

Alphaeus Hamilton Zulu (1905–1988)

It is neither wise nor Christian-like to preach the doctrine that all men are equal before the God of the white man, and then when the Native has accepted his faith . . . to treat him as a moral and social pariah (*Inkanyiso Yase Natal*, 21 June 1895. Quoted in *Natalia*, Nov. 1986).

We may marvel at the restraint of the men who pleaded in the pages of *Inkanyiso*, and those like them who followed in their footsteps, that whites should act in ways which were consistent with their faith and stated principles. One may marvel also at the lack of integrity in those who would not hear. Alphaeus Zulu more than most, lived his life where these two mindsets crossed, and struggled to handle the conflict they represented.

I first came to know him when I was a newly ordained priest in Durban in 1947. He was then a priest on the staff of St Faith's Mission in the city. He invited me as a young nobody to preach to the people in his care. I was touched by his warmth and trust in me. The fruit of Alphaeus's initiative was the setting up of a fully non-racial Youth Council for Durban.

My next lively impression of him was watching him in action in Natal diocesan synods. He spoke fairly often to raise matters which turned on the need to alter Church structures to enable the Church to become more consistent with its own faith. They seemed to me then to be contentious and sensitive issues. I wondered how my elders and betters would respond, because he focused on the root of things with what might be described as a restrained vigour. I thought of him as a daring man confronting those with whom, at that time, black people were still expected simply to agree. He was evidently, and rightly, confident in the dignity which being a Christian bestows upon us all.

Although I was not then aware of it, his assurance and dignity were teaching me, a liberal in principle, to accept with my heart as well as my mind the reality of our fellowship in Christ. I, and I believe others also, responded to him because he was not peddling an ideological position but speaking with a mind informed by the Spirit of God. What he had to say was evidently consistent with the Christian faith. He had the capacity also to aim his words in more than one direction, because he frequently also exhorted his own people to stand up and grow in self-reliance and eschew the easy way of dependence. He could do this with authenticity because he himself had struggled out of poverty by seizing upon every opportunity within his grasp.

There was, of course, more to it than perseverance. I believe that one of the most important experiences in his life may well have been sharing with Philip Mbatha in the founding of the spiritual revival movement known in the diocese of Zululand as Iviyo. It was a fellowship of Christians moved by the Holy Spirit. Members of Iviyo expected not only to know about God but to have a living relationship with Him. It was not surprising that its members developed a strong evangelistic outreach which was unusual among Anglicans. All-night Iviyo meetings for prayer were frowned upon and firmly discouraged by white bishops and missionaries and also some of the senior black clergy, but produced priests and religious sisters with an unusual depth of spiritual perception and dedication to the Lord they knew.

A remarkable feature of the tributes to Alphaeus Zulu at his funeral was their unanimity about his remarkable gifts of wisdom. This was not simply an

innate wisdom. The scribes said of Jesus, 'How is it that this man has learning, when He has never studied?' So Jesus answered them, 'My teaching is not mine, but His who sent me; If any man's will is to do His will he shall know whether the teaching is from God . . .' (Jn 7: 15-17). Of course Alphaeus Zulu had learning, but wisdom comes from another source. It is a gift of God to those whose will is to do His will.

It is my hope to convey as much as I can of what I have seen and heard myself of Alphaeus Zulu. We were both at different times consecrated bishops by Archbishop Joost de Blank. We lived at a time when in South African Anglicanism 'bishop' was spelled in two ways. One was Oxford and the other Cambridge! We were the first of a new breed. I was a Colonial and Alphaeus was a Native. The life of the Church is lived in a world which only too easily seduces it with its false values, and so I, an inexperienced priest of forty, became a diocesan bishop in 1957, and three years later the Native priest at 55 with far greater experience and natural gifts was consecrated only as a



Bishop Alphaeus Zulu.
(*Photograph: Africa Enterprise*)

suffragan Bishop. The important thing was, however, that Alphaeus now had a seat on the episcopal synod. In 1968 he was elected Bishop of Zululand.

