

Becoming Amakhohwa: Revival and the formation of group identity on the stations of the American Zulu Mission, 1890-1910

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There has suddenly sprung into existence a mighty preaching force, which is telling day and night the story of Jesus, and of his salvation. - Some of these men and women baptized by the Holy Ghost have become flames of fire to preach the Gospel and proving that they have indeed imbibed in the spirit of the early Christians and showing as we think that they are working in the spirit of the Holy Master.¹

There are, essentially, two impressions historians have formed of the early Zulu Christians, known as *amakhohwa*, of Natal, South Africa. The first, of the initial adherents, is that of a scorned minority, the flotsam and jetsam of society washed up onto the mission stations and converting, in large part, because they had no other place to go. The second is that of emergent leaders, the 1920s and 30s educated elite that formed political parties such as Inkhata and the African National Congress and marked the ascent of *amakhohwa* to positions of authority within the wider Zulu society. Largely absent from current literature, however, is a sense of what led to this remarkable transformation in identity. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining events on the stations of the American Zulu Mission (AZM), the largest mission body in Natal during the years 1895-1905. This period is marked by the evolution of the *amakhohwa* identity, from an inwardly focused people content with their own pursuits, to a group intent, much to the colonial power's chagrin, on bringing as many of the surrounding traditionalists into the fold as possible. Critical to this process were a series of revivals in the late 1890s, remembered as the "Great Revivals." These religious events, enthusiastically embraced, provided a model of both what it meant to be an individual Christian but also what it meant to be part of the group identifying itself as such. For a people who had found entrance into western society increasingly barred to them and for whom acceptance back into traditional society seemed improbable at best, revival, with its revolutionary message of every individuals' potential sanctification in Christ and the demand it placed on those

¹ Natal Archives, Pietermaritzburg (NAP), AZM A/3/41: Lindley Mission Station annual report for 1896-97.

accepting this message to pass it on, provided the group with a key to moving themselves into the “elite” positions they would occupy in the coming years.

Before and After

In Norman Etherington’s seminal work on the development of Christianity among Africans of Natal and Zululand in the years prior to the Anglo-Zulu war, those who chose to reside next to the newly built churches appear as freaks, outcasts and sinners. Converts were young lovers seeking freedom for their illicit romances, the old who could no longer care for themselves and did not have the kinship networks to provide for their needs, babies who had the misfortune to be born as a twin in a society that viewed such an occasion as an omen of evil, individuals fleeing witchcraft accusations and therefore certain death, and, especially, young girls fleeing marriages to that favorite of missionary stories, the lecherous old polygamists.² Those not fleeing hostile neighbors entered the church for economic reasons. The appeal of mission reserve land,³ the promise of a better way of life, these were the pull factors that counterbalanced those “pushed” onto the stations for their transgressions. Indeed, while Etherington acknowledges that a few *amakholwa* came into the Christian fold for purely religious reasons, he argues for the “primacy of secular needs” and even missionaries themselves were often forced to acknowledge the less than stellar identity of their flock.⁴

In painting a picture of the early mission stations as sanctuaries for the wicked, Etherington does overstate his case in asserting the existence of a strict dividing line between *amakholwa* and their neighbors.⁵ As late as 1880, he contends, even the families’ of converts frequently refused to have anything to do with them and this open hostility was returned. I have argued elsewhere, instead, for the permeable nature of this

² Norman Etherington, *Preachers, Peasants and Politics in Southeast Africa, 1835-1880* (London: 1978). See especially chapter 5.

³ The American Zulu Mission was one of the oldest and largest mission bodies in Natal and as such operated, by the turn of the century, 13 separate mission reserves of from 5 to 12 thousand acres each scattered largely along the North and South Coasts of Natal. The missionaries’ actual power on these reserves remained a contested issue throughout their history.

⁴ Etherington, *Preachers, Peasants and Politics in Southeast Africa, 1835-1880*, p. 90.

⁵ *Ibid* p.68.

boundry.⁶ Converts brought traditionalist family members onto the mission station to live with them, traditionalist households sent one or two children from a homestead for education, runaways returned home after conversion and while many went back to the ways of their family they retained some aspects of the new beliefs. In addition, as mission Christians became increasingly wealthy they sought to translate this new wealth into prestige. Old social relations such as *ukusisa*, the loaning of cattle from a patron to a client, and *lobola*, the exchange of cattle for brides, were engaged in as *amakholwa* increasingly sought to bridge the boundary between themselves and their non-Christian friends and family.⁷ Many of the station residents worked as transport-riders, often as owner-operators of their own wagon and oxen and participating in the trade that boomed as the peoples of south-eastern Africa increasingly engaged with the colonial market economy. Tales of these traders living double lives, supporting “respectable” families on the station while building larger, polygamous households in kwaZulu, shocked missionaries and confirms that many Zulu saw their Christianity in less than zealous terms.

