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The *Journal of African Christian Biography* was launched in 2016 to complement and make stories from the on-line *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* (www.DACB.org) more readily accessible and immediately useful in African congregations and classrooms.

Now published quarterly, with all issues available on line, the intent of the *JACB* is to promote the research, publication, and use of African Christian biography within Africa by serving as an academically credible but publicly accessible source of information on Christianity across the continent. Content will always include biographies already available in the database itself, but original contributions related to African Christian biography or to African church history are also welcome. While the policy of the *DACB* itself has been to restrict biographical content to subjects who are deceased, the *JACB* plans to include interviews with select living African church leaders and academics.

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From Mozambique to Cape Town and Murdered in Zimbabwe: The Martyrdom of Bernard Mizeki, the Seed of the Church in Mashonaland (1861-1896)

By James Amanze

Introduction

One of the most touching and inspiring stories of the Church of the Province of Central Africa of which the Anglican Church in Zimbabwe is a part, is the martyrdom of Bernard Mizeki, a man of God who gave his life for the sake of his Lord and Savior, Jesus of Nazareth. Today, scholars generally agree that the Church in Africa was planted and grew as a result not only of the work of missionaries from Europe and America but also thanks to the extensive efforts and suffering of local catechists—men and women of faith who, after embracing Christianity, went out with great zeal to spread the gospel to every corner of the African continent. This is the case even today. Missionaries planted the Word of God while local evangelists and clergy watered it so that it grew into a large prosperous harvest of believers. In this way, Africans became missionaries to themselves.

The Anglican Church in Zimbabwe

The Anglican Church in Zimbabwe today claims thousands of adherents. In his 1981 book titled *History of the Church in Africa*, Jonathan Hildebrandt estimated that there were 500 Anglican congregations, 95,100 members and 237,848 affiliated members in Zimbabwe.¹ Though the accuracy of these figures is difficult to establish, they do, nevertheless, show that the church has been experiencing tremendous growth from the time of its inception to the present day. David Barrett, in the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (1982), noted that there were 153,000 Anglican adherents in 1970. He predicted that this number would go up to 135,120 in mid-1980s and that it would reach 289,020 by the year 2000. In fact, his estimate fell short of the actual 325,000 Anglicans in Zimbabwe in 2000.² A recent article from the site *Religion in Zimbabwe*

that both these institutions, the Church and the village are staunch in their practices to the extent that no one wants to compromise their beliefs. Inculturation is found to be one of the methods to be implemented in order to promote wholesome living in Gamarishane between the Christian converts (*bakriste*) and the Pedi traditionalists (*baditshaba*), in order to eliminate further “Blood baptisms.”

¹ Brandt 1981, p. 278.

² *World Christian Encyclopedia* (2000).

which is marked by inter and intra party violence. The aim is to examine Luthuli's legacy for lessons that can be used in a democratic South Africa.

Kuzwayo, Millicent. **A church and culture exploration of the Ga-Marishane village rite of initiation in contestation with the Anglican initiation rite of baptism of adults: a Manche Masemola case study.** University of KwaZulu-Natal, Master of Theology. 2013.

Publication: <http://hdl.handle.net/10413/11215>

Abstract: This study has engaged in a critical exploration of the relationship between the Church and Culture in Ga-Marishane village in Limpopo. A Case Study of the Anglican martyr Manche Masemola of Sekhukhune has been used to reveal the extent of tension between Church and culture in the same village during the colonial-missionary era.

The topic of this study reflects on the contestation of the Anglican rite of passage of initiation through the baptism sacrament of adults, and the traditional Pedi rite of initiation with special reference to the initiation of girls in Ga-Marishane. These initiation rites live in missional-tension in what they ought to do and to be in the village and therefore an interface has to be arrived at. Christianity as a western culture comes into contact with African culture through the process of evangelizing the African continent, through missionary engagement. The missionaries come into contact with African indigenous people, who have their own system of beliefs and cultural practices, and they want to impose their Christian tradition upon the residents who in turn oppose the teachings of the Church, and harmony is lost. This brings a lot of controversy amongst the Christian converts and the Pedi traditionalists. In the process of this turmoil, a family is deprived of their daughter through death, and the Church loses a catechumen. Manche Masemola's parents were not happy that she wanted to join the Christian faith, more especially because they said that her behavior was very absurd, especially when she prayed, and they claimed that she acted like someone who had been bewitched.

According to Pedi custom, a girl was supposed to eventually get married after she had been proclaimed marriageable. Manche's parents were not happy when she joined the Church, as there were nuns in the village, who had made vows of remaining celibate and only be married to Jesus Christ. The presence of nuns suggested to them that Manche might want to be one of them, and then they would be deprived of *magadi*, as well as grandchildren, which would have been perceived by the community as their failure as parents to bring their daughter up. Manche's determination to be a Christian impacted a lot on her parents, and they never considered their daughter's desire to be a Christian, i.e. what it meant for her and what her ultimate goal was. This study reveals

indicated that, as of 2000, there were 674 Anglican congregations, 128,000 adherents, and 320,000 affiliated members.³ Although in all instances the figures do not portray the true picture of the situation on the ground, they do nevertheless convey the feeling that, like many other churches in Africa, the Anglican Church in Zimbabwe has been making great strides in its evangelistic mission of turning people to Christ.

The roots of Anglicanism in Zimbabwe are in part grounded in the blood of Bernard Mizeki, who was martyred in Marondelas in 1896. This was history repeating itself. It is a well-known fact that the annals of the history of the Church contain countless testimonies demonstrating that Christianity as a world religion has continued to exist in time and space through the courage and sacrifice of people who offered their lives to Christ. Beginning with the account of the martyrdom of Stephen, as recorded in Acts 7: 1-60, Christianity laid down strong foundations for its future growth and development on the legacy of the martyrs. In the apostolic age, the blood of the great martyrs such as the apostles Peter, Paul, Thomas, Bartholomew, James, Matthias—to name but a few—was indeed the seed of the Church. In the Early Church period, men and women of faith such as Justin Martyr, Polycarp, Perpetua and Felicitas, and others, ensured that God's Church was built on a rock against which even death could not prevail (Mt 16: 18). After witnessing the suffering of the martyrs, many people turned away from sin and committed their lives to Christ. Throughout church history this has been the case in many lands, especially since the 16th century Protestant Reformation. Africa has had a good share of martyrs. For example, the martyrs of Namugongo, executed on June 3, 1886, in Uganda, are a stark reminder of how the powers of evil can contrive to stifle the work of God and yet never prevail. Archbishop Janani Luwum's ultimate sacrifice for the love of Christ and his people in Uganda is another example of how good stood against evil to the very end.

From Mozambique to Cape Town, Martyred in Mashonaland

As a martyr, Bernard Mizeki paid the ultimate sacrifice because of his love for Jesus. Stories about this exceptional apostle to the Shona trace his ancestry to Mozambique from whence he migrated to seek work in Cape Town. He arrived in South Africa at the time when the Anglican Church was expanding to other countries in southern Africa. The evangelization of Mashonaland became one of the goals of the Anglican

³ "Anglican Church," *Religion in Zimbabwe* website.

Church at this time. Equipped with insights from the gospel that Mizeki acquired around the time of his baptism in Cape Town, he was in a position to join a missionary campaign to Mashonaland to plant the Anglican Church among the Shona.

