

Chapter Three

BLACK ORGANISATIONS

RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Interdenominational African Ministers' Association (IDAMASA)

Historical Background (1)

Originally known as TIAMA (Transvaal Interdenominational African Ministers' Association), IDAMASA was founded in 1915 at a time when the African National Congress was just beginning to pick up momentum. Under the able leadership of ministers like Mpitso, Chalata, Mahabane and many others, TIAMA spread its work into other provinces, hence the foundation of similar regional organisations in Natal, Free State, and Cape Province. Amongst the early projects of TIAMA were the establishment of the Mendi Memorial Scholarship Fund that helped several students through Fort Hare.

The various regional organisations met in 1945 at Bloemfontein and decided to amalgamate into the Interdenominational African Ministers' Federation (IDAMF) with the purpose of encouraging unity and goodwill amongst African ministers. The various ministers who were members of IDAMF joined the Federation as individual members and not as representatives of their churches and this had the effect of slowing down progress through paucity of funds. IDAMF existed as such from 1945 to 1965 during which time it applied itself to the solution of all problems relating to Africans.

In 1965 IDAMF was transformed into IDAMASA through the adoption of a constitution that changed the organisation from a federation to an association and from then the position of the

organisation improved and it became possible to employ permanent staff.

The permanent staff, i.e. General Secretaries, were periodically seconded by their churches to this post. IDAMASA has to date seen 3 general secretaries: Rev A.L. Ncube of the Methodist Church, Rev B.N.B. Ngidi of the Congregational Church, and now Rev B.B. Radebe of the Anglican Church.

Activities of IDAMASA involved interest in African education, scholarships, research into African customs and traditions, youth work, promotion of activity amongst women, representations to local and national governmental bodies and creation of rapport amongst the various church or religious organisations.

IDAMASA today

IDAMASA has 117 branches and a membership of more than 1 000. It is still an association of individual ministers and operates completely independently of the individual churches.

The President of the organisation is Rev F. de Waal Mahlasela who is at the head of an executive of six.

IDAMASA has a sister organisation, IDAMWASA (Interdenominational African Ministers' Wives Association of South Africa).

Activities

The 1972 Conference of IDAMASA was held in Umtata in September. From the report presented at Conference, it became clear that IDAMASA had taken a new direction in its involvement in social issues in the country. The various regions of the organisation had been commissioned by the Programmes Director to undertake the creation of workshops, each to tackle at least one major social issue in their localities.

From the report given at Conference, it became clear that a variety of issues had been handled by the branches. These included:

- Faction fighting
- scholarships
- educational syllabi
- unity
- building of centres
- nursery schools
- experimental farming

In his opening speech to conference, Rev de Waal Mahlasela, President, emphasised the need for Africans to dedicate themselves to the crystallisation and propagation of Black Theology.

Affiliations

IDAMASA is affiliated to the South African Council of Churches and to the All African Council of Churches.

African Independent Churches

According to estimates made in 1960 the distribution of religious affiliations amongst Africans is as follows:

Independent Churches	18.6%
'Orthodox' Churches	32%
No churches	49.4%

At present it is estimated that no less than 4 million Africans belong to the Independent Churches.

There are several associations and groupings amongst the Independent Churches, the most well known being:

- African Independent Churches Association (AICA)
- Reformed Independent Churches Association (RICA)
- Assembly of the Zionitic and Apostolic Association (AZASA)

(a) AICA

In 1964 a small group of leaders of the African Independent Churches approached the Christian Institute of Southern Africa for advice and guidance in the field of theological training for ministers of these churches. This was occasioned by a restriction by the government in 1960 on the recognition of ministers of Independent Churches who were without training.

It was therefore felt by the leadership of the Independent Churches that a concurrent establishment of a strong association to look after the interests of the Independent Churches would be to their advantage. Consequently at a Conference in Queenstown in 1965 the African Independent Churches Association was established. Rev J.R. Mthembu

was the first president. He and his executive then slowly built up the membership of the organisation. To day after 8 years AICA has 467 member churches. It is estimated that there are some 3 000 independent churches in South Africa.

Projects

- (i) *Correspondence Course:* AICA has a correspondence course designed to give simple theological tutelage to the various ministers in charge of the independent churches. The course deals mainly with Biblical principles and the message from the scriptures.

At present the course has a staff of six, two directors and three programmers and an administrative officer, and caters for 133 correspondent students. The Principal of the College, Rev E.B.M. Maqina, is also the president of the Association.

Funds for the course have to date come mainly from donations from churches in Germany, Holland and Switzerland. The students themselves are charged R20 a year.