By 1890 the upshot of this process was an identity pieced together from the confusing milieu around them; far from being “simply African Christians” *amakholwa* of the AZM presented an intriguing image of unperfected modernity.⁸ From one mission reserve to another no real sense of an overarching identity emerges. On some stations, such as Groutville, Christians and traditionalists lived in relative peace, at others, such as Mapumulo and Noodsberg, constant tensions created no room for harmony. On a few of the stations, Africans had an option to own land, on most they did not. Issues such as the baptism of female catechists married into polygamous households divided popular opinion and missionaries resorted to imposing a series of edicts, known as the

⁶ Robert Houle, “Constructing an *amaKholwa* Community: Cattle and the Creation of a Zulu Christianity”, MA thesis, (University of Wisconsin-Madison: 1998)

⁷ Robert Morrell, John Wright and Sheila Meintjes have suggested, without elaboration, a similar process by which Zulu Christians “straddled two cultures, evangelical Victorianism and the ‘black house’ outside.” p.44. See their chapter, “Colonialism and the Establishment of White Domination, 1840-1890” in Robert Morrell ed., *Political Economy and Identities in KwaZulu-Natal: Historical Perspectives* (Durban: 1996).

⁸ Norman Etherington, “Christianity and African Society in Nineteenth-century Natal,” in Andrew Duminy and Bill Guest (eds.) *Natal and Zululand From Earliest Times to 1910*, (Pietermaritzburg: 1989), p. 296. In an article reprising his 1978 work he writes: “In the mission station melting pots, they lost old identities and became simply African Christians.”

Umsumduze rules, in an attempt to create some form of orthodoxy.⁹ A frequent trope found in missionary letters home is of the church member lured back into a life of traditionalism through *utshwala*, or women or magic, only to return later and repent, and perhaps, to fall out again.¹⁰ Michael Mahoney has recently pointed out that Sundkler's famous classificatory system of placing 'Ethiopianist' and 'Zionist' along a continuum between traditionalist and main line Christian¹¹ obscures an understanding of the fluid nature Zulus held for what it meant to be a believer as the twentieth century began.¹²

Outside of investigating the minor role *amakholwa* played in the Poll tax rebellion of 1906, historians have largely ignored the development of the Christian community until they pick up the story again with the formation of Inkatha in the 1920s.¹³ *Amakholwa*, as represented in the works of Marks and Cope among others, appear as a fully formed minority, wielding enough political power and prestige to manipulate tradition and assist in the reconstruction of the Zulu royal house, accepting Solomon kaDinizulu as their leader and in the process playing a prominent role in the construction of Zulu ethnicity. In Cope's work, African Christians from across Natal forged their

⁹ Among other things the Umsumduze rules of 1879 called for church discipline against those who drank alcohol, including *utshwala*, asked for or received *lobola*, or practiced polygamy.

¹⁰ American missionaries backed off their plan to issue freehold titles to land on the reserves in 1868 after their experience at Umvoti, where several prominent men had relapsed into polygamy after they had obtained titles to land. Despite their best efforts, the Americans found they could not remove the troublemakers because of their status as freeholders and this effectively ended any interest by the missionaries in making available individual land holdings for the next thirty years. See NAP, AZM A/3/49: Goodenough to SNA, June 25th, 1894.

¹¹ Bengt Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (London: 1961).

¹² Michael Mahoney, "The Millennium Comes to Mapumulo: Popular Christianity in Rural Natal, 1866, 1906," *Journal of Southern African Studies* (Vol. 25: 1999), p. 376. Les Switzer has also recently pointed out that the *amakholwa* community was "much, much larger than the group of Christians identified as Christians in American mission statistics. This community embraced Africans who had fled or been forced out of mission churches or returned to a more traditional way of life." Les Switzer, "American Missionaries and the Making of an African Church in Colonial Natal," in John De Gruchy (ed.) *The London Missionary Society in Southern Africa*, (Cape Town: 1999), p. 178.

¹³ The one major exception to this is Les Switzer's exhaustive PhD dissertation, "The Problems of an African Mission in a White-Dominated, Multi-Racial Society: the American Zulu Mission in South Africa, 1885-1910", (University of Natal: 1971), which thoroughly documents the political battles the American Zulu Mission fought with the Government and with their own converts. While this work covers, in great detail, the workings of the church outside of the actual church, Switzer is less interested in what brought *amakholwa* into the church and what kept them there. So, for example, in his single reference to the revivals, he states: "At the same time, the stations were transformed through a succession of cathartic revivals (the 'Great Revivals' as they are still known among older Zulu Christians today) which, among other things, produced a fervently aggressive community of believers who appear to have had a profound effect on traditional society in Natal."

political beings in their quest for access to freehold title of property.¹⁴ The 1913 Natives' Land Act seriously undermined their ability to acquire land and it was in this light that they turned to a rapprochement with traditional rulers as a means to secure private land ownership, in the process forming political organizations that bound the two groups together. In Marks's works, *amakholwa* opinion becomes divided over the issue of land following the 1913 Land Act.¹⁵ The "Natal intelligentsia", the petty bourgeoisie who received higher education in mission schools, owned land and were embodied in the personhood of John Dube, onetime pastor of the AZM church at Inanda, supported cautious action, while many Christians, who found themselves increasingly dispossessed by the colonial state, forced onto crowded reserves as renters or towns as laborers, began to advocate for more radical measures.

Absent in the works twining *amakholwa* with the reconstruction of the Zulu royalty, and by extension the creation of Zulu ethnicity, is a sense of the incredible social distance Christians traveled in a very short time. No longer, in the narratives of *amakholwa* in the 1920s and 30s, are they a despised community, indeed they are often admired, even envied. Obviously not all *amakholwa* could be counted as members of the "Natal intelligentsia" and while many, although perhaps not most, supported the efforts of their fellow Christians to reconstitute the royal house, a more subtle study awaits to examine the internal debate over this policy that must have played out on the lips of congregations attending Sunday service and through letters to the editors of *Ilanga Lase Natal*. What interests me, however, is the transformation in identity that occurred among the *amakholwa* of the American Zulu Mission; how they moved from being a despised band of woeful misfits who, in converting, had potentially exiled themselves, to respected partners in the construction of Zulu ethnicity. In examining this process a series of questions emerge which have shaped my research to date (although I continue to struggle with piecing together the answers.) Why is it that traditionalists came to accept the

¹⁴ Nicholas Cope, *To Bind the Nation: Solomon kaDinuzulu and Zulu Nationalism, 1913-1933* (Pietermaritzburg: 1993).

