

Rev Jotham Charles Mthetho Mvusi

Reverend J. C. Mvusi was born in 1903, in the land of his forefathers at the Deipkloof farm, eMzimkhulu. Together with his wife Vunina, from the influential Nxasana family, they were blessed with seven children. They both studied and matriculated at the Marianhill College, in Natal. His wife, Vunina, also coming from a family that loved education and devoted Christians, proceeded to Marianhill Teachers' Training College, the same institution from which Mvusi qualified as a teacher in 1923.

Mrs Mvusi, after graduating as a teacher, taught briefly before she married Reverend JC Mvusi. Mvusi registered himself to study theology at the University of Fort Hare in 1934. He was ordained in 1936, at the completion of his theological training. Rev. Mvusi was an epitome of excellence in every respect. He was never an admirer of mediocrity.

“Waye yindoda eyenza into ngocoselelo. Ayenze ayigqibe into ayiqalileyo. Waye ngazigqwagqwi izinto. Waye nge ngophath'ayeke”.

He was the President of the Young Men's Guild for many years. He was in the Durban African Circuit for 12 years. And at Arthur Wellington Methodist Church in New Brighton, from 1955 to 1969.

As A Trailblazer

“ uGudl'unxweme”, as he was affectionately called, was the second African clergymen to be appointed President of the Methodist Church in SA in 1972. Reverend Seth Mokitimi (Black Bomber) was the first black person to be appointed to that position in 1964. (So Methodists were trailblazers)

His Ethos, Mission And Objective

This Christian faith leader believed in being the servant and a tool for socio-economic advancement of his people. He was not one of those who believed that the Church should concern itself exclusively with

things of the spirit. He cared for the material, physical and spiritual needs of his people, across all divides, Christians and non-Christians, black and white, for as long as they were human beings, they mattered to him. Through this lecture I will provide evidence to support my argument.

Affirmed The Dignity Of Africans

More than anything else, Mvusi passionately wanted to affirm the dignity of his people. Mvusi had confidence in his God, his people, and in himself.

His work and mission was to serve the human race with all his abilities and energies. J C Mvusi, a brilliant orator, believed that the privilege of the platform that he had access to, was to be used to lift his people, who were dealing with the most unfortunate human behaviour, that is, racism and other social and economic anomalies that were ravaging his nation. JC Mvusi, who was a minister from 1936 to the time of his death in 1991, in his words and deeds, did not believe that Christians must put up with and tolerate the perverted and unjust social relations that existed in his time.

JC Mvusi's track record shows a person who wanted to bring Christian change in areas of opportunity, fellowship, sharing, caring, etc. It makes absolute sense for the BMC to invite someone to come forward and remind us about the best, great and greatest servants of this nation.

Speaking in Johannesburg on the 21 May 1964, at the National Conference of the Christian Council of South Africa, on his topic, The New Dimension of Mission in South Africa Today, Mvusi called for a new approach on the part of the Christian Churches. *Unless they are prepared to plan and consult with a view to action together in a new programme in which all hands must play some part regardless of colour, creed or caste, they are doomed to fail. In order to win this*

country for Christ, the first big impact by the Christian forces must revolutionise afresh all our large concentrations in cities.

These concluding remarks by Mvusi were following a long lamentation by him of the social degradation caused by the poorly planned rapid industrialisation, in the aftermath of the destructive Second World War, WW2. He was calling upon the church to stand up and oppose the settlement of Africans on the fringes of all the large cities. Even in those days, Africans were being moved to the outskirts of the cities. On that occasions he raised all the anti-social ills such single- living quarters, the breaking down of the family unit, boys growing up without fathers, malnourishment, drunkenness , lack of sporting facilities, unwanted children born out of wedlock adding to juvenile delinquency. Can you believe that Mvusi lamented *“men who could afford a comfortable home, spent their money in buying motor cars”*

Racism In The Church

When JC Mvusi graced this land, our country was a polarised environment. He may not have used radical theological theories that entered our vocabulary in later years. However, I can say without fear of contradiction that he was way ahead of his time in terms of diagnosing the problems our people faced then and are facing now. The man was spot on. He, together with other luminaries of our great nation, worked hard under difficult conditions, trying to bring unity in the church. In their time, the church was racially divided.