Examinations for the Diploma in Theology offered by the course are organised by ASATI (Association of South African Theological Institutions) and the diploma is recognised by all the churches which are members of ASATI.

- (ii) *AICA Theological Seminary:* In addition to the correspondence course AICA also runs a theological seminary in Alice. The College is administered under the Theological Educational Committee which is elected by the AICA conference.

At present there are 31 students studying at the seminary under a permanent lecturing staff of 3.

Events

- (i) *Splits within AICA:* The progress of AICA has been temporarily hampered by a number of splits which have occurred in the organisation's recent history.

In 1969 a small band of churches broke off from AICA to form RICA. They complained about finances in the organisation,

particularly relating to the role played by the Christian Institute who had all along been advisers to AICA. RICA then sought help from the Dutch Reformed Church and now seems to be established with its own theological training centre administered as a project of the Department of Bantu Education.

In 1971 at their Bloemfontein Conference, AICA member churches were sadly divided on the validity of the conference following some alleged mal-administration and absence of major reports to the conference. Here, too, blame was imputed to the Christian Institute, one of whose staff members was a returning officer in the elections that further widened the rift between the 2 different groups.

A number of delegates refused to recognise the validity of the conference and insisted on a special conference being called to clear up issues and to elect a proper executive.

On 14 April, 1972, the special conference met in White City, Jabavu, with representatives of the 216 member churches who had petitioned the conference.

Amongst other things, the conference

- challenged the validity of the election of Rev E.B.M. Maqina as president;
- in fact challenged the authority of the whole conference;
- confirmed an original 'suspension' of Rev Maqina;
- elected its own executive with Bishop Manana as President.

In July at the time of the usual annual conference of AICA, two conferences were in fact held, one at Springs and another in Cape Town.

The conference in Springs was held by the breakaway group on 27-30 July, 1972 and this conference resolved (2):

- to immediately open dialogue with 'splinter groups' of the Independent Churches;

- to take whatever action was deemed necessary to guarantee the smooth running of AICA and the first and immediate step

would be to deal firmly with any organisation which took it upon itself to oppose this line of action;

to advise the Christian Institute and all other bodies that were previously advisers of AICA that this position would be taken by an adviser who would be an African;

to appoint a new all-African board of trustees that would take care of all movable and immovable property of AICA;

to see that the college (see below) was opened and that the students who had courses to complete be given a fair chance to do so.

The other AICA conference was held in Cape Town and the following major resolutions were taken (3):

that reconciliation with the dissatisfied groups who had broken away from AICA be sought as priority by the President;

that the AICA advisers (Christian Institute) be requested to continue in this capacity for the reason that AICA did not know as yet its financial resources;

that letters be written to AICA donors to send donations to AICA directly and that the advisers furnish AICA with all addresses of AICA donors;

that the theological seminary be opened forthwith with the condition that the principal should no longer continue with his duties.

This conference, though being the more direct continuation of AICA, was attended by fewer delegates, partly because the venue was so far away.

(ii) *Attempts at Reconciliation:* In September 1972 the 2 opposing AICA Presidents, Rev Maqina and Bishop Bengeza (who was elected President following Bishop Manana's death) and their boards met in Johannesburg in an attempt to arrive at conciliation. The meeting was organised apparently by the break-away group. Not much ground was covered at this meeting as both sides were still insisting on recognition of their stands.

At the time of going to press the two AICA Boards were moving nearer each other with reconciliation being handled by some black groups with whom AICA had for some time been involved. By then it had become quite clear that both groups saw as their common problem 'manipulation and control' by their advisers.

(iii) *Disturbances at the AICA Theological College:* Following accusations by the students against the Principal of the College, Mr Allan Socikwa, and unrest amongst students who refused to accept his authority, the theological college was closed down and the students were told to leave. It turned out that the college was closed as a result of a decision by the Board, following consultations with their advisers. About half of the students refused to leave the campus although facilities, including meals, were withdrawn.

The students denied that any communication other than from the lecturer, Mr T.S. Monyana, had been given to them to confirm closure of the college. In an interview with the press on the 7 September, Mr J.J.R. Makhase, one of the students, said that Rev Brian Brown of the Christian Institute had telephoned Rev T.S. Monyana and told him that the college had been closed a week before and the students had been given 2 days within which to leave (4).

Mr Makhase disclosed that the trouble at the college started in May when the students raised complaints against their principal, Rev A.L. Socikwa, but that the Theological Education Committee did not go into a thorough investigation of their complaints.