Once in Mashonaland, Bishop G. W. H. Knight-Bruce put Mizeki in charge of a mission station near Chief Mangwende's village among the VaNhowe people in east-central Zimbabwe. According to oral sources, it was not an easy task from either a political or a social standpoint. Thus, right from the start, Mizeki's ministry seemed doomed to failure. But he was ready to sacrifice his life for Christ, his Lord and Savior. After a short period of work in the area, Mizeki contributed significantly to the spread of the gospel. In addition to disseminating the good news by word of mouth, he assisted Bishop Knight-Bruce in translating parts of the Bible, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Creed into Shona.⁴

Unfortunately for Mizeki, the beginning of the First Chimurenga ("revolutionary struggle," 1896-1897), which is celebrated among Zimbabweans as the prelude to the movement for political emancipation from colonial rule, signaled the end of his ministry among the Shona. But the events that put an end to Mizeki's ministry appear to be a series of mysterious internal conflicts in Mangwende's family. Accounts of Mizeki's martyrdom are intricate and vary in theme and detail. Therefore, it would not be helpful to repeat them here. However, the common thread in all the stories is that Mizeki was murdered and his blood watered Zimbabwean soil. Out of this soil sprang one of the strongest forms of Anglicanism in southern Africa that has withstood the test of time.

The Blood of Bernard Mizeki: Seed for the Anglican Church in Mashonaland

Mizeki was no ordinary Christian. His evangelistic zeal drove him to respond to the call of God in a foreign land. He travelled all the way from Cape Town to Mangwende's country only to be murdered by the chief's family members. Mizeki's blood was, borrowing a leaf from Tertullian, "the seed of the church" in Mashonaland. This apparent victory of evil over good is a stark reminder of how, in the days of the early church, the Roman Emperors tried to wipe out Christianity by killing Christians in the Colosseum. This magnificent structure in central Rome is a frightening reminder of the power of evil that seems to know no boundaries. However, history tells us that the more

⁴ Zvobgo, p. 45.

On the other hand the training of the indigenous people for the ordained ministry was also another significant step in the process of indigenization in the Diocese of Mashonaland. In this regard, theological institutions such as St. Augustine's Seminary in Penhalonga Manicaland, St Peter's Seminary Rossettenville in Johannesburg and St. John's Seminary in Lusaka provided the much needed training.

This study also revealed that although the Diocese of Mashonaland had an indigenous person at its helm in 1981, it remained European in several facets of its life. Although translations as a form of indigenization started from the beginning of the Diocese of Mashonaland and continued right up to 1981, it seems it actually crippled the local indigenous peoples' innovativeness and ingenuity. In addition, indigenous musical instruments also took sometime before they could be accepted in divine worship. On the other hand, local art and décor as well as local architectural expressions took time to be incorporated into the Diocese of Mashonaland. However, few early European missionaries such as Arthur Shirley Cripps and Edgar Lloyd tried to implement local architecture and décor in their churches in Daromombe and Rusape respectively. This study has also established that although the Anglican Diocese of Mashonaland got indigenous leadership by 1981, its liturgy, theology as well as its Acts and Canons remained European.

Kumali, Simangaliso. **Faith and politics in the context of struggle : the legacy of Inkosi Albert John Luthuli's Christian-centred political leadership.** Article. University of South Africa. 2009.

Publication: <http://hdl.handle.net/10500/4563>

Abstract: Albert John Mvumbi Luthuli, a Zulu Inkosi and former President-General of the African National Congress (ANC) and a lay-preacher in the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) is a significant figure as he represents the last generation of ANC presidents who were opposed to violence in their execution of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. He attributed his opposition to violence to his Christian faith and theology. As a result he is remembered as a peace-maker, a reputation that earned him the honor of being the first African to win the Nobel Peace Prize. Also central to Luthuli's leadership of the ANC and his people at Grootville were democratic values of leadership where the voices of people mattered including those of the youth and women and his teaching on non-violence, much of which is shaped by his Christian faith and theology. This article seeks to examine Luthuli's legacy as a leader who used peaceful means not only to resist apartheid but also to execute his duties both in the party and the community. The study is a contribution to the struggle of maintaining peace in the political sphere in South Africa

Recent Print and Digital Resources Related to Christianity in Africa

Couper, Scott. **Albert Luthuli: Bound by Faith**. Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2012. \$39.00. [Amazon.com](#) ISBN-13: 978-1869141929 / ISBN-10: 186914192X

“Much public historical mythology asserts that Chief Albert Luthuli, former president of the African National Congress (ANC), launched an armed struggle upon his return to South Africa after having received the Nobel Peace Prize. This misinterpretation sparks what is arguably one of the most relevant and controversial historical debates in South Africa. Due to Luthuli’s domestic and international prominence and his impeccable moral character, politicians and political parties justify, in part, their past actions and their contemporary relevance through a contrived historical memory. Often, that memory is not compatible with the archival record. Contrary to a nationalist inspired historical perspective, this book argues that Luthuli did not support the initiation of violence in December 1961. Luthuli’s ecclesiastical tradition, Congregationalism, embedded within him the primacy of democracy, education, sacrificial service, multiracialism, and egalitarianism, propelling him to the heights of political leadership. However, these same seminal emphases rendered Luthuli obsolete as a political leader within an increasingly radicalized, desperate, and violent environment. While the Christian faith fueled his political success, it engendered his irrelevance following the ANC’s resort to violence. By not supporting the ANC’s armed movement, Luthuli’s political career proved to be ‘bound by faith.’” ([Amazon](#))

Open Access: Theses and Articles

Musodza, Archford. **An investigation of the process of indigenisation in the Anglican Diocese of Mashonaland, (1891 - 1981), with special emphasis on the ministry of indigenous Christians**. Ph.D. Theology, University of South Africa, 2008. Publication: <http://hdl.handle.net/10500/1323>

Abstract: This study considered indigenization to involve a process of making the local people “feel at home” in their Church. The ministry of early catechists such as Bernard Mizeki and Frank Ziqubu was crucial in showing the fact that the Anglican Church was not necessarily a church for Europeans only, but for the indigenous people as well. After this first generation of catechists there were numerous indigenous catechists who also ministered in the Diocese of Mashonaland by way of preparing people for the different sacraments found in the Anglican Church.

Christians died in that arena of death at the instigation of the emperors, the more people gave their lives to Christ. The explosive nature of their faith nurtured in the blood of countless martyrs enabled Christianity to overflow the boundaries of the Roman Empire and reach other parts of the world.

The example of Bernard Mizeki, who left his native land of Mozambique to go to Cape Town and then to Mashonaland to preach the good news of salvation only to be murdered there, deserves a special place in the history of the Anglican Church in Zimbabwe. It is in this context that, for decades, the Anglican Church has honored this great saint, who gave his life in a foreign land because of his love for God, his Master and Creator.

In recent years, the Anglican Church in Zimbabwe has witnessed a great deal of persecution instigated by authorities within the Anglican Church with the support of the powers that be. As in the past, people lost their lives for the sake of their church and Jesus Christ, their Savior. One may be tempted to believe that, like Mizeki who shed his blood for Christ in 1896, their blood too would make the church stronger today than ever before.

Mizeki’s martyrdom should be considered the bedrock from which the current generation of Christians in Zimbabwe was hewn. Mizeki, the evangelist who traveled from Mozambique to Mashonaland through Cape Town has become a pillar of the faith in the history of the Anglican Church in Zimbabwe. It is no wonder that his shrine attracts many faithful to Marondelas to praise and thank God for his life and ministry in Zimbabwe. The *DACB* has two brief accounts of the life and death of Bernard Mizeki which are featured in this section.

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“Anglican Church,” *Religion in Zimbabwe*. <https://relzim.org/major-religions-zimbabwe/anglicans>, accessed on 2/9/2017.

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Nairobi, September 8, 2017

- Chairman Kenya Rural Enterprise Program and Operation Save Innocent Lives.