¹⁵ Shula Marks, *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa: Class Nationalism, and the State in Twentieth-Century Natal* (Cape Town: 1986), particularly Chapter two. Also see Shula Marks, "Patriotism, Patriarchy and Purity: Natal and the Politics of Zulu Ethnic Consciousness," in Leroy Vail, ed., *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (London: 1989), in which it is suggested that *amakholwa* aligned with the head of traditional homesteads in an attempt to reign in both wild women and uncontrollable youth.

leadership of Christians? Where did their legitimacy derive from and how is it that members of the Congregationalist churches came to see themselves as a distinct community? Why, if conversion was a fundamentally materialist act of an individual seeking to better his or her lot in life, did so many *amakholwa* of the AZM actively participate in enlarging, at the turn of the century, what they could have maintained as an exclusive “club” had they avoided evangelization altogether?

In throwing light on these questions I have turned to a series of revivals that left such an indelible model for worship that the preaching practices and devotion style instituted during them remained in effect for at least three succeeding generations of *amakholwa*.¹⁶ As suggested above, the process of adopting Christianity was a messy, often contradictory affair that left a vast range of beliefs and theologies floating along in its wake. The experience of revival was, at least in part, an attempt to tidy up this hodgepodge of lived faith, to, quite literally, gather people together under one tent (revival meetings frequently occurred under a ‘tabernacle’/tent) who called themselves Christians and provide them with an experience around which their identity as believers, as *amakholwa*, crystallized.

The Coming Storm

Perhaps the revival may never have occurred had events in the mid-1890s not demonstrated aptly the difficulties Africans, including *amakholwa*, were to face in the new century. In 1893 Natal received responsible government, effectively placing the fate of the resident African population into the hands of a legislature dominated by settlers and intent on both securing a cheap labor pool and for its constituency and blocking the advances which certain natives, particularly Zulu Christians had made during the previous decades.¹⁷ Spurred on by the 1886 Mission Reserves Commission, which cited the deterioration on several of the AZM stations as evidence of mismanagement, the Natal government attempted to take control of the reserves away from the missionaries by introducing the 1895 Mission Reserves Bill, which, despite urgings from *amakholwa*

¹⁶ Arthur Christoferson, *Adventuring With God: The Story of the American Board Mission in South Africa*, (Durban: date unknown), p. 93.

¹⁷ John Lambert, *Betrayed Trust: Africans and the State in Colonial Natal*, (Pietermaritzburg: 1995), p. 82.

contained no clauses allowing for the purchase of freehold titles of land and allowed for the increase and collection of rents. Other problems loomed large; the boom of Indian farming threatened *amakholwa* market share, young men and women returned from Durban and Johannesburg unruly and disruptive, the Natal government increasingly refused to issue exemptions from Native law to Christians, and natural disasters such as locusts, drought, and cattle disease poised to sweep away all the community's recent advances. Particularly troubling, in light of the manner in which so many Christians generated capital and then invested their earnings, was rinderpest, a disease which had regularly swept away 90% of the cattle it touched as it marched through Africa in the 1890s.¹⁸

As rinderpest entered southern Africa, word of its devastating potential spread quickly and the newspapers of Natal meticulously tracked its progress towards the colony. *Amakholwa* returning from delivering goods in Rhodesia spread word of fields strewn with the fallen carcasses of entire herds and teams of oxen collapsing underneath them.¹⁹ Within months of its spread across the Zambezi, Natal officials, convinced of the responsibility of African transport riders for the spread of the epizootic, banned such trade outright. The colony erected wire fences, doubled up and strung along the border, stationed armed guards at key junctures, blew up mountain passes and required travelers to go through dipping stations.²⁰ Here guards required natives to strip and pass through a disinfectant dip while their clothing was fumigated. *Amakholwa*, who had worked hard to be recognized as "western" and "civilized", complained bitterly about being included in this campaign.

Faced with the looming disaster of rinderpest and increasingly marginalized by the colonial state, *amakholwa* turned inward, to their faith. For the first time as a community the church, not the mission station and all that it represented, became the focus of their interest. Rinderpest, hostile settlers and disruptive youth threatened to tear down the social and economic webs they had carefully constructed to piece together a collage of an identity. Revival was a deeply spiritual response to these disasters and

¹⁸ John Rowe, "Rinderpest in the Sudan 1888-1890: The Mystery of the Missing Panzootic," *Sudanic Africa*, (Volume 5: 1994), p. 149.

¹⁹ *Natal Mercury*, March 30th, 1896 and *Natal Mercury*, June 13th, 1896.

²⁰ Charles van Onselen, "Reactions to Rinderpest in Southern Africa," *Journal of African History*, (Volume 13: 1972).

those who participated came to identity themselves fundamentally by their faith and found that in so doing they both laid legitimate theological claim to control over their own churches and created a distinct community identity.

