

BISHOP ZULU AND IVIYO — A RESPONSE TO MICHAEL WORSNIP

After reading Michael Worsnip's review of Shorten's book about Iviyo, the Anglican society established by the late Bishop Alphaeus Zulu to deepen Christian discipleship and witness, I asked a friend who is a committed member of Iviyo about the criticism that this organisation deflects attention from social and political issues. She agreed that this might be so in rural areas; but felt that the commitment to recruit at least one new disciple each year obliged members to concern themselves with other people and their problems. As for the need to change structures — some people are called to this task — but there are other forms of service.

Bishop Zulu always insisted that he was not a politician. But he believed passionately that his people could and should stand on their own feet, speak up and express themselves, pay their own way, and take responsibility for their own needs. He himself had won success the hard way. When his mother had insufficient money for school fees, he readily agreed to spend his holidays working, and paid off the balance by teaching. His J.C. and Matric he won by correspondence, and he was 30 before he entered Fort Hare to obtain a B.A. with distinction in Social Anthropology. Then followed further study at St Peter's in Johannesburg for the priesthood, and he became the first Black priest to receive full ordination in the Anglican church, and later the first Black Bishop.

His interests were wide. In 1924 he had assisted in the formation of the Durban branch of the Natal African Teachers Union and became its Chairman. He assisted Chief Lutuli, with whom he had a very close relationship, in establishing the Natal Bantu Cane Growers Association in 1934, and became its Treasurer. He was Chairman of Durban Bantu Child Welfare and founded a similar organisation in Chesterville. Later, as Bishop of Zululand, he established Zisizeni, an ecumenical health and welfare self-help organisation.

OTHER TRADITIONS

He had a deep respect for Zulu Culture and traditions, but there was nothing narrow about his attitude to people of other races and traditions. He was an active member of the Durban International Club, Joint Council, and the S.A. Institute of Race Relations. He was a committed Anglican but believed firmly in co-operation with other churches. He was a leading member of IDAMSA, the Interdenominational African Ministers Association of South Africa. In 1959 he accepted a study fellowship at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute in Switzerland. In 1968 he was elected President of the World Council of Churches.

With his deep and compassionate concern for people and his wide sympathies he was essentially a man of peace, and became a member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation in 1955. When Chief Lutuli, winner of the 1962 Nobel Peace Prize, was its leader, he was a member of the A.N.C. But he could not go along with the decision by the exiled A.N.C. leadership that violence was a necessary part of the liberation struggle. He saw in his nephew Chief Mangusuthu Buthelezi, a man of intelligence, ability, energy and education, son of a princess of the royal Zulu house, the natural successor to Lutuli, and encouraged him to accept the responsibilities of leadership. A close bond developed between Buthelezi and his spiritual adviser. At the Bishop's funeral, Buthelezi stated that the idea of a Black cultural organisation that could play a role in the liberation struggle had been suggested to him simultaneously and independently by President Kenneth Kaunda and Bishop Zulu. So it was natural that the Bishop should accept office on Inkatha's Central Committee and National Council.

KWA ZULU DEVELOPMENT

And when he retired as Bishop, Buthelezi lost no time in availing himself of the services of this remarkable man, first as speaker of the Kwa Zulu Legislature, and then on various bodies concerned with the economic and social development of Kwa Zulu. They were not impressed with the record of socialism in African states, and believed that the best way to overcome the severe poverty of the people of Kwa Zulu was by encouraging investment not primarily for profit, but for people; so that they might have work and the opportunity to help themselves.

This brought him into conflict with former friends both here and overseas; but it did not deter the Bishop from doing what he believed to be right. And whatever economic or political systems we finally arrive at, there will always be a need for men and women with the qualities of Bishop Zulu; honesty and integrity; humility and compassion; a willingness to accept responsibility and to undertake onerous tasks. If Iviyo can help to produce people of that calibre, they will have made a significant contribution to the creation of a better South Africa.

REFERENCES:

Curriculum Vitae, June 29, 1905-February 29, 1988 (Commemorative Brochure).
The K.F.C. Developer, Special Commemorative Edition Issue 27, April-July 1988.
(Bishop Zulu was Chairman of the Kwa Zulu Finance Corporation.)