6. Some Related Website Links on Bethuel Kiplagat

- <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001247682/opinion-bethuel-kiplagat-has-left-peace-imprints-on-sands-of-time>
- http://www.aprmtreekit.saiia.org.za/component/docman/doc_view/16-atkt-kiplagat-bio-apr-panel-2007-en
- <https://softkenya.com/kenya/bethuel-kiplagat/>
- <http://www.nation.co.ke/news/Peace-calls-mark-Bethuel-Kiplagat-burial/1056-4027992-ht8y1h/index.html>
- <http://www.nation.co.ke/news/Life-and-times-of-Bethuel-Kiplagat/1056-4014396-nikudvz/index.html>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3K5PqJ6k7w>
- https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2017/07/14/former-tjrc-chairman-bethuel-kiplagat-is-dead_c1596826
- <http://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2017/07/ambassador-bethuel-kiplagat-is-dead/>
- <http://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2017/07/former-tjrc-boss-kiplagat-to-be-laid-to-rest-saturday/>
- <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/people/bethuel-kiplagat>
- <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001248471/diversity-as-mourners-pay-tribute-to-bethuel-kiplagat>
- <http://www.nation.co.ke/news/Peace-calls-mark-Bethuel-Kiplagat-burial/1056-4027992-ht8y1h/index.html>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHpOwF4mJro>
- <http://www.genevadeclaration.org/2014rrc/rrkenya/programme/speakers.html>
- <https://hukaloh.com/index.php?a=watch/ahSGPC3lkOc>
- <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/general-secretary/tributes/condolences-on-the-death-of-ambassador-bethuel-kiplagat>

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Bernard Mizeki

c. 1861 to 1896

Anglican

Zimbabwe

Bernard Mizeki was a Mozambican catechist, Bible translator, and martyr. Born in Inhambane, Mozambique, he trained as a linguist while living as a migrant worker in Cape Town. G. W. H. Knight-Bruce recruited him in 1891 as a catechist for the new Anglican diocese of Mashonaland in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). Based near Marondera, he translated into Chishona much of the Bible and Prayer Book. During the war of resistance to colonialism in 1896, Mizeki refused to leave his mission and was stabbed to death. He is remembered as the "Mashonaland martyr," and his shrine in Zimbabwe has become a place of pilgrimage. In South Africa, the Bernard Mizeki Men's Guild and numerous churches commemorate him as a symbol of black Anglicanism.

Janet Hodgson

Bibliography:

Jean Farrant, *Mashonaland Martyr: Bernard Mizeki and the Pioneer Church* (1966).

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Bernard Mizeki
1861 to 1906
Anglican
Zimbabwe

When he was about twelve years old, Bernard Mizeki left his home in Mozambique for Cape Town, South Africa, where he stayed for ten years as a laborer. He worked for white settlers and commuted each day to his home in the slums. He enrolled in an Anglican night school for blacks and refused to drink alcohol, which was what many poor Africans used to assuage their sorrows. With his gift for languages, the young African soon learned English, high Dutch, French, and eight African languages. This led to work for him as a translator of the Bible into indigenous languages.

Soon he became a Christian. Mizeki was prepared for baptism in 1886 by members of the Society of St. John the Evangelist. He then became a lay catechist in Mashonaland, accompanying an English bishop inland to what is now Zimbabwe. Here he built a mission station near the residence of the paramount chief Mangwende. Mizeki set about his work with a routine of daily prayer, attention to his subsistence garden, and the study of local languages, while also getting to know villagers.

Next he opened a school and, with the chief's permission, moved the mission station to a nearby plateau near a grove of trees where the ancestral spirits of the Mashona were believed to dwell. The Nhowe station prospered from 1891 to 1896, and the number of converts grew. The young catechist had considerable respect for local religious beliefs, suggesting that aspects of the Shona Spirit religion with its monotheistic faith in the high god Mwari were compatible with Christian thought. However, he angered local religious leaders when he cut down trees in the sacred grove and carved crosses into others.

During the Mashona rebellion of 1896 Mizeki was warned to flee, since local African Christians were regarded as agents of European imperialism rather than as independent agents. Mizeki would not leave the Christian community for which he assumed responsibility and, on the night of June 18, was speared outside his hut. His wife and another person racing to find food and blankets to keep him alive saw a blinding white light and heard a rushing wind on the hillside where they had left him. On their return, the martyr's body had disappeared. The place of his death has become a site for Protestant and Catholics to worship, and each year on the anniversary of his

and his work for justice and peace. From the General Secretariat, I would like to extend my sympathy to his wife and the whole Kiplagat family who mourn, and pray for peace and comfort at this difficult time. Our thoughts and prayers are with you. The WCC prays that his memory will inspire many and his legacy will continue to endure.⁵⁷

5. Some Highlights of Bethuel Kiplagat's Biography

Childhood and Youth

- 28.11.1936: Kiplagat is born
- He studied physical sciences at Makerere University and sociology of religion at the Sorbonne University (Paris).

Career

- 1978-1981: Kenya's Ambassador to France.
- 1981-1983: Kenya's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom.
- 1983– 1991: Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation of Kenya.
- 1985 –86: Facilitated peace talks in Uganda.
- 1988-1992: Initiated and facilitated peace talks in Mozambique.
- 1988-1992: Engaged warring parties in Ethiopia.
- 1985: Resource person to the IGAD Peace Process for Sudan.
- 1997: Member of Election Monitoring Committee of the National Council of Churches of Kenya.
- 2003- 2005: Kenya's special envoy to the Somalia peace process.
- 2009- November 2010: Chairman of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC). He later resigned after coming under investigation for past human rights abuses, particularly his role in the 1984 Wagalla Massacre.
- He also served as the chairman of Juhudi Kilimo Company Limited and chairman of K-Rep Bank Limited.
- He was the founder and former executive director of Africa Peace Forum.

Memberships

- Member of the Nairobi Stock Exchange.
- Executive Director of the Universal Bank of Kenya.

⁵⁷ <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/general-secretary/tributes/condolences-on-the-death-of-ambassador-bethuel-kiplagat>

people of other faiths appreciated his devoted religious practice. Mutual respect and appreciation, Kiplagat emphasized, is the beginning and the essence of reconciliation.

5. Kiplagat the Ecumenist

Kiplagat's international profile grew and blossomed within the ecumenical movement, first in the World Student Federation (WSCF), and mostly in the World Council of Churches (WCC). The Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary of the WCC, in his tribute after receiving the sad news of Kiplagat's death, lucidly and concisely expressed this ecumenical aspect of Kiplagat's vocation:

I am writing on behalf of the World Council of Churches to express our heartfelt condolences on the passing of Ambassador Bethuel Kiplagat. Amb. Kiplagat was a true ambassador of peace and reconciliation and a successful career diplomat who played crucial roles in the lives of many, both in his country, Kenya, and in the East African region and the continent of Africa at large. His service as chairman of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) of his country was a true testimony to his dedication for peace and harmony among the Kenyan society. Amb. Kiplagat had a distinguished record in conflict resolution efforts in the continent. Beyond Kenya, he also facilitated historic dialogues among warring parties in Uganda, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Somalia, and Sudan that all culminated in negotiated settlements. He has also been a valuable and willing resource person to civil society organizations who also established and chaired the African Peace Forum to help crusade peace building and reconciliation efforts in the continent.

Amb. Kiplagat successfully served as the moderator of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) of the World Council of Churches from 1998-2006. As moderator of the CCIA, he brought keen theological and public witness perspectives and vast experiences from the life of his public service. As a moderator, he worked tirelessly to defend and promote human rights. He was a highly respected and beloved leader within the global ecumenical movement. His faith and sense of dedication reflected a deep commitment and calling to serve in the life of the church, not only within his own denomination, but also in the global fellowship. His focus on issues of justice has been, and will continue to be, an inspiration to the council. I have had the privilege to get to know him personally and I got a deep respect for him and his faith

death pilgrims come from many parts of South Africa to pray and to commemorate his life.

Almighty God, whose glory is commemorated in the life of Bernard Mizeki, we thank you for the ministry of your servant among the people of South Africa as missionary, catechist, and martyr. Through the example of this steadfast courage even in death, may your church be called to renewed faith in you, the Great Shepherd of the people. Amen.