The Medium and the Message

In the April 5, 1894 edition of *The Sent of God* there appeared a long article titled “A Call to Africa” which, in gushing enthusiasm, extolled Christians to repay the debt the church owed to Africa for sheltering Moses, Abraham and Jesus, by becoming missionaries. Africa, the article proclaimed: “will yet be the black diamond in the Saviour’s crown.” The article warned against any assumption that the work might be easy, noting that: “It is a hard field, and appeals to all that is heroic and self-sacrificing in the soldiers of the Cross.” And yet, for those frustrated with touching relatively few hearts in the cities and towns of America, the potential reward was great, as a missionary in Africa “may claim, in a sense, a whole nation for himself, and have the great joy of being the founder of Christianity among a new race...”²¹ Whether this served as the inspiration for the Hephzibah Faith Missionary Association, the publishers of *The Sent of God*, to send missionaries to South Africa is difficult to say, for these were heady days for members of this Holiness movement based out of Tabor, Iowa.²² Founded in 1893, the association dedicated itself to foreign missions and established a missionary training school to assist in this endeavor. Almost immediately, the founding members of Hephzibah began to experience “divine urges” to establish missions. And so, from the tiny town of Tabor a steady stream of men and women began flowing out to Japan, India, China, and, in 1895, Africa. Trusting that God would provide, many of them left with families in tow and little else. Traveling until their money ran out, they evangelized their

²¹ *The Sent of God*, April 5th, 1894.

²² Ironically, the Zulu victory at Isandwana likely played a role as well, for advertisers, attempting to capitalize on the image of the victorious Zulu impis, gave prominence to the image of the powerful Zulu warrior. For several years in the mid-1890s, one of the local county newspapers near Tabor ran an add from the “Kaffir Kola Extract Co., Chicago” proclaiming Kola extract to be the “Greatest Remedy and Cure of the 19th Century.” The add went on to describe the ‘medicine’ as “an extract made from the juice of the nut of the Sacred Kola tree of South Africa. Used by the Kaffirs and Zulus in their tribes for many generations as a positive cure for all nervous diseases in men and women, from any cause; dyspepsia; constipation; kidney and bladder ailments and diseased liver.” *Mills County Tribune*, 1894-96

ways across the United States, taking up collections at small meetings conducted out of the back of wagons. In this way the first missionary to leave Tabor finally arrived in Japan two years after his departure. Elder George Weaver left Iowa for Africa on November 16th 1895, before boarding a steamer bound for Durban he spent nearly a year preaching in New York with Henry O'Neill, a native of West Africa and prominent Holiness author, and then three months preaching from atop a soapbox in the market square of Soham, England.

The Holiness movement emerged out of the social upheaval that accompanied the years before and after the United States' Civil War and at least initially centered around defections by itinerant Methodist and Baptist preachers based along the expanding American frontier.²³ Holiness teachings focused on John Wesley's theology that entire sanctification, the freedom from willful sin and thus the ability to love God perfectly, could be achieved prior to death as commanded by Jesus in Matthew 5:48, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be imbued with power from on high." Reaching this state of perfection did not preclude one from temptation, Holiness ministers were quick to point out, rather doing so removed all carnality from the soul, all inbred sin, and in its place sanctification left a perfect love for God and man. For those inclined to do so, and many did in the years prior to the Civil War, this theology also suggested the radical notion that all believers could achieve equality in Christ, regardless of gender or race. Charles Finney, perhaps the preeminent American revivalist of the 19th Century and an early advocate of "a life of holiness", refused to provide the sacrament to slave-holders, had his church vandalized by an anti-abolitionist mob and, in 1835 became a professor of theology at Oberlin College, the institution that had formed out of student and faculty expelled from Cincinnati's Lane Seminary for their radical beliefs in racial equality.²⁴ While not all Holiness ministers adopted as radical an approach as Finney, Weaver did. To this day, Tabor holds its heritage as a base for John Brown's violent raids against Missouri slave

²³ McLoughlin, William. *Revivals, Awakenings & Reform* (Chicago: 1978). See also V. Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, and D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain from 1730-1980s*.

²⁴ Hambrick-Stowe, Charles E. *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: 1996). See also, Keith Hardman, *Charles Grandison Finney: Revivalist and Reformer*, (Syracuse: 1987).

holders proudly, and George Weaver was not only one of the first in the surrounding county to volunteer for the Union Army, he reenlisted several times before a musket ball at the battle of Chickasaw Bayou ripped into his lower jaw, ending his military career, nearly ending his life, but from which, a year and a half later, he left the hospital to become a Baptist minister, and later, in 1886, a Holiness evangelist.²⁵

So, when Elder Weaver (sanctified members of Hephzibah referred to each other as Elder, denoting a status of a certain authority in the church, or Brother and Sister for regular members in good standing) finally arrived in Durban in September of 1896, he carried with him a radical, if not revolutionary, steamer trunk of theological ideas. Justification, the act of recognizing ones sins, followed by sanctification, filled one with the Holy Ghost and not only made all of God's children pure, it also acted as an instant anointment into service, compelling the believer to spread the news. Weaver was not an educated man and he frequently expressed anger with those that expressed the idea that a preacher need be so, commenting that the Word proclaimed: "God hath chosen the foolish things of the word to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty."²⁶ Taken to its logical conclusion, Weaver felt, anyone, "bestowed by the Holy Spirit" accepted the burden of Christ's command to the apostles in Mark 6-8, to go out, two by two, healing the sick, driving away unclean spirits and spread the word to unbelievers armed with only a walking stick and the faith that God would provide room and board along the way.²⁷ While the Congregationalism of the American Zulu Mission had always encouraged active participation by individuals in their respective congregations, this was mitigated by both the rigid demands they placed on acceptance into that congregation and their continued insistence on some degree of education for the upper echelons of the African leadership.²⁸

Significantly, for the success of the revival in South Africa, Weaver forcefully proclaimed the message of Acts 1:8, "But ye shall receive power, after the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea,

²⁵ "Close of a Notable Life", *Tabor Beacon* April 30th, 1914.

