30</sup> Archival material, Wuppertal. Mayer's summary of the main events on the schism, from 13 May 1946 to Vedder's recommendations as to how to deal with members who broke away from the RMS, 31 May 1946. He made the summary for the 'deputation' meeting in Keetmanshoop on 4 September 1946.



The most significant communication during June 1946 is the 3 June 1946 letter by Dr. Vedder in which he verbally repeats the first paragraph, the reference to Zacheus Thomas, and the issue about 'greater responsibility', in his request of late May 1946. He closes the letter by saying that they should remain in their calling and not work for division<sup>31</sup>.

The spiritual leaders of the Nama speaking Rhenish Churches in the South (at Keetmanshoop, Mariental, Maltahöhe, Gibeon, Hoachanas and Bethanie), together with a large number of members subsequently severed their association with the Rhenish mission, and seceded. They soon joined the AME church. Katjavivi (1989:1-29) observes:

In Namibia the AME had a tremendous appeal in Southern Namibia, the majority of the people, including the most influential portion of the community, became its members and supporters.

Another figure who appeared on the scene during the 1940s and 1950s, proselytizing for the AME church in the central part of Namibia, with his headquarters in Windhoek, was Rev. M.M. Sephula. Many people joined the AME as a result of his efforts. Most Herero members, however, left the AME church when the Oruaano church was established in 1955.

Alfred Moleah observes that Christian churches' complicity in colonial policy and practices and white paternalism and racist arrogance towards Africans, caused resentment, which at times flared into revolt and rejection. Continued refusal by the Rhenish Mission Society to provide further education and training to black pastors, as well as give them greater authority and leadership roles, led, in 1946, to a breakaway and the formation in the South of Namibia, of the Nama Teachers and Evangelist Association at Maltahöhe. The Herero identified the RMS with German colonialism, and after the German loss in the Second World War, its influence among them simply melted away. The RMS was later able to make a partial recovery among the Herero, but without significantly mending its ways (Moleah 1983:103f).

The missionaries bemoaned the failure of the Evangelists to trust them and come back to them for 'enlightenment'. The authors of the 12 January

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<sup>31</sup> Archival material. ELCRN archive. Letter of Dr. H. Vedder is in Afrikaans. Windhoek. 3 June 1946.

1946 'Protest', alleged that the RMS was also planning to sell them to the DRC 'behind our backs like slaughter cattle'. Kössler observes: 'An examination of the record shows that the break of trust was indeed one-sided'. The correspondence between the RMS directorate in Namibia and their headquarters in Wuppertal, Barmen, Germany as well as that with representatives of the DRC reveal without the shadow of doubt that the transfer of the RMS stations to the DRC was a strategy that had been developed over many years. A central figure in the plan was Dr. Heinrich Vedder who officiated as Präses from 1937. Whilst the transfer may not have been the missionaries' preferred option, given financial constraints it was treated as realistic possibility. The possibility of independence for (or even consultation with) the Namibian congregations apparently did not even enter the minds of the missionaries. This attitude is connected closely to a line of thinking that seems to have been self-evident to the missionaries. They situated their work quite naturally and unquestioningly within the framework of a German cultural calling, set in nationalist and colonial terms (Kössler 1999:23).

However, missionary Spellmeyer understood the problems of the Nama leaders very well. He often came up with original views, he looked beyond the conventional, and he was original in his thinking and reacted in that way to many problems. One of his greatest advantages is that it was very easy for him to live in two different cultures, that is, the African culture and the culture of the Europeans. He appreciated the two cultures. Spellmeyer was very interested in the Nama culture and was very enthusiastic throughout his nearly four decades of service in the South. Since he came from a Western culture, he tried to bring the two cultures together in his mind and this played a major role in his work. On this point Pauly said:

The 1946 AMEC schism among the leaders could have been avoided, if Dr. Vedder seriously listened to the advice of Missionary Spellmeyer who worked for the greatest part of his ministry among the Namas. In short, Spellmeyer's wish was to ordain the Nama leaders<sup>32</sup>.

There was also another missionary F. Pönninghaus who favoured integration. He stated in 1937:

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with Pastor. P. Pauly, 20 November 2002, Windhoek. (Pastor Pauly is a retired minister of the RMS.)