Frederick Quinn

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Manche Masemola and Albert Luthuli: Iconic Figures of South African Christianity

By Madipoane Masenya

Two important figures that have shaped Protestant Christianity in South Africa are Manche Masemola and Albert Luthuli, featured in this issue of the *Journal of African Christian Biography*. A martyr like Bernard Mizeki, Manche Masemola died for her faith at a young age. Annual pilgrimages to her grave celebrate her legacy as a martyr of the Church. Chief Albert Luthuli left an extensive legacy as a teacher, a traditional leader, a politician, and a prophetic Christian in the non-violent struggle against apartheid.

DACB Advisor Prof. Dr. Madipoane Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) documents the lives of these extraordinary individuals in the following two biographies.

* * *

Introduction

What attracted me to the difficult story of a young Pedi girl whose strange and controversial death turned her not only into a local, national, and international icon, but also more importantly for the purposes of this brief introduction, into a martyr?

First, coming from the Anglican tradition, residing then in the northern Transvaal, not far from Manche's gravesite, I once, as a secondary school pupil, participated in a pilgrimage to Manche's grave in the year 1972.

Second, unlike the many relatively older heroes and heroines whose lives are celebrated in the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*, Manche's narrative presents a unique case of a faith commitment by a young rural girl.

Third, being part of the Pedi people and cognisant of the strict gender and age hierarchies between parents and children as well as the difficult relationship that I sometimes had with my parents, especially my father, on account of my newly found faith, Manche Masemola's story hits close to home.

were explicitly articulated. Here below is a transcript of two questions published on the Center's website:

Mr. Kiplagat, could you elaborate on where the work of the TJRC stands today, especially during this sensitive time of the constitutional referendum?

Bethuel Kiplagat: First, I want to point out that regardless of whether or not the referendum passes, the TJRC stands, and we will continue to do our vital work. Beyond the two years of our mandate, there remains the more permanent institution called the National Cohesion and Integration Commission, which will endure the 2012 presidential elections and beyond. With relation to where our work stands today, we are in the middle of our fact-finding mission, and I believe that it is very important that we continue during this politically sensitive time. We have hired dozens of experts, historians, and researchers, and we are well underway with our research. The TJRC is another reason why Kenyans stand optimistic today: people will finally have a more complete record of their past and the ability to bring to justice the perpetrators of the most heinous crimes that this country has seen.

What is your version of the allegations against you regarding your past during the Moi regime and what that says about your current position as chairman of the TJRC?

Bethuel Kiplagat: I am well aware of all the allegations against me, and I will repeat what I have said to everyone else: I stand behind my innocence, and I have opened a case in court for them to investigate my past. I am not avoiding accountability and would be happy to prove my innocence in a court of law. I am proud of the work of TJRC, and I think that these allegations will pass, and we will be able to continue our work undisturbed. We are still coming to work every day and realizing the mission of the TJRC.⁵⁶

Kiplagat diplomatically and courageously expressed his views in his endeavor to mediate conflicts, even when the opponents were poles apart. He was a very patient negotiator, and his diplomatic skill was exceptional. His faith as a Christian sustained him, and

⁵⁶ <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/interviews/a-discussion-with-major-general-ahmed-sheikh-farah-member-and-bethuel-kiplagat-chairman-truth-justice-and-reconciliation-commission-nairobi-kenya>

other resources, and hosted one of the most successful conferences ever held.⁵⁴ The theme was “Jesus Christ Frees and Unites.” This was the first WCC Assembly convened in Africa. Kiplagat’s role as coordinator of the Local Arrangements Committee was exemplary. Here is a testimony from a Kenyan Muslim of the younger generation, whom Kiplagat has influenced and impressed immensely:

I knew Kip from the late 1980’s on radio and television, and finally met him in person in 2007 at the Citizens Initiative for Peace -- after the outbreak of violence in 2007. He never was simply a peace lover, and was never a spectator where violence threatened peace. He rolled up his sleeves and he did what he had to do as peacemaker. One teaching I learnt from my Christian friends is “Blessed are the peacemakers for they will inherit the Kingdom of God.” That was Kip. In our Islamic traditions, the same teaching is expressed thus: “If you save life, it would be counted as if you saved the whole humanity.” I had chances to witness Kip’s peace work in Somalia and Kenya. I also learned of his many achievements from friends. I saw the man doing his work with humility. Ambassador Kiplagat, himself, was a “center of excellence.”⁵⁵

Kiplagat’s involvement in the WSCF, the WCC, the AACC, and the NCCCK prepared him for diplomatic service. In 1978, the Republic of Kenya appointed him ambassador, a role he maintained in various capacities, both formal and informal, until his health deteriorated. He left a legacy to be emulated. He set very high standards for those who come after him. “All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth to those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.” (Psalm 25: 9, NRSV).

4. Bethuel Kiplagat’s Resilience and Consistency

One of Kiplagat’s most challenging responsibilities in Kenya was his role as chairman of the Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Committee (TJRC). He was confronted with criticism and allegations that he had been adversely implicated in one of the scandals. In an interview conducted at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University, U.S.A. on July 7, 2010, Kiplagat’s resilience and consistency

⁵⁴ The WCC Fifth Assembly in November 1975 was the first international gathering convened at the Kenyatta International Conference Center, Nairobi (KICC). The Center had just been completed and opened for such functions.

⁵⁵ Dr. Mustafa Ali, Personal Tribute to Amb. Bethuel Kiplagat, July 17, 2017.

Masemola, Manche 1913-1928 Anglican Communion South Africa

“Missionary records, although prejudiced against Pedi society and customs, and shaped by piety, give her (Manche Masemola) a name and preserve details of the life of a young woman who would not normally have received much recognition in either Pedi society or the Christian church.”⁵

Manche Masemola, a teenage convert in the Anglican Church in Ga-Marishane, Sekhukhuneland, came to be known after she died in 1928. Manche Masemola was thus popularized by her death, one that local Anglicans came to recognize as the death of a martyr.⁶ In the view of Mandy Goedhals, most of what is known about Manche Masemola can be found in missionary records. Her narrative is shaped more by Christian hagiography than by actual history.

As the Pedi people in Sekhukhuneland, the home region of Manche Masemola, were generally negative and resistant to the British Anglican missionaries, the missionaries’ attitudes to the Sekhukhuneland Pedi people left much to be desired. Does it occasion any wonder that they paid only sporadic visits to Anglicans in Sekhukhuneland?⁷ On account of the harsh climate as well as the unwelcoming people, white clergy became reluctant to settle in Sekhukhuneland.⁸

An African priest by the name of Augustine Moeka founded a school and St. Peter’s Church at Marishane. The chief at gaMarishane, albeit willing to accept the missionaries, was never baptized. Other developments in the neighborhood included the establishment of a mission center and a hospital in Jane Furse. Jane Furse was 16 km from Marishane.⁹ One missionary regarded the preceding two entities as two tiny Christian “oases in a great desert.”¹⁰ In Goedhals’ view, the quoted phrase is key to our understanding of the early life of Manche Masemola. These details have more in common with hagiography than history and “bear some of the crude and uncritical characteristics often associated with missionary writings.”¹¹

⁵ Goedhals 2000, p. 101; the brackets are mine.

⁶ Goedhals 2000, p. 99.

⁷ Hinchliff 1963, p.153-157.

⁸ Goedhals 2000, p.100.

⁹ Goedhals 2000, p.100.

¹⁰ Lewis and Edwards 1934, p. 640.

¹¹ Goedhals 2000, p.100.

There were two assumptions running through the missionary accounts of her life and death. First, the narratives ignored Pedi history, regarded their political and social structures as hostile to the growth of Christianity, and rejected Pedi culture while the benevolence of western rule was taken for granted. Also, conversion to Christianity was usually equated with the adoption of western norms and standards by local people. Second, the Sekhukhuneland missionaries identified strongly with the legacy of the early church that endured fierce and prolonged persecution. According to Goedhals, “The result of these two tendencies is that Manche, stripped of the cultural context and worldview in which she was brought up, is presented as a stereotype of the faithful Christian who is courageous in the face of persecution and obedient unto death.”¹² She was thus used by the missionaries to represent an ideal rather than respected as a person holistically.