²⁶ *The Sent of God* April 2nd 1896. Weaver frequently referred derisively to highly educated ministers as 'professors'.

²⁷ *The Sent of God* April 18th, 1895.

²⁸ Not to mention their firm belief, along with most other mission bodies, in the efficacy of education.

and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.”²⁹ This reading must certainly have struck home to a people who becoming increasingly marginalized by the colonial government in whose economic and political values they had set one foot of their identity in, and for whom the land around the church had often meant more than the services conducted inside its walls. This message was nothing less than the promise that their identities as Christians, their lives as people of faith, could be translated into lives of both temporal and spiritual greatness. Power now flowed from within their Christianity but depended upon their ability to tap it, and that depended upon their ability to live lives of perfection, something that Weaver warned could not be done without the firm support of other like-minded believers. With this in mind, revival among the *amakholwa* developed into the act of regenerating and reconstituting their community; and in doing so preparing the way for their identity to be firmly rooted in their faith, not just what they wore, the economic activities they participated in, or their ownership of a square home on two acres of their own land.

Revival

Ida and William Worcester, young Hephzibahite missionaries, met Elder Weaver in England and the three of them set sail for South Africa, arriving in Durban August 23, 1896. Unlike Weaver, who arrived in Natal as an itinerant preacher intent on returning to the States after a short stay, the Worcesters came to establish a permanent mission and they made use of a generous offer of assistance from members of the AZM, staying at Adams and Groutville stations while learning Zulu and becoming acculturated. Weaver, after a short stay in Durban, accepted an invitation from Frank Weiss, a missionary in Mapumulo, to conduct services there, arriving the middle of September.³⁰

²⁹ *The Sent of God* April 4th, 1895. Several other doctrines espoused by Weaver and the Hephzibites played prominent roles in the revival and subsequent faith lives of Zulu believers. Particularly interesting, but not directly pertinent to this paper, is the practice of faith healing introduced by Weaver. This predates the introduction of Pentecostalism by nearly a decade (the Azusa Street Revival began in 1906) and may have been the source of similar practices by Zionists. See Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality* (New York: 1995).

³⁰ Weiss was not a missionary of the American Zulu Mission and it is unclear if he had an affiliation to any other denomination, was simply a teacher, or perhaps a guest missionary. The letters of the Worcesters home, indicate that their small band planned on settling in Natal well before they left England, what is not clear is how Weaver and Weiss connected.

Weaver's message appears to have immediately caught the imagination as well as the hearts of the Mapumulo congregation and a spectacle that became familiar across the missions of the AZM began to play itself out. Weaver delivered his sermon, prayed and called men and women forward to receive sanctification at the 'tabernacle'. Before they could receive this blessing, however, they needed to go through justification and this proved to be a time of deep struggle. Women cried out, fell to the ground and lay immobilized and unable to rise for hours, men shook with anguish and others became covered in perspiration as they visibly fought with demons.³¹ Sins, both banal and shocking poured forth as the church participated in a congregation wide purge. Once past transgressions were revealed, another remarkable series of events began to take place as *amakholwa* sought to right the perceived wrongs of their community. Members paid off forgotten debts, tearfully forgave longstanding feuds and, in a deeply symbolic act, burned snuffboxes, tobacco pipes, beer pots, *umuthi* and "heathen ornaments."³² In so doing they, for the first time as a community, set out to establish the parameters of what it meant to be part of "their" group

The revival spread from Mapumulo as Weaver received invitations from other American missionaries eager to recreate the success of Mapumulo at their stations. At Groutiville/Umvoti, where Weaver arrived the first part of November, the church became so crowded meetings had to be held outside and a leading man of the community spoke of how, after a day and night of fasting and praying he had returned home calling out loudly to his family. When his wife asked in alarm, "What is the matter?" He responded, "Matter, I have received the Holy Spirit and I want you to get Him."³³ From Goutville Weaver went with Wilcox to Impapala, a community of *amakholwa* who had several years earlier set themselves up in Zululand independently of AZM action, but maintained a close connection with the American missionaries.³⁴ Here again, meetings lasted well into the night, past sins were righted and, in a dramatic turn, a man healed of a

³¹ Holiness should not, however, be confused with Pentecostalism, the movement it eventually spawned. Unlike Pentecostalism, Holiness ministers did not, generally, stress an imminent millennium nor was baptism of the Spirit represented through glossolalia – the act of speaking in tongues.

³² NAP AZM A/3/41: Wilcox report of works under charge for year 1896-97.

³³ Ibid

³⁴ A move that paid dividends in the following years when the Natal government threw open Zululand for white settlement. Impapala was one of the areas designated for sale and only after lengthy negotiations did the government agree to not sell several plots of land centered on the church.

venomous snakebite. Miraculous healings and repentance of backsliders were the order of the day at Esidumbini the beginning of the new year, followed by Noodsberg the middle of January, Umsumduze the end of the month, and Inanda and Durban the first of February, before Weaver departed for his return voyage to the states.

