

# Work at the Moravian Church Theological College Mbeya, Tanzania

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The college was founded in 1969. In 1984, 15 years of its existence will be celebrated. Arrangements for that occasion are underway. Graduates of this college totaled over 70 in 1980. The 11th commencement on 28th November, 1982 will comprise of 10 Moravians and 4 Lutherans. The door is open to other denominations which are members of the Christian Council of Tanzania (CCT).

For 9 years the college occupied temporarily the buildings of the Bible School at Chunya. In 1978, the college moved to its permanent campus at Mwakibete, Mbeya. The campus is 7 kilometers from the centre of the town. An official opening of the new buildings took place on 11th September, 1978. Dr. H. Bintz, representing the Provincial Board of the Continental Province officially opened the buildings. The Continental Province raised almost the whole total cost of the buildings and furniture.

Since its founding, 10 indigenous teachers and 6 missionaries (expatriates) have worked at the college. The present staff is made up of 3 indigenous teachers and 3 missionaries. The number of students has been increasing through the years. The present number is 58. Out of this number, 55 are men and 3 are women. The maximum number of students the campus is able to hold is 60.

## Entrance procedure for students

The call starts from the parish. The character of a candidate is critically analysed by the parish council. His moral life in general is assessed. A candidate has a better chance if he/she has been active in various activities in the parish - namely: as a Sunday School teacher, a leader of youth, a choir leader, a parish worker etc. At last, the parish council recommends chosen candidates to the Provincial Board.

The college sets an Entrance Examination of 4 subjects: English, Swahili, Bible Knowledge and General Knowledge. The centres of this examination are the offices of the Provinces and Dioceses. This examination is usually done in October. The papers are marked at the college and the results are sent to the respective Provinces and Dioceses.

The selection of students needed is done by the Provincial Board. It is confined to those only who pass the Entrance Examination and Interview conducted internally by each Province. Besides passing the Entrance Examination, the following qualifications are needed: a) 11 years of schooling (Form IV) with a National Certificate of Education or equivalent b) 20 - 40 years of age and c) having gone through an accepted Bible School. (This last qualification is not compulsory).

Once the Provincial Board has made its selection, the names are sent to the college. The student signs a contract with his/her church. A letter

of information about the college is sent to all selected students at least three weeks before the opening day. Each new student produces a medical certificate which testifies his physical health. Without this certificate, no admission is granted.

## College Curriculum

A college curriculum is planned for a course of 4 years. It is divided into five departments: Biblical Theology (OT & NT); Dogmatics; Practical Theology; Church History and Liberal Arts. Specialization in teaching the subjects is not emphasized at present.

In 1980, the Board of Governors of the college approved a programme of Internship. This programme started in 1981 for the first time in the history of the college. According to this programme, 3rd year students go out to work into the field for 6 months (July - December). A student is supervised by an experienced pastor. The supervisor and the student follow the college guidelines for the whole programme. In each month, two reports (one from the student and the other one from the supervisor) are sent to the college. Copies of the reports are sent to the office of the Province/Diocese. Teachers visit each student in his respective parish.

The first evaluation of the programme took place in the beginning of this year (1982). The students (now in their last year) were given a three hours time to answer the questions concerning the programme as part of the evaluation. In general, they highly recommended the programme to continue. Students and teachers exchanged their experiences. A number of recommendations and advices from the students have been approved by the Board of Governors. One of the recommendations is that, a period of 6 months in the field is not enough, it should extend to one year. This suggestion is to be effective in 1984.

An example of a typical experience in the field

### 1) Pastoral Counseling

*Client:* I was very much touched by your sermon last Sunday. I thank you for that.

*Student:* I don't deserve your thanks, only Jesus does. I was just His instrument in that sermon. By the way, I like to know your name and if possible your Christian experience.

*Client:* My name is "Msema Kweli" (it means one who speaks the truth). I 'm not a Christian. I like to be a Christian but there is a problem which I don't know how to solve it. I'm a polygamist - I have three wives. I love them all. According to the Christian teaching, I'm told that in order to become a Christian, I have to chase away my two wives so that I remain with only one!

*Student:* Yes, you have a big problem but it can be solved.