Tracing the Origins of Her Story

Father Augustine Moeka collected the first accounts of Manche Masemole’s story. When the news of Manche’s death was brought to the church, Moeka was not in the village. Upon his return to the village, Moeka sought recollections of the conversations with Manche in his attempt at making connections.

Moeka’s notes shed considerable light on the events leading up to her death. During the missionary period, in any community whose people resisted Christianity, the period for baptism was usually prolonged. Moeka came to know Manche when she attended the hearers’ classes. By the middle of 1927, Manche was a catechumen, which meant that she was being formally prepared for baptism. Given the general hostile attitude of parents—that is, the elders and custodians of Pedi customs and culture—it was quite common for young women to experience parental anger around Christian rituals, especially if they were viewed as threats to the traditional ones. Being aware of the dilemma the young women faced, Moeka told those who were being subjected to various degrees of corporal punishment to respect the authority of their parents and not defy them. Manche is purported to have replied as follows: “I am sorry, but from now on, I am going to stand by myself.” And again, “If they cut off my head, I will never leave my faith.”¹³ She was warned that it would take some time before she could undergo baptism. She responded, “I may be baptized with a better baptism.”¹⁴

A Radio and Television Personality. Through the media—especially television appearances—Kiplagat influenced and educated many people in Kenya and elsewhere. He was an excellent communicator.⁵²

A Strong believer in Family Values. Alongside Kiplagat’s very busy schedules in Kenya and abroad, he allocated time for his family and mentored younger people to do the same.⁵³

3. Diplomacy through Ecumenical Relations

For more than half a century Kiplagat consistently promoted reconciliation, with the ecumenical movement as the frame of reference. He featured in most ecumenical initiatives for reconciliation across all of Africa, including Angola, Burundi, Congo, Liberia, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Rwanda, South Africa, and Sudan. He served as mediation consultant for the World Council of Churches (WCC), the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), and the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK).

Kiplagat was Africa Secretary for the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) between 1968 and 1971. Though based in Nairobi, he travelled widely. One of his priorities at that time was mentoring young Africans to become exemplary future leaders of their respective nations. Many African leaders of the present generation have benefitted from his mentorship. While in the WSCF Africa Office he served as editor for *Presence* magazine (Volumes 2 and 3, 1969-70) that published contributions from visionary young Africans, motivating many of them to become prominent leaders in their respective nations.

He firmly believed that peace and harmony could best be achieved and sustained through mutual recognition, mutual respect and mutual appreciation across the barriers of race, religion, nation, profession, age, and gender. One of his great assets in mediation was his proficiency in both English and French. Thus he could communicate directly while most of his colleagues relied on translators and interpreters.

In 1974, Kiplagat was appointed Deputy General Secretary of the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK). One of his most memorable contributions to ecumenical diplomacy was his influence in mid-1974 that led the World Council of Churches to choose Nairobi, Kenya as the venue for its Fifth Assembly in November 1975, with the National Council of Churches (NCCK) as the host organization. As soon as the decision was confirmed, Kenyan church leaders mobilized their human and

¹² Goedhals 2000, p.101.

¹³ Goedhals 1998, p.37.

¹⁴ Goedhals 2000, p.101; Goedhals 1998, p.37; Whitnall 1983.

⁵² <http://www.tubeita.com/search/Bethwel-Kiplagat>

⁵³ https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2017/07/21/bethuel-mourned-as-africas-pillar-of-peace-his-kids-term-him-caring_c1601166

His tenure at the ministry coincided with the so-called “lost decade” for Africa -- a period in which there were widespread misconceptions about Africa, then regarded as a hopeless continent. Navigating international relations at this time was therefore a considerable challenge, demanding creativity, hard work and sufficient enterprise. Unmatched in his creativity, insight and drive, Kiplagat was equal to the task. A dynamic leader and team worker, he was instrumental in the introduction of strategic approaches and fresh perspectives in the conduct of Kenya’s diplomatic relations. This ushered in a new assertive and progressive profile for Kenya on the world stage. An effective negotiator, he also had an impressive career as a peacemaker who contributed immensely to peace initiatives and processes in Africa. He served in various peace engagements in Africa.⁴⁹

An Innovative Motivator. During his stint at the National Council of Churches (NCCCK) the work of the council grew tremendously, with many pioneering ventures and innovations -- all thanks to Kiplagat’s innovative and imaginative ideas.

An Investment Advisor. He became one of the influential leaders in the Nairobi Stock Exchange; encouraged the National Council of Churches to promote investment ventures as a strategy to wean from dependence on donations from abroad; and became one of the founders of the Kenya Rural Enterprise Program that eventually grew into the K-Rep Bank.⁵⁰

An Effective Entrepreneur. Throughout his vocation, Kiplagat was convinced that Africa’s economic success would be assured through effective African participation in industry. During the late 1960s, he campaigned for research to ascertain the level of African investment in the industrialization of Kenya. The outcome was a book titled *Who Controls Industry in Kenya* in which it was confirmed that Kenyan participation was practically non-existent. As follow up, he encouraged Kenyans to participate in the industrialization of Kenya through investment in shares and also through the formation of Kenyan-owned companies.⁵¹

⁴⁹ <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001247682/opinion-bethuel-kiplagat-has-left-peace-imprints-on-sands-of-time>

⁵⁰ The K-REP Bank was re-branded as Sidian Bank in 2017.

⁵¹ *Who Controls Industry in Kenya? Report of a Working Group* (Nairobi: NCCCK, 1968).

The plan in place was that Manche would be baptized just before Easter in the year 1928. Moeka proposed to the young women that they retain their traditional dress after their baptism but they rejected this idea. However, Manche subsequently told him that she regretted the communal rejection of his proposal. Particularly in the context of her later death as a martyr, it is not clear why Manche would have reacted as she did. Shortly before her death, Moeka reported that she predicted: “I shall be baptized with my own blood.”¹⁵ When asked if she was afraid to die for her faith, her response was, “Never.”¹⁶

The earliest written record that mentions Manche Masemola was by Mrs. Moffat, wife of missionary Robert Moffat. Some have attributed Manche’s death to illness because many people fell ill during the rainy season. But if this claim is true, it is unclear why it is ignored by many reporters. Second, Manche’s time of trial was short while other accounts, including Moeka’s, feature prolonged persecution. Mrs. Moffat claimed that Manche laughed as she was beaten to death asking why the death of a young native catechumen should be chronicled. It is clear that Moffat’s report was deliberately prepared to support the claim that Manche died as a martyr rather than to foreground the value of human life.

By November of 1928, the cause of Manche as a martyr was well established. Records indicated that at Easter of 1929, there was a pilgrimage to Manche’s grave and that on the gravestone were inscribed the words, “The noble army of martyrs praise thee.” In reality though, a tablet with the preceding words was only erected in 1949. The preceding report, written by a woman, seemed geared at proving a specific point rather than respecting the integrity of Manche Masemola’s humanity. Therefore it is no surprise that there was an appeal at the end of the article for donations to build a permanent church in Manche’s village, that is gaMarishane.

The last report that provides a window into the life of Manche before her death is provided by Lucia, her cousin who, due to her status as an orphan, stayed with Manche and her three siblings. The report, translated by Moeka, was given to Wilfred Parker, the bishop of Pretoria, in Jane Furse in 1937.

Lucia was attending the hearers’ class with Manche. She also witnessed Manche’s beatings before her death. When Manche was 13, the young girls had heard Father Moeka preach at St. Peters Church at gaMarishane. Manche then became interested and asked permission to attend the hearers’ classes.¹⁷ Although her parents allowed her to attend the classes, they wanted her to attend the initiation school as well.

¹⁵ Goedhals 1998, p.36-37.

¹⁶ Goedhals 2000, p.102; Whitnall 1983.