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Why are there not indigenous pastors in SWA, or is there only indignation in South West, for I had spoken for that aim, that we should allow the natives in South West Africa to become pastors (in Sundermeier 1973: 18)<sup>33</sup>.

### 8.3 July 1946

For July, the most significant correspondence, is the letter by Petrus Jod, to Dr. Vedder in which he reflects on his thirty-seven years in the service of the RMS and how he and other Nama people have experienced the RMS and its leadership<sup>34</sup>. What is important for July, is that he wrote this about 47 days after the final break from AMEC perspective (in the letter from Keetmanshoop), and two days before the final recognition by the RMS that the schism has indeed take place. The final recognition of the break by the RMS could be due to the fact that Vedder and others still thought that, as significant leader, Jod would not join the secession. From this letter, however, it is clear that he has joined it, and that there is no hope for reconciliation. He lists all the issues which he found wrong in the RMS from personal experience. Vedder, in his letter of two days later, therefore, had to accept the schism.

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<sup>33</sup> Joining the RMS in 1921, Missionary Pönningshaus ministered for 30 years as spiritual leader amongst the Nama in Namibia. He first served as minister in the Nama speaking congregation of Windhoek (1922-1933), then for four years in Okahandja, and then as founder and first principal of the Paulinum Theological Seminary at Karibib since 1938. Interned during WW11, he used his time to publish a series of sermons for every Sunday of the year, as well as a catechism handbook for use in Christian Education and Sunday Schools (Baumann 1967:187). When he was released, he continued with the theological training of indigenous ministers, returned to Germany at age sixty-eight in 1953, and continued his ministry by preparing a new translation of the Bible in the Nama language. This task lasted for a period of 14 years (1953-1967). It was completed in 1967, when it was published and inaugurated festively by the Bible Society at Berseba. The University of Bonn awarded missionary Pönningshaus an honorary doctorate for his gigantic work. In 1975 he died at the age of 90 and was buried at Otjiwarongo (*Immanuel*, news magazine of the ELCRN, July 1975. p. 10).

<sup>34</sup> See note 6 above.

As stated above, the issues include Präses Fenchel's statement that he could not 'accept a Nama teacher from the tribe which rebel-ed against our German Government as a school teacher. Anyhow, all my experiences with Nama teachers have been bad'. He has also given all his time and energy in contexts without any infra-structure, and without adequate appreciation; that, if you are not white, it does not help you to work for a white organisation; that Vedder did not treat him right; and that he could not further continue his work only on the basis of promises. On the last two issues, he said:

As I said so and did not answer, he [Vedder] jumped at me and threw words at me like: 'You are an Evangelist and in our service, and when you are asked you must answer, and you must do what you are told. And this is the southern synod, and you as an evangelist should help to bring God's flock together, but you cause division. Instead of helping to build up you pull down, and you take the missionary's work away from him. This is not what an evangelist should be like'.

In case I would stay in the service of the Rhenish Mission after these words, I would hear these same reproaches and have to answer these same questions after every incident, which would eventually happen. What kind of help do I still have here?

As far as my strength went I had wanted to serve together and I know that my colleagues have the same longing. We only want us and our people to get on. All we got, however, was promises and our own hope, all those years. So I ask myself: With what enthusiasm should I still work on?<sup>35</sup>

Jod then denies that he made it difficult for the missionaries to do their work. He also denies the fact that he is one who destroys the church or functions as counter-worker (*Gegenarbeiter*) and gives examples of his commitment and work. Every time he comes back to the racial distinction that is made by the RMS—that Nama missionaries are not treated on an equal footing with the whites. He also repeatedly points out, that decisions are forced on them and that they are never consulted, even on their own affairs. He concludes again by referring to the promises of the missionaries, but say that he will now look for their fulfilment somewhere else. He restates his commitment to God, because,

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<sup>35</sup> See note 6 above.

as he says, 'HE will not leave us, when we don't leave our faith, and we are only leaving Rhenish Mission'<sup>36</sup>.

#### 8.4 The Immediate Aftermath of the Schism in 1946

From available documents, the most significant events are the September meeting the RMS organized in Keetmanshoop and that Pastor Mayer compiled the information for, and the minutes of the meeting of the Commissioner of Native Affairs with Captain David Witbooi and the Council members and inhabitants of Gibeon in October 1946.