Education

J C Mvusi was not a sign post, that points the direction to Grahamstown, and does not move an inch. He practiced what he

preached. He made sure that he equipped himself well if he wanted to have an impact, and to change the course of events. His propensity to travel, here at home and abroad shows that he knew that knowledge is power. *“Ukuhamba ngumbono”*. He travelled the globe and attended conferences and many other youth gatherings to far flung places like Asia, Europe and many African states. He was a believer of the saying, “to be conscious that you are ignorant of facts, is a great step to knowledge.” In some of those trips, he was with such African luminaries like Chief Albert Luthuli, Rev. S.S Tema and others.

He followed his own advice to the nation, by educating all his children. He encouraged parents to educate their children. He played a significant role in the troubles that flared after the proclamation of Bantu Education in the late 1950s. Together, with other church leaders of his time, Rev JJR Jolobe, GB Molefe, and others worked very hard to sensitise the community during those trying times.

In a motivational speech to Limekhaya High School pupils, in Uitenhage, on the 2nd of December 1969, he said *“A person can’t learn unless he knows what he wants to learn”*.

This educationist and distinguished African went on to say *“Learning is a process of organising knowledge for oneself through disciplined study”*. On that occasion, the clergyman counselled the students by saying the following *“for the best results, a pupil should relate learning with his or her experience”*.

In today’s language, he was saying *Bold and the Beautiful* is no appropriate model for an African child in Uganda, Nigeria, SA or Lesotho. For you to advance you must be 100% familiar with your own immediate surrounding and conditions, first, before you venture to unfamiliar areas.

The man loved education. He did a lot in the field of education and the development of the youth. Retired Methodist priest, Reverend Joseph

Mahlasela, remembers JC Mvusi as a man who was “highly *evangelical, particularly with the youth*”. He has associated himself and worked with numerous youth formations, said the younger Mahlasela to me. They include the YCMA, Student Christian Association, and others.

Contextualisation of God

The responsibility of theology is to answer the question concerning what God means in the light of human existence, with all its distortions. After all God’s relevance is meaningful in the light of what He does with His people. Black theology sought to dismiss the myth of divorcing Christianity from politics. The two cross-pollinate each other.

Then the question will be asked then where does politics fit into this jigsaw puzzle? Remember that politics, in broad terms, is an attempt by people to structure, construct and institutionalise their interpersonal and personal relationships. That is done for humanity to live in a just society and be able to realise their fullest potential. The Church then is called upon to monitor how this impact on the Children of God.

Black Theologians stepped into the fray precisely because they wanted to better the plight of our people who were facing racial discrimination, branded in various names such as separate development, parallel development or plural development. A system that promote separateness. Black Theology or Liberation Theology was born out of those realities.

Black Methodists Consultation

The Black Methodist Consultation, I want to thank and applaud the BMC for its role in, not only in the Methodist fraternity, more so for its mission and contribution to our nation’s cause. Those militant clergies who raised their voices at that time were brave men and women were scare, we applaud you. BMC was relevant then, is more required and

relevant again today. The call to be part of decisions that affect you and your communities was an act of bravery and courage.

The pioneers of this organisation wanted to make sure that Afrocentrism was not left behind. With such gallant and all-round fighters like Rev Mgojo, and Baartman, you were certainly destined to do good in the fight for social justice and the welfare of all. Encouraging and promoting unity amongst the Blacks, cross cutting ethnic groups, racial lines as well as amongst Blacks and Whites, was a master stroke. I thank you for creating this platform for knowledge empowerment.