¹⁷ Goedhals 2000, p.103.

Given the generally hostile attitudes of the Pedis towards Christianity and the way the missionaries brought divisions between the Christians (*majakane*) and the non-Christians (*bahedene* or heathens), and the missionaries' general contempt of Pedi and African cultures, (including the initiation schools), it makes sense that all these factors would regrettably take their toll on an innocent young girl, culminating in her death, perhaps not as a martyr, but by default. When Manche's interest in Christian teachings persisted, she and Lucia were sent away to take care of youths who were cattle herders in a distant location. When she persisted in her faith, the parents resorted to beating and humiliating her. They also sent Lucia, who was viewed as a bad influence, back to Marishane.

Manche's family lived in Mabuke next to their fields. The fields were the only source of the family's livelihood, hence the expectation that whatever field-related chore was allocated to her was to be taken very seriously. Parental violence continued to increase. The real causes of tension in the family and the fears that caused the violence were never clearly spelled out. It is noteworthy that the main cause of tension was Manche's commitment to church over her work in the fields, something that invited especially the wrath of her mother as the responsibility for the fields rested on women's shoulders. On one occasion Manche's mother followed her with a whip and a spear. As some point Manche told Lucia that she would obey her parents and work to the best of her ability but that she would not turn away from the Church. The medicine from the traditional doctor that was forced on her did not turn her away from Christianity. Another version related to this account is that the medicine from the traditional doctor was smeared on Manche's hoe as a way of hitting back at the suspected magic of the Christians. Upon touching the hoe, Manche was infected and died. Though Manche's clothes were taken away from her, she continued praying outside, in the mornings and in the evenings. According to Goedhals, "Eventually, in about February 1928, her parents took her to a lonely place and beat her to death, because she refused to give up her allegiance to Christ and her desire for baptism."¹⁸

After Lucia's report, Bishop Parker was satisfied that Manche's death presented a genuine case for Christian martyrdom. The South African bishops recommended that Manche's name be included among the list of holy persons commemorated annually on special days by the Anglican Church.¹⁹ The latter was implemented only 40 years later however. A small group of people participated in the pilgrimage to her grave after a few

¹⁸ Goedhals 2000, p.104.

¹⁹ Parker 1944.

remained an integral aspect of his mediation throughout his life.⁴⁷ Within church circles, Kiplagat was most renowned for his work in diplomacy, mediated through inter-religious and inter-cultural relations. Mediation was his vocation since his youth. His proficiency in French became a great asset in his vocation of diplomacy and ecumenical relations, both within the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) and the World Council of Churches (WCC). While within the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) he remained a faithful congregant and at the same time, remained a staunch Ecumenist, in pursuit of the prayer of Jesus, "That All may be One" (John 17: 20-26).

A Pan-African Patriot. Although he was a very patriotic Kenyan, he was at the same time a committed Pan-Africanist. In his vocation there was no contradiction or conflict between passionate patriotism and broad-minded Pan-Africanism. This open-mindedness was cultivated early in life, when he studied at Makerere University, Uganda, with peers from various African nations, under instruction and mentorship from multiple nations abroad. To Kiplagat, Pan-African identity was a practical commitment rather than a theoretical proposition. He chose as his wife a diplomat from Madagascar, a French-speaking nation in the Indian Ocean. Thus his family became multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-talented – an example of what Pan-African identity could achieve if taken seriously as a lifetime commitment.

A Peacemaker and an Inter-Community Bridge-builder. In all his involvement with various initiatives both within and outside ecumenical, diplomatic and inter-faith circles, Kiplagat always advocated for peace, healing, and reconciliation—to which he richly contributed both formally and informally.⁴⁸ He was an effective bridge builder. He assumed this role very naturally, in small groups as well as between communities and organizations.

A Principled Negotiator. One of the qualities that made him acceptable as a mediator was his disposition as a principled negotiator, that is, a person in whom the conflicting parties could confide.

A Seasoned Diplomat. As a member of the Kenya Diplomatic Corps he served as a senior diplomat for more than four decades mentoring younger diplomats and advising older ones while sharing his wide-ranging experience and exposure. One of his younger colleague diplomats, Amina Mohamed summarized Kiplagat's contribution to Kenya's diplomatic profile thus:

⁴⁷ His father was a Muslim from the Rift Valley, Kenya, but his upbringing was rooted in the Tugen-Kalenjin cultural heritage.

⁴⁸ Bethuel Kiplagat offered to mediate for peace whenever and wherever conflict erupted, if he was convinced that he could contribute constructively toward bridging the gap between the conflicting viewpoints. This commitment was exemplified in his mediation of conflict in many African countries, including Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan.

“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely[b] on my account. [Matthew 5:1-11, NRSV]

The testimonies of many people who encountered Kiplagat in the context of a wide variety of circumstances—from many nations, professions, religions, organizations and political leanings—confirm that he was indeed a unique personality. He was firm in his convictions, but gentle in persuading other people to embrace his insights. Long before his appointment as ambassador in the diplomatic corps of Kenya, he was already a practicing diplomat, mediating conflicts between individuals, communities and political factions within Kenya and elsewhere. He had the rare gift of articulate, multi-lingual self-expression, and a likable personality that drew people to him, both for company and counsel. As an Anglican lay leader, he set a high standard of active participation in Church affairs, particularly with regard to welcoming visitors to “feel at home away from home.”

2. Bethuel Kiplagat’s Multi-faceted Legacy

In his vocation, Kiplagat played many roles in his interactions with others.

An exceptional mentor. Kiplagat placed a high priority on mentoring young people across Africa to become responsible and exemplary leaders. He took great interest in their concerns, especially those in schools and colleges. This mentorship vocation began early in life at the Alliance High School he was appointed school captain in 1956.

A visionary. As a visionary, he encouraged people, young and old, men and women, to think and act for long-term goals, even when focusing on short-term objectives.

A Prominent Lay Churchman. He was a prominent lay leader at St. Mark’s Anglican Church in Westlands, Nairobi. At the same time, he was a strong promoter of ecumenical and inter-faith relations. Thus his commitment to the Christian faith, as an Anglican, was supportive of, rather than antagonistic to, ecumenical and interfaith collaboration.

A Senior Ecumenist. For more than five decades he served as a consultant ecumenist within the National Council of Churches; the All Africa Conference of Churches and the World Council of Churches.

A Respector of all Faiths and a Promoter of Inter-Religious Dialogue. His Islamic background prior to joining Alliance High School positioned him in good reputation as a respector of all faiths and he inspired others to do likewise. This inter-faith posture

years. But by the 1960s, many hundreds, all over the Northern Transvaal were drawn, and continue to come on pilgrimages to Manche’s grave.²⁰

Although Manche’s mother continued to display her hatred towards Christians after Manche’s death, she was drawn to the church, and became baptized and confirmed in 1969, taking the biblical name Magdalene. Manche was given an official feast day in the Anglican calendar of saints in the year 1975. Statues of ten Christian martyrs were put above the west door of Westminster Abbey in 1998. Among them was that of Manche Masemola.

What Lessons may the Church derive from Manche’s Narrative?

On Missionaries and Missions

Many Western missionaries to Africa colluded with the colonizers in the act of civilizing heathens and savages, imposing western norms and values as normative in the contexts of their missions. Even though they did this in the name of God, it did not do justice to the cause of Christian missions. It is essential that those who are committed to the cause of missions appreciate and respect both the people and the cultures they wish to reach through their missionary work. If the early missionaries had acted this way, perhaps the Sekhukhuland Pedi people would not have viewed them with such suspicion, and perhaps the tragedy which befell Manche would have been averted.