While there is a direct correlation between Elder Weaver and revival, a careful reading of the extraordinary accounts of the events occurring on the stations of the AZM at this time reveal the extent to which African agency drove this experience. Indeed, an argument can be made that Mbiya Kuzwayo, onetime preacher at Mapumulo, was the man single most responsible for the success of the revival. Weaver spoke no Zulu and it was through Kuzwayo, a man: “so filled with the Spirit – He makes the same jestures [sic] and puts his whole soul into it” that the revival message flowed.³⁵ Writing into *The Sent of God*, Kuzwayo described his experience of sanctification:

God’s Spirit came with power upon myself and those who received him. I began to talk in an unknown tongue, that is English. That day I felt as if I could stand and preach in English to any congregation without any fear. For God had taken all fear from me. Because what I spoke was not from my own experience, but what the Holy Ghost told me to utter. Also some of our young people, men and women, began to shout, Allelujah! Glory to God! “Halibongwe igama lika Jehova!” That is praise the name of the Lord!

I must also inform you dear friends, how God revealed the way of sanctification to me. Early in the morning of Sept. 22, the Spirit of God said to me, “Go and tell Bro. Weavers that this is a blessed day. No man or woman shall work. We shall have a whole day’s service.” That day was Tuesday, and the Lord instantly fulfilled his Word. For we had a very large assembly both of Station and Kraal people, and we held the service from morning to evening.

The people were surprised and said, “Are these people mad, crazy, or are they possessed with evil spirits? So most of them went to their homes with that opinion. But it was not long, till Almighty God sent his light on some of them, so they came to the altar, prayed, confessed and forsook their sins, and the Lord saved them right on the spot.”³⁶

As Weaver moved from station to station Kuzwayo moved with him, organizing a group of other sanctified Africans to prepare the way, spreading the message before Weaver began and insuring that *amakholwa* households tucked away in the various valleys and dales of northern Natal knew of the miraculous events occurring in their midst. By the

³⁵ *The Sent of God*, December 17th, 1896.

³⁶ *The Sent of God*, December 3rd, 1896.

end of his first stay in Natal, the only man to whom Weaver attached the honorific ‘Elder’ was Kuzwayo, noting “He alone has paid me by been [sic] filled with the spirit for coming over to Africa.”³⁷

Kuzwayo was not alone in spreading the word. At Mapumulo a young man got himself arrested when, “drunk with the Spirit” he began to preach to native policemen who assumed him either insane or inebriated. Undeterred the young man continued praising the Lord, shouting out hallelujahs and preaching to both his jailers and those imprisoned with him. After a short period he received his release with the admonition that he should never return and that he needed to see the doctor straight away.³⁸ At Inanda girls’ seminary, residents carried word of the revival back with them following the Christmas break. After one Sunday evening service, the girls gathered in a classroom and short-time later the teachers investigated the loud crying and sobbing emanating from behind the closed doors, only to find “nearly the whole school in an almost uncontrollable state of emotion.”³⁹ When Weaver did arrive, at the end of February, the experience intensified as girls spent nights in feverish prayer, fasted for days, and went off by themselves and in small groups seeking the manifestation of the gifts of the spirit. So filled with power were the girls, that they took their message out to the surrounding reserve residents, daring to preach a message of repentance of sin to their elders. The willingness of men to confess their sins in a meeting led by girls was seen as further evidence of the working of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁰ A band of girls even journeyed as far as Amanzimtoti to preach, leading to an awakening at Adams, the primary boy’s school of the mission.⁴¹ So too did the work carry on at Umzumbe House for girls where, following a series of bible studies led by a Zulu teacher and devoted to the message of the Pentecost found in Acts 2:39, a revival sprang to full force in the middle of March, 1897. The now familiar scene, of distressed spirits, confessions of sin, and then joyful redemption, repeated itself in the home and, spurred by the desire of one of the girls, the residents moved out preaching among the station residents. For the *amakholwa* it seemed

³⁷ Personal diaries of George Weaver, entry for January 18, 1897. One interesting side-note is that in Weaver’s first public speech upon his return to Iowa, Weaver boasted not of the rapturous events that accompanied the revival among *amakholwa* but of the fact that he had ‘converted’ several missionaries.

³⁸ *The Sent of God*, December 3rd, 1896.

³⁹ NAP, AZM A/3/41: Report of Inanda Seminary, July 1896-July 1897, Fidelia Phelps.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ NAP, AZM A/3/41: Amanzimtoti annual report, June 1896-June 1897, Charles Ransom.

that there had been “a great search light thrown upon the hearts of the church members, that marvelous power of the Holy Ghost, bringing out iniquities and sin hidden for long years.”⁴² Suddenly, being Christian demanded much more rigorous attention be paid to one’s faith; the price paid for the relatively simple manner of becoming Christian through justification and sanctification was the demand to live a “perfected” life.