*Client:* How can it be solved? In your sermon you preached that one is saved by faith through Jesus Christ. I have heard about this man from many people. His love to men was finally expressed on the Cross. He died for my sins. I love Him and I believe in Him. Can't He accept me as I am with all my three wives?

*Student:* Well, I see now, it is not a simple problem as I thought. I remember very well how I stressed in my sermon that faith is the only requirement for anyone to be saved. You say you have faith in Jesus but

the church demands that you chase away your two wives first!

*Client:* As you see me, I'm very old, my wives too are very old. Where can I send them? No one is going to take care of them. They all love me. They were baptized four years ago. They are therefore Christians - but I'm not. How would you interpret God's love to all men if I chase away my two wives with whom I have lived for more than 40 years?

*Student:* I very feel your concern, I take your problem and I welcome you to come again after two weeks for further discussion on this issue.

The conversation ended in that way. In the student's report, he asked for an advice how to deal with this problem of that polygamist. The advice was given and in the following three months, "Msema Kweli", started receiving baptismal instructions.

## 2) A student's problem

*Student:* I'm somehow frustrated the way Br. John, the Elder of Kaloreni Street handles me. He wants me to follow every thing he says. He thinks that he knows every thing.

*Supervisor (Pastor):* Do you know, Br. John has been a church Elder for ten years? He is an experienced Elder.

*Student:* I honour his experience but I don't think that he knows every thing - nobody on earth can claim to know every thing.

*Supervisor:* How can you show him that nobody on earth knows every thing?

*Student:* That's why I have raised this problem to you - I need your help.

*Supervisor:* It seems to me that you have reached a quick judgement on Br. John. I don't think that he really claims to know every thing. It is just your own interpretation.

*Student:* A quick judgement! Surely, I don't like to do this - there is no wisdom in it.

*Supervisor:* I'm glad that you can see your shortcoming. Your good approach to Br. John is the only way which can change your relationship with him. If you will indicate to him that you don't know every thing, he will also indicate to you that he too doesn't know every thing. It seems to me that Br. John's impression on you is a negative one. He thinks that you are proud because of your education. In defending his inferiority complex, he argues against every thing you say. I know, you don't like to argue with him - so you become frustrated. Have you understood your problem?

*Student:* Yes pastor, I thank you very much for your insight and advice. My weakness is now very clear. I look forward to seeing a new relationship with Br. John.

The Supervisor handled the problem very tactfully. He pointed out the student's weakness in such a way that his counselee (student) made an evaluation of himself in a positive way. This was an encouraging growth in the student's experience.

## Life at the college

The day starts with a morning service led by a student at 1.40 to 1.55 a.m. A teacher on duty for the week leads this service on Mondays and Fridays. The day ends with an evening prayer of intercessions. One of

the touching intercessions on 7th June, 1982 I still remember vividly had the following words:

Dear Lord, Jesus Christ  
We pray that you bring peace  
where there is no peace.  
We think of our brothers and sisters  
who are suffering because of the  
war which is going on in the Falklands,  
in Chad and in Lebanon. Innocent people  
- children, young and old men die  
and some remain handicapped for life.  
We pray that the shedding of blood in  
these countries will come to an end.  
We know that it is not your will that  
your people suffer under such circumstances  
which are caused by human-beings  
to their fellow human-beings. We ask  
this in your Holy Name. Amen.

Morning classes start at 8.00 to 12.15 p.m. There is a short break at 10.25 - 10.40 a.m. At this time of relaxation, students take tea outside the kitchen. One hears arguments originated from a discussion in a class. Opinions are aired sometimes with emotions. Sometimes, staff participate in the arguments playing the role of being "catalysts". In the afternoon, there is one period from 2.00 - 2.45 p.m. From 2.50 - 4.00 p.m. students study for themselves in the library. Studies continue in the evening from 8.00 - 10.00 p.m. The library contains 4,000 books. Most of them are written in English. There is a very high demand for books in Kiswahili language. The very few African theologians we have in our country don't have enough spare time to write theological books in Kiswahili. Therefore, for the students to understand well what they read from English books, an adequate knowledge of English is essential.

