

# Maranatha Mission, South Africa

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Maranatha Mission was the first Seventh-day Adventist mission station established in the Eastern Cape to cater for the educational and spiritual needs of Black South Africans. It functioned from 1909 to 1916.

## Factors that Led to the Establishment of the Institution

As early as 1903, Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders desired to establish a mission among the Xhosa people. To realize this desire, Richard Moko, who later became the first Black South African ordained minister, began his ministry by visiting the Xhosa people and selling books to them. A. W. Spaulding confirms that Pastor Moko had started a school at Maranatha as early as 1904, before G. W. Shone joined him.<sup>1</sup> Moko's work was a form of a mobile school using the little "Gospel Wagon" purchased by the South African Union Conference at £100 for Pastor Moko and Elder P. Simailes to use in the Ciskei.<sup>2</sup> They used it to hold Bible readings wherever and whenever they could.

Elder and Mrs. F. B. Armitage arrived in 1907 from Somabula Mission in Southern Rhodesia to replace Shone, who was assigned to work among the Dutch people.<sup>3</sup> Elders Armitage and Hyatt took a little wagon and six bullocks and went around visiting the natives and holding lantern lectures. This gave birth to the idea of the "Gospel Wagon" that became a prominent feature of the work among the natives for many years.<sup>4</sup> Traveling on the Gospel Wagon was no pleasure trip since it sometimes meant as long as four months of separation from families, although it might take only two and a half days' journey to get back to the mission.

## Founding of the Institution

Then the missionaries decided that the time had come for doing a more definite work for the natives. Pastor G. W. Shone was ordained and set apart for that specific work. He knew the people very well and spoke their language.<sup>5</sup> In 1908, the Cape Conference Committee appointed Elder Shone and I. B. Burton to travel over across the Kei River and visit some parts of the Transkei region in the Eastern Cape so they could secure a piece of land. It was after much fruitless search that they finally reached Charles Sparrow's farm on the main road

from Grahamstown to Peddie, a large native settlement. Since Sparrow loved the natives, he was willing to offer 520 acres (200 hectares) of land on the basis of a 99 lease agreement with the Church.

Elder Armitage erected a church that also served as a day school at the Maranatha Mission in 1908.<sup>6</sup> G. A. Ellingworth was one of the teachers in the school, and W. Claude Tarr served as the farm manager. The two families initially lived in tents before they built wattle and daub houses with flat iron roofs. Each of the houses had two rooms. One was used as a bedroom while the other served as a kitchen and living room. Each family had a water tank in which they stored water caught from the flat iron roof. Pastor Hyatt used to go around visiting the villages using the little wagon to speak to the people about the mission station and encourage them to send their children to school. The simple treatments given to the sick opened the hearts of the people who began sending their children to the school.<sup>7</sup>

In 1909, a boarding school was opened under the leadership of G. A. Ellingworth. Then in 1910 Elder Armitage was transferred to Natal where he went to open the Spion Kop Station among the Zulus. He was replaced by W. S. Hyatt as director of the Maranatha Mission. Enrollment reached 48 students that year. The first baptism took place in 1910 when four people joined the Church, around the same time when a new stone church building was dedicated. The older boys took great interest working with tools in a small carpenter shop making tables, benches, and other articles for their rooms.<sup>8</sup> In 1911, the Maranatha congregation was organized with 27 baptized members.<sup>9</sup>

W. S. Hyatt had more to say about the fruitful work of the Gospel Wagon:

The mission wagon has brought the truth to many, and a few are rejoicing in the new light that has come to them. Several are asking for baptism, and if they continue to be faithful a little longer, we will gladly bury them with their Lord. We are more and more convinced that we should put forth strong efforts in the evangelistic work. This field is ripe for the harvesters, and there should be delay no longer.<sup>10</sup>

In the region around the Maranatha Mission, the ministry of the Gospel Wagon exerted a great influence among the natives in such places as Fish River and Combs. W. Claude Tarr, the director of the Mission at the time, wrote the following regarding the interest aroused in Fish River:

When work was started there, it was not long before the natives desired to read the Bible for themselves. As with the white man so with the natives, seeing is believing. So we had Brother Faba start a school there, with the result that quite a number of these, who twenty months ago could neither read nor write, are now able to read the Bible quite intelligently, through faithful work having been done there. So therefore, we feel to praise God for this out-school.<sup>11</sup>

Maranatha Mission's evangelistic work was not limited to rural settings alone. The Mission also had oversight of the work in Grahamstown where such a great interest had developed that two or three people were reported to be awaiting baptism.

Maranatha's blessings also included material prosperity. W. C. Tarr reported of the production of the mission farm, saying: "We are glad to report that God has blessed on the farm also. We have raised more than enough food for the use of the school, and we have a supply on hand for the next half year, or until the next crop is harvested. While many of the farmers and natives have had to buy grain, we have been able to dispose of part of our crop."<sup>12</sup>

Elder Tarr became director of the mission in 1911 when Hyatt was called to the presidency of the Cape Conference. Serving as mission director between 1911-1916, Tarr developed the school farm industry. Miss Adeline Victoria Sutherland, a graduate of Claremont College, was one of the teachers at the school. Some of the first students to be trained at this school during those early years were Amos Magalela, Agrippa Mzozoyana, Stanford Ntwana, Banford Scott, Shadrach Pikoli, Douglas Ntsikeni, Dode Kobe, and Griffiths Mayaba, all of whom later occupied responsible positions in Adventist work. Teachers and students labored together in the school's work program. The institution attracted learners from as far away as Nyasaland (Malawi).<sup>13</sup> Erico Msuseni and Benford Scott of Malamulo Mission travelled to South Africa and literally walked all the way from Transvaal to the Maranatha Mission to further their education, surviving on a raw maize-meal mixed with water as their daily food.

