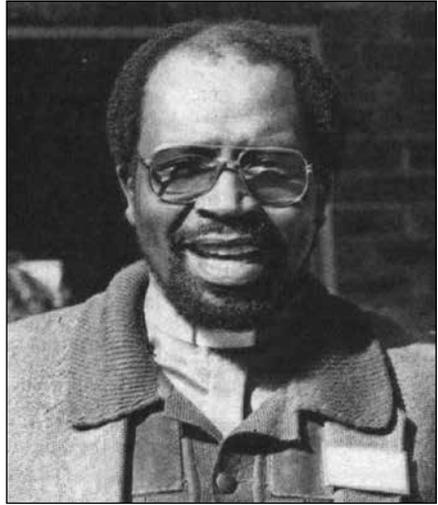


Manas Buthelezi (1935–2016)

MANAS Buthelezi, who died in Mahlabathini in KwaZulu-Natal on 20 April 2016 at the age of 81, was a bishop of the Lutheran Church, president of the South African Council of Churches (SACC), leading anti-apartheid cleric and powerful exponent of black liberation theology. He supported the call of radical black theologians for white missionaries to “go home and leave the black man; he is mature enough to manage his own affairs”.

In 1973, in what was then the province of Natal, while regional director of the Christian Institute led by his friend Beyers Naudé, he was slapped with a five-year banning order. While serving it he successfully sued the editor of the state-supported publication *To the Point*, who was an ordained minister of the Baptist Church, and who wrote that Buthelezi backed violence and bloodshed in South Africa. His banning provoked such an outcry and gave South African ambassadors such a torrid time in places where the Lutheran church was strong, including Scandinavia, Germany and America, that it was soon lifted.

Manas Buthelezi completed his Master's degree in theology at Yale University and his doctorate at Drew University in the US in the 1960s, where he was exposed to and adopted black theology. He was one of the first clergymen to introduce black theology to South Africa. In 1972, after a stint as a visiting professor at the University of Heidelberg in Germany, where he delivered a series of lectures on black theology, he participated in a symposium organised by the SACC. A series of papers was delivered at the event which were later published in a book entitled



Black Theology in South Africa. Buthelezi was one of the main contributors.

He had a significant impact on the Black Consciousness Movement founded by Steve Biko. While Biko, his contemporary, adopted a politico-philosophical approach to black consciousness, Buthelezi translated this into the language of black liberation theology. At the request of Naudé he published various articles on the subject of black theology in the Christian Institute's publication, *Pro Veritate*.

Buthelezi was instrumental in unifying the separate Lutheran mission agencies in South Africa to strengthen the church's resistance to apartheid. He was general secretary of the united church from 1975 to 1977 when, at the age of 42, he was consecrated bishop of the diocese of Johannesburg.

After the 1976 Soweto student uprising he helped to start and became chairman of the Black Parents Association, which was set up to establish the whereabouts of students who had disappeared during the upheavals. He was constantly harassed

by the security police in this period. He was bishop for more than 20 years, using his church as a place of refuge for black anti-apartheid organisations. He served on the executive of the SACC and was president from 1984 to 1991.

Buthelezi, who was a first cousin of Inkatha Freedom Party leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi, was born at Mahlabathini KwaCeza in 1935. He matriculated at St Francis, Mariannhill, a Roman Catholic institution, where he also completed his teacher training. He taught for a few years before deciding to go into the ministry.

In 1958 he did his theological training at Umphumulo Theological Seminary and obtained a BA degree in theology through the University of South Africa. On his return from the US in the late 1960s he taught biblical hermeneutics and other subjects at Umphumulo Theological Seminary. He retired to Mahlabathini in 2000. He is survived by his wife, Grace, and four children.

CHRIS BARRON

(Acknowledgements to
the *Sunday Times*)