Students have manual work twice a week in the evening. A staple food at our college is "Ugali" (stiff-porridge) made from maize (corn) grown by students. We annually harvest an average of 38 bags of maize. 3/4 of the vegetables is produced from the college garden. It is our aim to be self-reliant in food. It is quite possible to achieve this objective if the land we have will be wisely used. The whole college area is 30 acres. Other crops like potatoes, wheat and beans thrive very well.

We have recently started raising four pigs and at the same time, we have submitted some applications to the Christian Council of Tanzania asking for a grant to enable us operate the following projects: a) raising of rabbits for meat b) piggery project and c) a Day Care Centre for children. We need a total capital of about Tsh. 150,000.- (\$18,750.-) to start these three projects. One of the important things in training students in the Third World is to encourage them to value manual work. This emphasis is in line with the policy of our Government which encourages institutions to be self-reliant in food. The aim behind this policy is to decrease the running cost of an institution.

Besides manual work, students play games twice a week. The popular games are soccer and volleyball. Some students like indoor-games, namely: draughts, cards, "bao" etc. We encourage students to participate in games of their choice. Friday evening at 8.00 - 10.00 p.m. is when college choir practises its songs for Sunday services etc. Life

at the college reaches its peak during the weekends. Students whose homes are near get permission to go out two times a month. In the beginning of each term, a programme of different activities is drawn covering all the weekends. Some of these activities are: debates, concert, filmstrips, slides and evangelistic trips.

There is a danger for a residential theological school like ours to be "an island" - that's to be cut off from the needs and concerns of the people. We believe that a meaningful life at our college is one which takes seriously the Gospel so that it reaches the human needs that surround us. The following experience will help to show what I mean by taking the Gospel seriously:

#### New life at Nsenga village

East of our college is Nsenga village. It is 8 kilometers away. A call to preach the Word of God to Nsenga came through a head-teacher of a nearby Primary school of Iyela in 1979. He shared the news with two members of our staff - the Rev. Zacharia Shimwela and the Rev. Charles Lord. Responding to the call, they surveyed the village by using a motorcycle. They found out that the villagers were all followers of African Traditional Religion. In 1979, an evangelistic committee for Nsenga was formed at the college. The committee arranged trips to Nsenga involving all the students and staff. The following methods of evangelism were used: choir with trumpets, showing of slides, home visitation, preaching at public places - at the funeral, market place, at the "pombe" (beer) shop, usage of tracts etc. We suggested to the nearby congregation (Ruanda Moravian parish) to appoint a full time evangelist for Nsenga. The suggestion was accepted. An evangelist was appointed in 1980. He worked for two years. He laid the foundation. In the beginning of this year (1982) another evangelist was appointed. He is a very hard working young man. Right now, there are 20 youth taking baptismal instructions. The baptism is scheduled to take place in September. About 12 - 15 are expected to be baptized. The college chapel was privileged to have a few of these catechumen visit us on Sunday 16th May, 1982. These young people surprised us as they sang very beautifully. I do remember a few words in the first verse of their song:

"Oh Lord, we love thee,  
We testify our joy to be your  
followers....."

A few of us remaining at the college will be privileged in September to witness the first fruits of our 4 years of labour at Nsenga village. New life at Nsenga is quite visible now. A church is planned to be built in the near future.

#### Mobilization of ministry

Our college is in the urban area where the population is growing very rapidly because of the new industries being opened yearly. We feel that we are obliged to take theological education to the people. The suitable time to do this is during the weekends. In this way, our students use the chance applying their theory into practice. We visit the hospital, jail, psychiatric unit, etc. for pastoral work. It is interesting as we realize that the feedback we get strengthens our faith. There is a great hunger

for the Word of God. People want to read the Word of God for themselves but we don't have enough Bibles or Christian Literature to offer or to sell. The report we have from the Bible Society of Tanzania is that the demand for Bibles throughout the country is extremely high. The Society faces it with little hope of reaching a balanced demand.

Engaged in the full time training of candidates for ordained ministry, we value the academic as well as the practical aspects. We aim at integrating the normal context of life and ministry in such a way that real human problems are brought to surface for effective solution.