With a warm and sensitive spirit and a joyful sense of humour, Alphaeus very soon made a contribution to decision-making. It was here that his wisdom became evident to me. He discerned the real issue involved in a contentious matter and with rare insight penetrated to the nub of it. But what is more, in a homely fashion he would set before us the best way to proceed, leaving little more to be said and an impression that a wise decision had been made. I do not think I have known a man with greater gifts of wisdom.

He was first and foremost loyal to his Lord and because of that he was also faithful in seeking to keep the Church obedient as a sign of the Kingdom of God. He was not therefore in bondage to ecclesiastical systems. He was free to serve the King wherever he was. This was why he could feel at home in another environment, serving with distinction as Speaker of the KwaZulu Legislative Assembly, Director of the KwaZulu Development Corporation, and chairman of a variety of other corporations.

The Church required his resignation as a bishop when he reached 70, but for another 13 years this man of God invested his time and energy in serving his nation. This second vocation one must suppose to have been what was intended for him and the Zulu people, and who am I to complain? There nevertheless remains a sadness in me that when an Archbishop had to be elected in 1974 the rules of the Church effectively ruled out his election. We now know he had another dozen years to go, and what an incomparable metropolitan he would have made!

Every church has to strive for unity in Christ. It was evident to Alphaeus that Anglicans needed to find it. It is not altogether surprising then that he had a strong ecumenical bent. The Kingdom of God he served has no boundaries, and those erected by denominations are not His. Perhaps it was for this reason that he was sent to represent South African Anglicans at the New Delhi World Council Assembly in 1961. We shared again the WCC experience at Uppsala in 1968. Here I saw him take his rightful place in the ecumenical movement as he stepped into an international role as one of the presidents of the World Council. As he did so he entered upon one of the most difficult experiences of his life, enduring very painful pressures.

Alphaeus enjoyed a close relationship with Chief Albert Luthuli which strengthened his conviction that the problems of our country could not be resolved except by peaceful methods. In the meantime the WCC executive following Uppsala resolved to proceed with a 'programme to combat racism' which included the provision of financial aid to liberation movements and thus implicitly gave its support to organizations espousing violence. This was not acceptable to him and he had no alternative but to absent himself from the WCC Assembly in Nairobi in 1975.

Alphaeus has been criticised for his decision. The fact is it was consistent with his stated principles, but what is more it was also consistent with the CPSA Provincial Synod resolution of 1970 which criticized the WCC decision 'in that it fails to distinguish unambiguously between the mission of Christ, who rejected the use of military force in establishing the Kingdom of God on earth, and who is betrayed by His Church when it acts differently'. The resolution goes on to say that a Christian is nevertheless free to act as his conscience dictates, either in upholding the law and order or, in carefully

defined circumstances, in opposing injustice (Acts and Resolutions of the Twentieth Session of the Provincial Synod 1970).

Alphaeus Zulu fought a lonely battle within the WCC hierarchy against the use of the Church as a political tool, for he saw clearly the implications of funds being raised for liberation movements, because there were already means through Inter-Church Aid and World Service to meet humanitarian needs. Though he desired with all his heart and strength to see his people restored to freedom in their own land, his ultimate loyalty was to his Lord and, therefore, his presidential chair remained vacant at the 1975 Nairobi Assembly, where he had been expected to play a significant role.

It is significant that he turned from the WCC and broke his relationship with the ANC in the same year. Now he turned his energies to the struggle for the peaceful transformation of our crippled society. He remained a godly political pragmatist, as I believe all Christians must be, for there are no definitive solutions to political problems. The attempt to give divine sanction to political ideals he knew to be the way to *jihad* but not to the Kingdom of God.

So he accepted the national Chairmanship of Inkatha and became a member and Speaker of the KwaZulu Legislative Assembly, and a constant supporter of his kinsman the Chief Minister of KwaZulu.

What treasures await South Africa when her peoples are free to offer themselves up to her in the liberty of the sons of God! This man, Alphaeus Zulu whom my soul loved, is a sign to us to the steadfast Rock on which our nation can be built.

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