At the same-time as revival actively engaged the Christian community in re-defining its own internal borders, it also commanded participants with expanding the frontier. And so, for the first time in the American Zulu Mission’s history, large numbers of *amakholwa* actively participated in the evangelization of their traditionalist neighbors and family. At Umzumbe: “Bands of three or four girls usually with a teacher, were permitted to go out to heathen kraals within easy access and hold service.”⁴³ At Inanda “hundreds” of Christians organized themselves to go out, during the week, and hold meetings amongst the kraal residents. While the missionary in charge at Inanda noted the “ignorance” of many of these self-appointed evangelists, he also commented: “but they can tell of what God has done for themselves to the people in their own language and God is working by and through them for the salvation of others.”⁴⁴ A band of Christians gathered early Thursday mornings in Esidumbini, prayed, reported on their successes of the previous week and then went in groups of from two to five to various kraals to evangelize: “Some find a cordial welcome, others indifference, & a few opposition. As a result of this work we already notice an increase in the heathen attendance upon Sabbath services.”⁴⁵ And at Mapumulo, Mbiya Kuzwayo organized a band of young Christians, calling themselves *amavoluntiya*, the ‘volunteers’, to spread the message of the revival off of the station as well as continue the reformation so earnestly in progress among their fellow believers.⁴⁶ All told, a dramatic increase in the number of lay-preachers occurred; in 1892 the mission recorded 101 such workers, in June 1896 148 unpaid evangelists labored in the field, the following year the number jumped to 195, in 1900 this had

⁴² NAP, AZM A/3/41: Umzumbe Home annual report, June 1896-June 1897, Alice Stillson.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ NAP, AZM A/3/41: Lindley Mission Station annual report for 1896-97.

⁴⁵ NAP, AZM A/3/41: Esidumbini annual report for 1896-97, Mellen.

⁴⁶ NAP, AZM A/3/41: Report of works under charge for year 1896-97, Wilcox.

increased to 287 and by 1904 438 lay-preachers spread the message, nearly three times the number of 1896 in the months prior to the revival.⁴⁷

In participating in such an active campaign, Christians eventually achieved two ends. They undoubtedly increased the size of their community, but perhaps more importantly they asserted themselves into the wider community as leaders. They ventured forth, off of the reserves, “their” land and crossed the boundary into the land set aside for traditionalists not as traders, or those seeking to reinvest new-found wealth into traditional forms of exchange, but as Christians seeking to proclaim the universality of Christian ‘truth’. A new era, in which *amakholwa* had become responsible for the souls of their non-believing friends, family and neighbors had begun.

What Weaver began on the northern and central stations of the AZM in 1896-97, he returned in 1899 to press forward on the south coast stations, where he received an enthusiastic welcome from both the missionary in charge and those *amakholwa* who felt they had missed out during the first wave of excitement. Arriving at Ifafa on August 16th, Weaver spent two weeks, with the assistance once again of Mbiya Kuzwayo, holding services there before moving the revival and its workers to Umtwalume for three weeks, followed by a week at Umzumbé.⁴⁸ Once again the act of justification; wrestling with the forces of Satan, confession of sins and making past wrongs right; was followed by conversions, miraculous healings, casting out of evil spirits, and ultimately, sanctification. Once again the revival featured a strong effort to reconstitute the community of believers as backsliders confessed and were accepted back into the fold and as *amakholwa* created their own form of orthodoxy. Kuzwayo expanded his *amavoluntiya*, forming a band of young Christians at Umtwalume that became legendary in the years to come for their ability to regenerate the revival spirit at other AZM stations as well as their efforts to spread the message across Natal.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ NAP, AZM A: Statistical tables of the American Zulu Mission.

⁴⁸ Mbiya Kuzwayo turned down overtures from various churches to become their pastor “as he wishes to become an evangelist to his people through the influences of his relation to Elder Weavers. Such a work is greatly needed and he is eminently fitted for it.” Kuzwayo received support from both the AZM and the Zulu churches to act as a traveling revivalist for years after the ‘Great Revivals’. NAP, AZM A/3/42: Report of the Missionary in charge of the Amanzimtoti, Inanda, Umgeni, Itafamasi, Umsunduze, Umvoti, Tugela, Mapumulo, Imushane and Impapala Mission Stations for year 1899-1900, Bunker.

⁴⁹ NAP, AZM A/3/42: Report of the South Coast and Polela districts, June 1899 to June 1900, Charles Ransom. The *amavoluntiya* remained active and in the 1960s combined with the Young Men’s Christian

Not all the missionaries who experienced the effects of revival approved of the experience. Some maintained that Zulu Christians had demonstrated an intensified interest in the workings of the Holy Spirit before the arrival of Weavers and that his contribution shouldn't be overstated.⁵⁰ Others expressed doubts over the outward signs of the revival, worrying that the "loud crying and wild demonstrations of feeling" were just that and not true signs of faith and an effort was made to teach that "salvation does not depend on their crying but that faith in Jesus is the essential thing."⁵¹ And while some, such as Charles Ransom in charge of the South Coast stations and William Wilcox, enthusiastically welcomed Weaver's return in 1899 (as did the *amakholwa* who invited him to be the feature speaker at their annual gathering in 1900), the bulk of the missionaries affected a much cooler tone in their written comments of Weaver's second tour.⁵² And yet several of the missionaries found themselves forced to acknowledge the ineffectiveness of their own past efforts and some wondered out loud at the place they should now hold:

From the off-repeated confessions it would seem that not a few of those in our native churches have given an intellectual assent to the Christian doctrines preached by the Missionaries, and have made fitful endeavors to conform their lives to certain regulations and standards of conduct, the chief motive being a desire to follow the Umfundisi, and to be counted a Christian.