About the Hosts of the Missionaries

In the tradition of African hospitality and the spirit of *ubuntu* (humanness and kindness), visitors are highly respected in African cultures, especially those whose cause is genuine. A pertinent question in this regard would be: If the missionary genuinely feels called by God to conduct missions within a specific location only to be confronted by the wrath and rejection of the host, what would be a reasonable way out of the situation? In a hierarchical context such as traditional Africa, what might be the role of resistant parents vis-à-vis their children who might have an earnest thirst to be taught about the things of God? Which parent should take precedence for the child who is also equally created in God’s image—the Heavenly Parent or the earthly one? Which role may parents play regarding the holistic nurturing of their children in the preceding scenario?

²⁰ Blake 1950; Whitnall 1983.

The Agency of Young Gospel Recipients

Statistics have revealed that Africa is a young continent, with more than 60% of the population falling within the category of “youth.” Although traditional African mentality prioritizes male and age hierarchy, could present day African parents appreciate and accept the agency of young people especially when it comes to matters of faith and religious practice? Particularly parents who are persuaded that God should be involved in the lives of all people, including the youth, would they be willing to acknowledge the agency of younger ones like Manche, the martyr? As scholar Mandy Goedhals states, “Her labor was controlled by her parents, and she could not read or write. But we can take her life history seriously, even in the circumscribed form in which we have it. Though illiterate, she was capable of making decisions, she had resources for survival and resistance, an inviolable sense of self.”²¹

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²¹ Goedhals 2000, p.111.

Foundation (AMREF)) and served on a panel established by the International Peace Academy and the OAU to examine the institutional relationship between the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and civil society.

He was a resource person to the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) Peace Process for Sudan from 1985 and advised Sudanese civil society on conflict resolution. He was an independent consultant on peace and conflict resolution, Kenya’s Special Envoy in the Somali Peace Process and chairman of the IGAD Technical Committee on Somali National Reconciliation Conference. He chaired several organizations such as the Kenya Rural Enterprise Program and Operation Save Innocent Lives, served on several boards including that of the Nairobi Stock Exchange, and he was also the chancellor of Egerton University in Kenya. Kiplagat was the founder and executive director of the African Peace Forum and a director of Universal Bank in Kenya. He was also engaged in activities aimed at encouraging community-based peace processes in Eastern Africa.⁴⁶

Kiplagat’s vocation exemplified the core teaching of Jesus about Christian discipleship, as summarized in the Gospel of Matthew, chapters 5 to 7. In his various duties and responsibilities both in Kenya and elsewhere, Kiplagat seems to have been guided by the Beatitudes – the blessings that accompany those who do endeavor to make the world a better place for all, without complaint, without blaming others, and without evading responsibility:

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

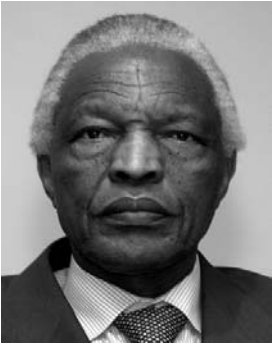
“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴⁶ [Http://www.aprmtreekit.saiia.org.za/component/docman/doc_view/16-atkt-kiplagat-bio-apr-panel-2007-en](http://www.aprmtreekit.saiia.org.za/component/docman/doc_view/16-atkt-kiplagat-bio-apr-panel-2007-en)

Multi-Talented Peacebuilder: Ambassador Dr. Bethuel A. Kiplagat
(November 28, 1936 -July 14, 2017)

By Jesse N. K. Mugambi

Whitnall CR Dominic. "Manche Masemola, Sekhukhuniland Martyr." AB2038F.
CPSA Archives. William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, 1983.



1. Introduction

This article for the *Journal of African Christian Biography* is dedicated to Ambassador Bethuel Abdu Kiplagat (November 28, 1936 – July 14, 2014), the distinguished Kenyan diplomat, ecumenist, and mentor who served in many roles, with great impact both in Africa and abroad.⁴⁵ Here is a summary of his illustrious career as a diplomat, in context of his role as member of the Panel of Eminent Persons (APR Panel) of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM).

Bethuel Abdu Kiplagat was born on November 28, 1936 in Kenya. He studied physical sciences at Makerere University and sociology of religion at the Sorbonne (Paris, France). He served in the Kenyan Foreign Service for thirteen years then was Kenya's Ambassador to France (1978-1981) and the United Kingdom (1981-1983) and the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation of Kenya from 1983 – 1991. He also served his country in other capacities as a member of the Election Monitoring Committee of the National Council of Churches of Kenya (1997) and was involved in the constitutional review process in Kenya. Kiplagat was closely involved in the conflict resolution efforts on the continent, particularly in Eastern Africa. He facilitated peace talks in Uganda (1985 – 86), initiated and facilitated peace talks in Mozambique (1988-1992), and engaged warring parties in Ethiopia in dialogue in 1988-1992.

Kiplagat was active in civil society organizations, serving as Deputy General Secretary with the National Christian Council of Churches of Kenya and director of the Relief, Rehabilitation, and Development Program of the Sudan Council of Churches in Southern Sudan. He also chaired the African Medical and Research

⁴⁵ The sources for this paper are wide-ranging, from his close associates both in Kenya and abroad, and also from his public roles in ecclesial, corporate and state responsibilities. The author of this article is grateful to the Amani Group and the family of Ambassador Kiplagat for the support and encouragement in the process of compiling this brief paper on such an exemplary lay leader in African Christianity during our generation.

Luthuli, Albert John Mvumbi
1899-1967
Congregational
South Africa

*“Although he was silenced, history will make his voice speak again, that powerful brave voice that spoke for those who could not speak.”*²²

His Early Life

Albert Luthuli was from Groutville, a missionary reserve, in Natal. In Groutville, there was a close relationship between the people and the missionaries. Although conversion to the Christian religion brought revolution in people’s lives, they remained Africans. According to Luthuli, “They were still Zulus to the backbone—that remained unchanged except for a few irrelevant externals. But they were Christian Zulus, not heathen Zulus, and conversion affected their lives to the core.”²³

At some point, Albert’s father John Luthuli went to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) to serve with the Rhodesian forces. His mother Mtonya followed and soon Luthuli was born in Rhodesia, possibly around 1898, but not later than 1900. As his father died a few months later, the burden for his whole upbringing fell upon his single mother who came from the Qwabe stock, a clan known for its strict discipline.²⁴

In 1908/1909, Luthuli’s family left Rhodesia because his brother had responded to the call to begin missionary activities for the Seventh Day Adventists in Natal. Due to a lack of schooling facilities at the new place, his mother sent him back to Groutville to stay with his uncle Martin who was a chief at that time. Although as a child he could not be involved in chieftaincy activities, young Albert was able to witness some of the incidents that were brought to his uncle.²⁵ Luthuli’s new home impacted his Christian faith. In retrospect, he could later remark: “All the time, unconsciously, I was busy absorbing the Christian ethos of home, and church congregation, and the social ethos of the community.”²⁶

His brother and mother came back to Groutville and Luthuli joined them, moving from the Adventist to the Congregational church. The latter tradition would

²² Paton 1967, p.207.

²³ Luthuli 1962, p.19.

²⁴ Luthuli 1962, p.23. Looking back at the disciplinarian mother who brought him up basically as an only child, he was grateful.

²⁵ Luthuli 1962, p.24.

²⁶ Luthuli 1962, p.25.

(Christianity, in his case) should influence one’s political theory and praxis. Our Christian praxis must be revealed especially by how we treat those on the margins of our communities.

Luthuli, the preacher, also reminded believers that the Christian life is like an adventure. Like the apostle Peter, Luthuli called upon Christians to launch into the deep. How deeply one launched into the sea of Christian experience would, in Luthuli’s view, indicate how good and effective the blessing on humankind was. Just like Peter in the story upon which his sermon, titled, “Launch out into the deep: Christian Life as a Constant Venture” was based.⁴⁴

Prophesying Truth to Power, Even at all Costs

Not unrelated to the preceding point, is the need for Christians, especially Christian leaders, be they teachers, lay preachers, politicians or chiefs, to speak truth to power, even if such speaking costs the prophets involved their own lives.