Because of the disagreement with the students, the committee closed the college on 24 May and decided that it would be re-opened on 4th July.

On 5 July the committee told the students to choose between the college continuing as it had been before any investigations started, or having the college activities suspended until investigations were completed.

The students said lectures should continue under the following conditions:

that the principal leave the campus;

that the committee to investigate the complaints be composed of people other than those belonging to the Theological Education Committee (TEC);

that alternatively if the TEC were to investigate, then students should be represented on the committee;

that all employees (cooks and maids) who had been dismissed be allowed to return and be paid for the time they had not been at the college;

that all findings of the investigations be tabled before the start of the annual AICA conference in Cape Town on 26 July.

The committee then decided to close the college for an indefinite period in complete disregard of the students' views, and when conference met, no information was received about the closure of the college from the TEC, but the matter was raised by individual delegates at the conference.

The conference then decided to reopen the college on 23 August and to suspend the principal, Rev A.L. Socikwa.

Rev T.S. Monyana confirmed that the statement made by Mr Makhase was correct, but pointed out that when Mr Brown phoned him, he had informed him of a decision.

In a statement to the press, Rev E. Maqina, President of AICA, deplored the action of those who had closed the college, referring to them as a group who were doing all in their power to disrupt the smooth running of the AICA College. He denied knowledge of any meeting of the TEC, which could have decided to close the college, suggesting that the decision must have been taken by the AICA Board which had no power to close the college.

By November the college was still open and lectures were going on smoothly, but the principal, Rev Socikwa, was still absent.

The Lay Ecumenical Centre

Background

The Edendale Lay Ecumenical Centre is situated six miles south of Pietermaritzburg in the Makholwa Tribal Area which includes a full range of Africans from rural to sophisticated town dwellers. It serves the 3rd largest African community in the province of Natal. Being the only Ecumenical Centre in South Africa administered by Africans, its services extend to the whole South African community.

The Centre is a symbol of African initiative. The site was purchased and the centre is partly supported by Nzondelelo, an African organisation within the Methodist Church in Natal. The trustees, who are dynamic

and educated African representatives of various churches' (5), hold freehold rights to the property under the Chief of the Edendale Makholwa Tribe, the Edendale District being one of the few remaining areas close to an urban complex in which African people enjoy freehold property rights.

The advantage of this situation is that all racial groups can meet on the premises.

Objectives

Set within the social network of a divided and apathetic society, it aims to create the type of informed Christian leadership that is prepared to take community responsibility and leadership seriously.

The project aims at bringing together people from different professional and racial groups to develop their awareness of responsibility for community leadership, and to explore ways in which this leadership can be exercised with mutual concern.

The present situation of a professional elite who have become alienated from their fellows causes anxiety in African communities where belonging to each other is an important component of African personality. This project aims at attempting to bridge the gap, and to integrate this leadership into the African community and confront professional people of other racial groups with the contribution they could make to the welfare of the whole community.

In addition to providing Christian education for laymen, it aims to serve the emerging African industrial workers and urban dwellers. The centre believes that the African is a community man who has to regain his awareness of himself as a human and social being in a time of rapid transition in a closed society.

Available Facilities

The Centre owns land to the extent of 10,7003 acres. On this has been built a centre with the following facilities:

- 2 sleeping units capable of housing 48 people
- a hall used as meeting and dining hall with a capacity of 200
- an administration block with 5 offices.

The centre has a staff of 5 people under the directorship of Rev Enos Sikakane.

Programmes

The Centre has a dual system of programmes:

- (a) its own programmes
- (b) programmes run at the Centre by other organisations.

The Centre's programmes consist of the following:

Youth Programmes, mainly revolving around action training, skills training, leadership courses

Women's programmes, also revolving around the area of skills and consultation.

The centre is used by a variety of organisations, e.g. teachers' organisations, religious groups, women's groups, cultural organisations, youth groups, students' organisations.

All leadership training courses run by SASO for its own membership have been held at the Centre. The Black Community Programmes used the Centre for 5 of its major conferences during 1972. Also notable is the fact that Black People's Convention used the Centre as its conference site during its formative stages.

Affiliations

The Centre is affiliated to the South African Council of Churches.

REFERENCES

1. Report by Rev B.B. Radebe to 1970 IDAMASA Conference.
2. AICA Springs Conference report and minutes.
3. AICA Cape Town Conference report and minutes.
4. *Daily Dispatch* 6.9.72, 7.9.72, 9.9.72.
Rand Daily Mail 6.9.72.
5. Undated pamphlet from Lay Ecumenical Centre.