But they have never before passed thro' an experience of conviction of sin, an utter forsaking of it, and a personal saving faith in the Atonement of Christ. We have mourned over the dead and corrupt state of our native churches. Have we not here a clue to the cause? Are we wholly blameless?⁵³ [original emphasis]

Missionaries were not alone in asking these questions as their African pastors, preachers, lay-evangelists and congregations began voicing similar thoughts.

Union to form Soldiers of Christ. See D. Roy Briggs and Joseph Wing, *The Harvest and the Hope: The Story of Congregationalism in Southern Africa*, (Johannesburg: 1970), p. 295.

⁵⁰ NAP, AZM A/3/41: Lindley Mission Station report, June 1896 to June 1898.

⁵¹ NAP, AZM A/3/42: Inanda Seminary report, June 1897 to June 1898, Fidelia Phelps.

⁵² Weaver's third tour, in 1903, found him virtually cut off from formal participation in the life of the AZM. This is, at least in part, was the result of the success the Worcestersters had in setting up their own mission in Johannesburg and a second mission station opened up by the Hephzibah Faith Mission in Zululand. Weaver spent the bulk of his time touring these sites.

⁵³ NAP, AZM A/3/41: Annual report of Umzumbe Home, June 1896-June 1897, Alice Stillson.

Postlude

The revival found the American Zulu Mission at a turning point. Long suffering from the annoyance of one breakaway body, Mbiyana Ngidi's church, which attempted, largely without any real numerical success, to set down branches on numerous other stations during the 1890s, the AZM found itself in the midst of real crises during the middle of the 1890s.⁵⁴ Unable to man its station at Table Mountain, the mission responded to a threat from the Natal government to withdraw the title by entering into cooperation with the Natal Congregational Union who supplied a local missionary to oversee the reserve. Conflict between this man and the AZM preacher there, Simungu Shibe, led Shibe to separate, taking with him most of the congregation. Similar events befell a rapidly expanding Johannesburg mission and, by early 1898 the two separatist movements had combined to form the Zulu Congregational Church. So too, fired by the power of the revival message, did other ministers across the mission begin to question the authority of their American supervisors. At Umtwalume, pastor Sunguzwa Nyuswa reported in May 1897, on the spiritual uplift the church was then experiencing and that the revival "continues with power indeed." Going on he described the revival further, but then attached a series of troubling questions:

The good news is that there is conversion of sins, throwing away of corn alcohol, smoking, and snuff tobacco. The young people from the school have been revived greatly and are preaching in many places.

Beloved minister I am requesting you to answer the following questions.

1. Am I Mr. Harris's worker?
2. Am I not God's servant?
3. Why am I under Mr. Harris?
4. Who is a white minister under another white minister?
5. Why is it necessary that a minister from Umtwalume be reported to America since the American Board is no longer helping us (not even with a child's safety pin) at all.⁵⁵

The Americans fought a vigorous rearguard action to maintain control, but by 1900 had to admit that they had been reduced to mere bystanders as they watched the native

⁵⁴ For an extended discussion of these events please see, Switzer

⁵⁵ NAP, AZM A/1/8: Pastor Nyuswa to Fred Bunker, May 26th, 1897.

governing body of the Zulu congregations, the *abalsitupa* (the six) negotiate the return of the Johannesburg branch of the ZCC into the fold. As part of this agreement the Zulu churches agreed to change their name from the American Zulu Mission to the African Congregational Church. The missionaries, in the American Zulu Mission Annual for 1900, admitted: “The conditions under which work is carried on today are, of course, those which have been created by the events of the past. – it being more certain than ever after the recent developments that ‘Africa must be saved by the Africans’ and that the chief function of the missionary must be to train native workers.”⁵⁶

Sadly the story does not end here, with the triumphant ascension of a dynamic Zulu congregation, empowered by the message of revival to claim their own role in saving themselves and those they perceived as ‘heathen’ around them. Instead, the Natal government, unaware of the revival but quickly becoming acutely aware of an increase in evangelist activity in the years following the first waves of excitement, sought to block what they came to refer to as “Ethiopian” activity. Beginning in 1903 the government began to systematically block the activities of *amakholwa* seeking to extend the realm of God; refusing to allow native preachers to live and work outside of the reserves, denying marriage licenses to pastors of the AZM and tearing down the simple structures evangelists constructed for worship in outlying areas of Natal. By 1907, stunned by the rebellion of the previous year, the AZM was forced by the government to begin reinserting themselves into the activities of the African Congregational Church. Still, it proved to late to alter the nature of what it meant to be Christian; for by that time, enthusiastic congregations, hundreds of evangelists and an increasing pastorate had firmly established an identity built around the revival message that would carry through into the succeeding generations, lending legitimacy from its message of sanctification in Christ. Revival helped define the border of the *amakholwa* community and commanded Christians to constantly expand this boundary, to be fishers of men and leaders of nations, and so, in the succeeding years, as best they could, this is what they attempted to do.

⁵⁶ NAP, AZM A/3/42: The American Zulu Mission Annual, 1900-1901 and 1901-1902 (p. 8). The principal of Amanzimtoti Theological Seminary reported: “The primary period of the mission is past. The second stage has come when our chief work is to reach the people through trained leaders. From the higher schools of the mission must be drawn to a large extent the men who are to mould the church life and discipline in Natal and the men who are to evangelize the cities and sow the seed along a thousand African Roads.” NAP, AZM A/3/42: Adams and Amanzimtoti Seminary report, 1900.