In gratitude to these abundant blessings and in response to the effective teaching of the word of God, a revival of faithfulness took place among the believers in returning tithes and offerings at one of the nearby churches in the same region, as C. Sparrow noted:

A revival in tithe paying has come to this church. Some brought a tithe of pumpkins; some brought goats; others brought a cow or an ox. One native head man was so impressed that he has tithed all his stock, his tithe amounting to ten head of cattle. This seems a lot for a native man who a few years ago was a heathen, especially when we remember how fond the natives are of their cattle.<sup>14</sup>

It was also at Maranatha Mission where the first Bible Institute was organized for natives in South Africa. All the native workers were in attendance. The institute opened on July 1, 1915, with the South African Union President, Pastor W. B. White, as speaker. On Sabbath, July 3, with Maranatha Church's baptized membership attendance numbering 175, 52 of whom were natives. On that day, Pastor Richard Moko, who had labored among the natives for 20 years, was ordained to the Gospel ministry. He became the first Black minister to be ordained to the Gospel ministry in South Africa.<sup>15</sup>

Maranatha Mission also served as the venue for organizing the first church in the Kaffir Reserve. On Sabbath, July 10, 1915, a meeting of the Maranatha Church was held during which "letters of transfer were given to seventy members, that they might form a Seventh-day Adventist church on the Kaffir Reserve."<sup>16</sup> At that meeting, three elders were chosen and ordained--one of whom was Charles Sparrow--and two native brethren, two deacons, a clerk, and treasurer, all the latter being natives. The newly formed church was named the Themba Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Some of the students who attended the school at Maranatha Mission arrived there by divine providence, as shown in the following story:

A young man who came from Mt. Frere, in the Transkei, was led to our school in a remarkable way. He had passed the 6th. standard; so his father decided to take "him to Lovedale" for the first year pupil teachers' training course. They had a seven days' journey before them; and not having been over that part of the country before, they lost their way. "When they thought they had reached their journey's end, they found that they had passed Alice and were near Peddie. A certain native man advised the father not to go back to Alice; but to take his son to the 'Jewish Mission' over the hill. They arrived here the following day and the father was very much impressed with the school and the way the superintendent spoke to him. The young man is now a member of our church and a moral asset to our station.<sup>17</sup>

It was such a blessing that there were dedicated teachers at Maranatha Mission such as Miss A. V. Sutherland, who were passionate not only in providing education to students, but in leading them to the Lord, as Pastor W. B. White noted:

We are glad to note the progress in the school. Miss Sutherland, the teacher, is not only helping them to acquire an education, but she is exerting a strong Christian influence over them. The Lord has given her the hearts of the pupils, and she is doing all she can to lead them to the Saviour. Quite a number of those baptised were from the school, some of whom had quite a remarkable experience. We are sorry the school is not larger and hope another year may see an improvement in this respect, but the blessing of the Lord is in it, and souls are being turned from darkness to light through its influence.<sup>18</sup>

Dr. Harry Hankins, who in 1914 was voted by the South African Union Conference Executive Committee to work at the hospital situated at Maranatha Mission, was another European physician (in addition to Dr. Thomason) who was planning for some time to give his life to medical work among some of the native people of Africa. He worked at Maranatha until the Lord opened the way for him to go among the natives and open a dispensary to carry forward medical missionary work among those who seemed to be so needy of medical attention. The General Conference appropriated funds to start that work, and it was hoped that it would soon been seen to be successfully established.<sup>19</sup>

## Closure of the Institution

By the end of 1916, the enrollment at Maranatha Mission had reached 70, and examination results revealed that very significant work was being done by the teachers.<sup>20</sup> In that same year, British Colonial rule pushed the African population further eastward, across the Kei River. The state's comprehensive program of racial segregation and discrimination limited land ownership by Africans to demarcated reserves.<sup>21</sup> This forced the school committee to sell Maranatha Mission farm back to Charles Sparrow for £1,650 and use the proceeds to

purchase another piece of land in Butterworth in Transkei where the school was moved, and it became known as Bethel College. This brought to an end the seven years of the existence of Maranatha Mission.

## List of Principals

G. A. Ellingworth (1908-1909); W. S. Hyatt (1910-1911); W. C. Tarr (1912-1916)

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### NOTES

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2. Nhlanga Mafani, *From Genesis to Generations*, Hlanga Mafani (2011), 45.
3. M. Ellsworth Olsen, *A History of the Origin and Progress of Seventh-day Adventists* (Takoma Park, MD: 1926): 503.
4. (MISSING Endnote #4!)
5. I. B. Burton, *The Reminiscences and Recollections of A Pioneer or With the Message in the Dark Continent 1894-1924*. Unpublished Manuscript (Amarillo, Texas, 1976), 92.
6. Swanepoel, 125; Olsen, 503.
7. Burton, *The Reminiscences and Recollections of a Pioneer. . .*, 93.
8. W. S. Hyatt, "Maranatha Mission," *Southern African Missionary*, December 19, 1910, 3.
9. L. Francois Swanepoel, *The Origin and Early History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in South Africa, 1886-1920*. Unpublished MTh Thesis, (University of south Africa, 1972), 125.
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11. W. Claude Tarr, "Report of Maranatha Mission as Presented at the Recent Union Conference", *The South African Missionary*, March 24, 1913, 2.
12. Ibid.
13. V. E. Robinson, *Third Angel Over Africa*. Unpublished Manuscript, (1945), 131.
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18. W. B. White, "Maranatha", *South African Missionary*, May 26, 1914, 1.
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