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⁴⁴ Luthuli 2008, p.110.

leadership and personal life were premised on the impulses and manifestations of Congregationalism. This strand of Protestantism had a major impact on his faith life.

While at Adams College, it became clear to Luthuli that the Christian faith was not a private affair irrelevant to society. “It was, rather, belief which equipped us in a unique way to meet the challenges of our society. It was a belief which had to be applied to the conditions of our lives; and our many works—they ranged from Sunday School teaching to road building—became meaningful as the outflow of Christian belief.”⁴¹

Luthuli confronted the *apartheid* system from the position of his faith by acknowledging that to “remain neutral in a situation where the laws of the land virtually criticized God for having created men of color, was the sort of thing [he] could not, as a Christian, tolerate.”⁴² He also used the Bible to challenge the injustices levelled against the oppressed, the laws and conditions that debased a God-given force, that is, human personality. The laws might have been brought about by the state or other individuals but they were to be opposed relentlessly in the spirit of defiance revealed by St. Peter when he asked the rulers of his day: “Shall we obey God or man?” Laws and conditions debasing non-white people, abounded in South Africa.⁴³

Chief Albert Luthuli’ Legacy for the African-South African Church

Christianity that is *African*

Contrary to what was taught by many missionaries in African contexts, Chief Albert Luthuli taught us that we did not need to deny and/or reject our African identity in order to be a Christian. Therefore it became possible to be an authentically Zulu Christian, for example. Each human being, irrespective of his/her culture or skin color, was valued by God, the Creator of them all. It is no wonder that Luthuli could at some point, albeit for a short period of time, perform his chieftaincy while unashamedly still adhering to and confessing his Christian faith.

Rejecting the False Dichotomy between (Christian) Religion and Politics

Contrary to the received theologies and biblical studies/hermeneutics, mostly devoid of cultural context in South African Church History, Luthuli believed that one’s religion

⁴¹ 1962:39

⁴² Luthuli 1961:162.

⁴³ 2008:114.

later have an impact on his political convictions and life.²⁷ His activist stance already manifested during his secondary school years when he became involved in strikes.²⁸

In Edendale, where he enrolled for a two years’ teachers’ course, Luthuli was exposed to a context that emphasized personal responsibility and active adult leadership. These qualities left a mark on him. Given the commitment of his school teachers, Luthuli came to love teaching, appreciating his European mentors while at the same time confirming his Africanness: “I am aware of a profound gratitude for what I have learned. I remain an African. I think as an African, I speak as an African, I act as an African, and, as an African, I worship the God whose children we all are. I do not see why it should be otherwise.”²⁹

Luthuli married in 1927 and the family was blessed with seven children. Due to the very hard conditions in South Africa then, the parents prayed for their children. Luthuli appreciated the role that his wife played in his life and family. As could be expected, when Luthuli became a public figure of considerable magnitude, his wife had to run the family single-handedly many a time.

His Work as a Teacher

When he finished his teacher training, Luthuli went to Blaauwbosch in the Natal uplands to teach.³⁰ In the absence of a Congregational church, he was confirmed in the Methodist Church where he subsequently became the lay preacher. After two years at Blaauwbosch, he accepted a recommendation for a bursary to do a Higher Teachers’ Training Course at Adams College. He then spent the next 15 years of his life at Adams College.

At the end of his training course, he was offered a position to train African teachers at the College. Looking back at the life at Adam’s College, Luthuli laments the detachment from or rather ignorance about the harsh realities of the South African context. In 1928, in addition to his teaching responsibilities, Luthuli became the secretary of the African teachers’ association. He also took the initiative of founding the

²⁷ John De Gruchy lists the following key impulses of Congregationalism: a key commitment against state interference in the church; a democratic church order in which property ownership and decision making are in the hands of the local congregation; a commitment to unity and ecumenism; a valuing of human dignity, justice and freedom as key elements in its praxis in the world and a desire to share its message around the world (De Gruchy, n.d. 5, *African Studies* 701, April 2011).

²⁸ Cf. Ohlange Institute and Edendale, 1962, p.29.

²⁹ Luthuli 1962, p.29.

³⁰ Luthuli 1962, p.29.

Zulu Language and Cultural Society auxiliary to the Teacher's Association.³¹ He also became the first secretary of the South African Football Association.³² His abilities as a leader were thus already becoming manifest at that point of his life.

At some point, in the midst of his teaching work in Adamsville Luthuli was called back home by his people to become their chief.

Chief/ Traditional Leader

Luthuli reluctantly left his beloved teaching profession and accepted the call to chieftaincy after two years. Luthuli then became the chief of the Umvoti Mission Reserve.³³ He was able to bridge the gap between his people and the government on issues such as the building of white-owned beer halls among his own people. Although Luthuli had a resistant spirit, he chose to express it in a non-violent manner. Due to the previous non-violent, non-revolutionary passive resistance, Luthuli could not understand the government's claim that there was conflict between his chieftaincy and his leadership of the African National Congress. He then called upon the government to give a precise definition of chieftainship.

Especially in his role as the president of the African National Congress, Luthuli stood up for the rights of his people, the dispossessed, the poor, and the voiceless. For this, Luthuli had to choose between his chieftainship and his rights as a man to fight for what he thought was good. He also knew that he might have to suffer for his choice even unto death.³⁴ Luthuli reasoned that,

I have embraced the non-violent passive resistance technique in fighting for freedom because I am convinced it is the only non-revolutionary, legitimate, and humane way that could be used by people denied, as we are, effective constitutional means to further aspirations. The wisdom or foolishness of this decision I place in the hands of the Almighty. What the future has in store for me I do not know. It might be ridicule, imprisonment, concentration camp, flogging, banishment, and even death. I only pray to the Almighty to strengthen my resolve so that none of these grim possibilities may deter me from striving, for the sake of the good name of our beloved country, for the Union of South Africa, to

³¹ Luthuli 1962, p.34-35.

³² Luthuli 1962, p.35.

³³ Luthuli 1962, p.50-51.

³⁴ Paton 1967, p.207.

make it a true democracy and a true union in form and spirit of all communities in the land.³⁵

Luthuli Politician

Hooper described Chief Albert Luthuli as a man with the following rare combination: "I think the paradox is this: the assurance is so deeply grounded in intellectual humility that it is not possible to distinguish one from the other. Neither quality would be there but for the other. Assurance without arrogance, and the humility of a man who cannot be humiliated: this is a rare combination."³⁶

Luthuli was involved for more than three decades in the resistance against white supremacy yet with no results from the government of the day.³⁷ The thirty years were typified by restrictive laws: no rights at all for South African Blacks, no adequate land for occupation, dwindling numbers of cattle, no decent and remunerative employment, restrictions on the freedom of movement through passes, influx control measures. The preceding measures were geared at ensuring and protecting white supremacy.³⁸

The black South African Nobel Peace Prize laureates Luthuli, Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela did not choose to suffer, they were made to suffer. Suffering bred adversity, which bred character and then gave birth to a vision for social change. The first South African to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize was Chief Albert Luthuli in 1960.³⁹ The prize was awarded for Luthuli's leadership of peaceful resistance to apartheid, noting the non-violence means he used to fight racial discrimination.

In his resistance however, Luthuli was not a passive Christian leader.

A Prophet and/or Activist Christian

Luthuli's grandfather, Ntaba Luthuli, and his wife, Titisi, were the first two converts to Christianity in Grootville. Albert Luthuli regarded them as the founders of the Luthuli Christian line, and felt greatly indebted to them. Luthuli is remembered for his understanding of the sound relationship between church and state.⁴⁰ His political

³⁵ Luthuli 2008, p.114-115.

³⁶ Luthuli 1962, p.12; Charles Hooper, p.9-14.

³⁷ Luthuli 1962, p.15.

³⁸ Luthuli 2008, p.112.

³⁹ Irwin 2009:158.

⁴⁰ 1962:20.