### Prospects for the future

One of the problems we face right now is the difficulty in getting qualified indigenous teachers. The very few we have are badly needed in their respective Provinces. The need to prepare theologians for the college is very important. As the situation indicates, the need for missionaries remains. Br. Charles Lord's contract terminates in the end of this year. A replacement is needed. I'm glad that the Board of World Mission of the Moravian Church, Bethlehem U.S.A., is looking for a successor.

We have learned through experience that relationships between our college and congregations or parishes, teachers and students, theory and experience of practice, theology and context generate progressive change in the models for teaching and learning. We have learned that the traditional methods of spreading the Word of God by pulpit preaching and lecture method are no longer as effective as they used to be thirty years ago. Good Christian life in the midst of non-Christians "speaks" more loudly than just mere words. Further more, we have learned that the Gospel has to reach the people by mobilization which involves lay people. The new agenda then is this: How can this involvement of lay people be effective? The right answer to this question would be a new way of doing theology in our contemporary situation. The expectation of the world around us is to see the church line up in joint action with the wider human community in building up a just society. Part of our contribution we are making towards a just society is a practical one. The college family operates a communal shop. This shop serves the community on the campus and the surrounding neighbours. This shop has a very wide attraction because of its fair prices and good service to all. In doing all this, we endeavor to make theological education a continual process rather than an accumulation of knowledge which is not applied in everyday life.

### Zusammenfassung

Die Arbeit am Theologischen College der Brüderkirche in Mbeya

Das College wurde im Jahr 1969 gegründet und zunächst in der Bibelschule von Chunya untergebracht. 1978 erhielt es dann ein eigenes Gebäude, 7 km von der Stadt Mbeya entfernt. Seit der Gründung waren 10 einheimische Lehrer und 6 Missionare im Lehrkörper tätig. Die Zahl der Studenten hat sich jährlich gesteigert und betrug im Jahr 1983 insgesamt 58 Studenten (darunter drei Damen). Das College nimmt nur solche Studenten an, die von der Gemeinde ausgewählt werden, die nötigen

schulischen Voraussetzungen besitzen und in einem Eintrittsexamen in den Fächern Englisch, Suaheli, Bibelkunde und Allgemeinwissen sowie in einem Gespräch mit der Kirchenleitung der Provinz ihre Eignung unter Beweis stellen. Die Ausbildungszeit beträgt vier Jahre. Seit 1980 wurde zusätzlich zu dem Unterricht in den theologischen Hauptfächern ein halbjähriger Kursus in praktischer Gemeindegarbeit bei einem erfahrenen Pfarrer eingerichtet, der sich sehr bewährt hat, so daß dieser Kursus auf die Dauer eines Jahres ausgeweitet werden soll. Was solche praktische Erfahrung für Studenten bedeutet, zeigt der Verfasser an zwei Beispielen, einmal an einem Gespräch mit einem Polygamisten über seine Aufnahme in die Kirche und zum anderen an dem Ärger eines Studenten über einen Kirchenältesten. Großer Wert wird auf die praktische Handarbeit der Studenten gelegt. So sind sie für den Mais- bzw. Kornbedarf des Seminars verantwortlich ebenso wie für einen großen Teil des Gemüsebedarfs, was auf Feldern des Seminars angebaut wird. Ziel ist die Selbstversorgung des Colleges. Man betreibt sogar einen eigenen Musterladen mit nicht überhöhten festen Preisen. Natürlich sollen die Studenten in ihrer Freizeit auch singen und spielen und vieles andere. Damit das Seminar nicht zu einer geistigen Insel wird, betätigt man sich evangelistisch in der näheren Umgebung. Der Verfasser zeigt dies am Beispiel des Dorfes Nsenga, dem man das Evangelium mit Bläserchor, Lichtbildern, Besuchen, Straßenpredigten, Schriftenverteilung u.a. nahezubringen sucht. Insbesondere an den Wochenenden werden die Studenten in der Stadt Mbeya zum Besuch im Krankenhaus, Gefängnis, psychiatrischer Klinik u.a. eingesetzt. Vornehmstes Ziel der Ausbildung ist die Verbindung von College und Gemeindegarbeit, von Theorie und Praxis, und hier sucht man ständig nach besseren, lebendigeren Lernmethoden.