In the first document, Mayer says that Brother Eisenberg, (more than 70 years old) serves there together with the evangelist Zachäus Thomas. He also explains that there are 'a Nama-Bergdama congregation, a Herero-Ovambo congregation and a Coloured congregation (Bastards)'. He then explains that Brother Neumeister was called to Keetmanshoop because Brother Eisenberg wanted to retire. He says that the Nama leaders objected to this 'in a long letter'. He replied to this letter and they did so in turn, giving reasons why they object. The main point—as stated above—was that they wanted to serve under their own leadership, and not that appointed by the RMS.

In his second paragraph he continued to refer to the letter of 13 May 1946 to Superintendent Rust and then reports what the sequence of events were on RMS side, and how the RMS congregations broke up according to ethnic lines. On the issues involving himself, he says:

The following accusations were made against me: I had not seen to it that the evangelists got the gown—which had never been promised to them. I had not improved the school education. Their children were still not able to go on to Standard 6. They totally forgot that most parents take their children from school before Standard 4. In 1926 I had stated in a letter to him that it would not be wise to wake up sleeping dogs.

This I had indeed written. I had told him at that time that—if the higher Standards were introduced by government law—our teachers would get into a scrape because they would have to be dismissed and new teachers would get their posts. Soon enough they

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<sup>36</sup> See note 6.

will demand higher qualifications from the schools. We, however, should be careful not to wake up sleeping dogs.

Further, I had not seen to it that the girls got a center to train them as nursing sisters. This is correct. Nevertheless, we don't even have a real hospital, except for the hospital in Rehoboth, which was opened last year. In another letter I had written: 'Wait for another century, and then many wishes of today will be fulfilled.' He, however, did not want to wait for 100 years.

Mayer then turned to Petrus Jod and the situation at that point.

Petrus Jod of Maltahöhe, whom we had expected to oppose Zachäus Thomas' arguments and to help us, agreed to all of them. There were no additional complaints. The declaration of leaving/resignation was repeated. The schism had happened. They were not impressed when we explained to them what the consequences would be. All buildings of the stations plus church and school belong to the Rhenish Mission Society. Their declaration of leaving/resignation meant that they would resign from their work and not get any salary any more. They just withdrew silently. Oh, if they had accused us not to give them freedom enough to evangelize, but to do everything without them, or that the salaries were not enough, then we would have co-operated with them. But they did not want to co-operate. They wanted to stick to the decision they had taken. To justify it, they had searched in the old letters for points to use as a weapon. Zachäus had a whole bundle of such letters.

He then elaborates on Zacheus Thomas:

What were the reasons for such a course of action? A tree has many roots, not only one. This schism (*Abfallbewegung*) did not come out of a congregation but started with the evangelists, especially Zachäus. He drew the other two evangelists to his side and was in union with Petrus Jod of Maltahöhe. Even the teachers of Keetmanshoop and the elders of the congregation came under his influence and leadership. The gown plays an important role. The letter of 1926, in which I explained to him, that the gown is only for those who had passed certain exams,

and that a person who had not passed them, would be ridiculous in the gown, had been accepted at that time. He wrote me in answer to this letter, that I should not believe, that he really aimed for it, it was only the elder from Lüderitzbucht, who is not among the living any more.

He then makes the following judgement:

The influence of communist propaganda is affecting the indigenous people. Either the indigenous man must be on the same level as the white man; or the white man, also the white missionary, must leave the country. They will not suffer the patronizing of the white men any more, not even the patronage of the church through the white missionaries. In Keetmanshoop they themselves noticed that there are many church fellowships among the whites. There are more than ten church buildings of several denominations in Keetmanshoop. In the South African Union there are more than 510 different denominations officially registered among the indigenous people. New names for few denominations are hard to find. The indigenous people manage all these. All this confuses our people. If then something happens that excites them, the ball is set rolling ....

He then turns to the issue of the AMEC:

On top of this the African Methodist Episcopal Church dedicated their first church in Lüderitzbucht a short while ago, and it seems as if there are close connections to Keetmanshoop. A teacher's union is to be founded in Walvisbay. In the holidays in our congregation of Gibeon a similar meeting is to take place. We must be prepared ...<sup>37</sup>.

The text closed with the summary of the eight points Dr. Vedder stated in the letter of 31 May 1946 (see above), in terms of which the different RMS congregations should deal with members who wanted to join the schism.

The other event took place in October 1946. According to the minutes of the meeting of the Commissioner of Native Affairs with Captain David Witbooi and the Council members and inhabitants of Gibeon in October, the

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<sup>37</sup> The previous 6 references all come from the reference in note 29.

meeting addressed six issues. These six issues were: livestock, grazing money, the further supplying of water, the feeding of children and older people, the appointment of a welfare official, and the problem caused by the closing of the industrial school. Then follows statements by Captain David Witbooi, Johannes Jakob and Diedrik Keister, with a response from the Commissioner. The main significance of these reports, is to see how the schism has also affected the Nama community, i.e. in terms of how people who worked and lived together before, were divided. Since the Damaras decided to remain within the RMS, the division also affected Nama-Damara relationships. They reflect the impact of the schism on the Nama people, the divisions it brought about, and how the issue of collected money by the different churches was to be treated<sup>38</sup>.

## 8 Conclusion

The motive for the Nama secession was the search for greater independence, recognition as fellow Christians and equal co-workers in the mission, and full acknowledgement of the authority and leadership of the indigenous leaders. In this regard it is remarkable that those mission congregations who had no white missionaries – where the distinction was not glaring – and where only Nama Evangelists worked, remained loyal to the RMS. The name of Pastor Hendrik Isaak is worthy to be mentioned in this regard.

These items, however, were symptomatic of the larger structural problem, namely the racial distinctions allowed by the governments of the day. The leaders of the schism opposed the transfer of the RMS to the DRC, which, through its catering for white Afrikaners supporting the National Party, covertly supported racial distinctions. In this context Sundkler, an authority on independent churches in Africa observed: 'The German missionaries tried a difficult balancing act between concern for the African population and a conformation with South African "Native" policy'. Given the fact that the Nama leadership's discontent with the RMS arose and manifested independent of this issue, this is a naïve and simplistic view, which ignores the whole history of indigenous discontent with colonial power. This showed particularly when the government in Pretoria appointed the greatest of the Namibian

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<sup>38</sup> Box SWAA 1192/ A158/98. Magistrate of Mariental to the Head of Native Affairs, Windhoek, which is attached to the minutes. 19 October 1946.



missionaries, Dr. H. Vedder, as Senator with responsibility for African affairs—a great honour from the point of view of Pretoria. At that time, Herero reaction was sharp: 'He, who after all is our father, goes to government in South Africa' they felt.

The Herero, deeply injured and almost annihilated by their colonial masters at the beginning of the century, hesitated for years until in 1955 they too, took the definite step. They joined the Oruaano church. Oruaano means 'fellowship'—what they had been looking forward to in the mission church but had not found there. The Nama further south criticized the programme of the missionaries and instead joined the AMEC in 1946 (Sundkler 2000: 842f).

An underlying motif, which manifested in the early twentieth century revolts, and sporadically surfaced through the first fifty years of this century, only became clear after the merger with the AMEC. This was the desire for political emancipation and independence, especially in Gibeon and Maltahöhe, the old tribal area of the Witboois. Chief Hendrik Witbooi's political ideals of liberation from German Colonisation which dates from the 1890s, were revived due to the secession and the joining of the AMEC. Evangelist Petrus Jod was honoured as a resurrected Hendrik Witbooi (Buys & Nambala 2003:177). More importantly, however, is that the events of 1946 constitute a significant conscientisation of the Nama people in a larger domain. By default, and even though many Nama in the RMS and Damara, Herero and Ovambo in the South did not join the AMEC, the same is true of these other fellow citizens. The AMEC schism of 1946, can therefore be said to have been important not only in the formation of a new church in the country, but an important even in the political conscientisation of the people. It was an important factor which eventually fed into the political struggles against the apartheid government, and the 1960 uprisings.

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## Interviews & Archival Sources

- See the relevant footnotes.
- ELCRN - Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia.