

A ~~CATHOLIC~~ nun, teacher and former anti-apartheid activist Sr Christine Obotseng has died.

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She was a teacher at the Holy Cross School in Diepkloof, Soweto. Before that she also taught at St Mary's in Munsieville and St

Activist Sr Christine dies

Peter's, both on the West Rand, and then at St Angela's.

Sr Christine was, with the likes of Sr Bernard Ncube, detained on several occasions for her work with communities and organisations fighting

against apartheid.

A memorial service will be held at St Margaret Catholic Church in Diepkloof at 1pm tomorrow.

She will be buried on Saturday at Sterkfontein cemetery after a service at St Angela's at 6.30am.

Sowetan page 8 9/9/2009.

SISTER CHRISTINE OBOTSENG

Died: 7 September 2009

On September 8, 2009 an article on page 8 of the Sowetan read:

“A Catholic nun, teacher and former anti-apartheid activist, Sr. Christine Obotseng has died.

Sr. Christine died at the St. Angela's Convent in Dobsonville, Soweto, on Monday after a short illness.

She was a teacher at the Holy Cross in Diepkloof, Soweto. Before that she also taught at St. Mary's in Munsieville and St. Peter's - both on the West Rand, and then at St. Angela's.

Sr. Christine was, with the likes of Sr. Bernard Ncube, detained on several occasions for her work with communities and organisations fighting against apartheid.

A memorial service will be held at St. Margaret Catholic Church in Diepkloof at 1pm tomorrow.

She will be buried on Saturday at Sterkfontein cemetery after a service at St. Angela's at 6.30 am.”

Thank you Sowetan!

For those who do not understand why an activist is buried at the unearthly hour of 6.30 am, then you have not read the Sowetan on Thursday and mainly on Fridays weekly.

Footprints

These are only the paid advertisements of deaths. How many of the poorest of the poor have died, you will have to guess.

Weekly on Saturdays and Sundays, as many as 30 to 40 are buried in many of the churches in Soweto and elsewhere. As one undertaker removes the coffin from the church another coffin is wheeled in.

In Durban when we lost Comrade Florence Mkhize, after the service as she was being wheeled out another coffin arrived. We had to move to the floor below to have comrades and friends say their farewell to her. She was a great comrade and you will find her in my book (*Footsteps in Grey Street*).

So Sr. Christine will be wheeled out, while another body comes into the church to be blessed and sent on her way to where she believed she was going to.

Daily the newspapers in our neck of the woods will tell you those who have died, some with photographs, but mostly not. You must remember these notices are paid for! Sometimes these are included in the undertaker's charges, sometimes not.

The poor never reach the obituary columns. Remember they are in the majority in our country! Those killed by drunken drivers on the side of the road etc are mentioned in the news columns or the TV bites.

I am presently reading my son Mosala Mosegomi's book "Soweto Explodes". You will be amazed at the students, teachers and some headmasters who contributed to the struggle against apartheid education (Bantu Education, 1954). Amos Masondo from Guateng was in the initial SASM, African Student Movements and other organisations that went before it. Mosala will dispel the notion that June 16, 1976 was an event.

Sr. Christine at Diepkloof, a teacher in those days right in the heart of Soweto, must have been one of those teachers, whose

support of her student's struggle against the lowering of the Matriculation standards preparing them for serfdom was never in dispute.

An account of her experience in detention, written by her and featured in the book "THEY'RE BURNING THE CHURCHES" by Patrick Noonan - a priest in Sebokeng in the mid 1980's (pg 191-194, published by Jacana), gives us a fascinating insight of this great icon:

Sister Christine's health broke during her imprisonment. She has never completely recovered. Little did I know what was happening behind the scenes. Sister Christine recalls some of it:

"One day, during the late morning session of 23 December 1986, the political prisoners were assembled in the small prison hall which also served as the place for religious services. As we sat there, two white security police started addressing us by asking us whether we knew why we were imprisoned. Most of us were highly annoyed by this type of question, because we could not understand why they came to pose such a question to us after we had been six months in detention.

While we were still puzzled by this arrogance, one of the two policemen suddenly turned to me and said: "Sister, what's your name?" I instantly got angry and just stared at him without uttering a word. He then posed the same question to one of the girls who happened to be an ex-pupil of ours at St Peters. Her name was Segakweng. I think the question found her unguarded and, unthinkingly, she answered "Sister Christine". "Christine who?" "Obotseng," came the reply. Then he continued in Afrikaans saying: "*Daar is ander bobbejaan onder julle wat ...*" (there are certain monkeys among you who ...) Before he completed the sentence something within me at once seemed to say: "This man is insulting us and I for one am not going to listen to such offensive people." I got up at once and left, followed by

Patricia Nzwane of Kagiso 11 and Nobantu Nkosi from Randfontein. The three of us remained outside until the meeting was over after which we returned to the cells with the other detainees.

Early the next morning the three of us were told by the warder to take all our belongings and go to the reception. (Of course this move did not surprise us much. We expected a reaction from the security police, in response to our previous day's behaviour.) When we arrived at the reception, we found two security police, one black and one white. We never got to know their names. Our fingerprints were taken. As I stood next to one of the policemen I noticed that he was writing: "Transferred from Johannesburg prison to Vereeniging prison." It was Christmas Eve.

When we arrived at Vereeniging, south of Johannesburg, the three of us were placed in one cell. One day after three months the warder, Ms Smith, told us that we had to move out and go to single cells. This meant solitary confinement. This was just too much for us to accept. We could not face single cells again. The stress was too great. We knew from the past. We resisted. Ms Smith realised that we didn't want to shift to the single cells. She took a hosepipe and sprayed us with water, right inside the cell. We reacted with fury. We grabbed her and struggled to dispossess her of the hosepipe. Eventually one of us got hold of her, tightening our grip around her hands, which were still gripping the hosepipe. She became helpless and was now suspecting that we were about to spray her with water.

As we were hosing her with water a black warder entered the cell. Smith shouted: "*Druk die klok. Hulle wil my doodmaak!*" (Press the alarm. They want to kill me). Then a certain Mr Labuschagne from the male prison department came to her assistance. When he came in he pulled Ms Smith and tore her from our grip. He then grabbed me and tried to kick me. I grabbed him by the jacket and held on to him.

The floor was a mini-pool so we both slipped and fell. From the floor we were a sight for a fly on the wall!

The number of warders had now risen to six. They stood there and watched. I continued to argue but he again grabbed me and pushed me. I was a bag of emotions, anger, humiliation and frustration. I felt like crying, but something within me said: "Don't. You cannot afford the luxury of being seen to shed tears in such a situation. You cry, then what?" I became victorious.

Tears were blocked through exercising my will. I continued to argue with Mr Labuschagne but that did not help me. He eventually managed to forcefully put me into one of the single cells where we remained until we were taken back to Krugersdorp prison to be released ...

But the time I really felt helpless, frustrated, bitter and powerless was when Sisters Mary Modise and Anne Mayhew came to see me at Leeuhof prison in Vereeniging, and broke the news of Sister Raphael Molokwane's death. Sister Raphael had been detained originally (19 June 1986). I pleaded with the warders to request the prison officials, i.e. whoever was the rightful authority, to grant me leave to go to her funeral. The answer was "No, that is impossible." I even begged them to accompany me to make sure I came back to prison and that was met with a flat refusal. This is one experience that pained me very much during my detention."

~

The article of journalist Fikile-Ntsikelelo Moya in the Sowetan 11 September 2009 (on the next page) tells you so much more of this grand struggle veteran.

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11/9/2009

'Her' kids felt special

Fikile-Ntsikelelo Moya

ONE of my earliest memories of Sister Christine Obotseng was when I was in Standard 4 (now Grade 6): I had a boil on my thigh and could not walk properly.

For some reason I had to go to the offices of the St Angela's School, where she was principal and teacher.

I can still see the concern on her face when she asked me what was wrong and then uttered what was the most amazing thing any adult had said to me up to that point of my life: "Do you mind if I look what's wrong or will you feel offended?"

Here was this adult in authority asking this meek 11-year-old if he minded taking off his pants so that she could see his wound.

Had she demanded that I strip I would not have thought twice about it. That was what adults did.

Sr Christine assumed that as a human being I had inherent dignity. My age had nothing to do with anything. And because I was a human being in pain, I deserved compassion.

She was not my teacher then but would be the following year. She only knew me as one of the kids at school.

She had just arrived from St Peter's in Kagiso, where she had a reputation for being political and for liberally admin-

istering the cane.

So it made perfect sense to me when she was detained with Sr Bernard Ncube and Nomvula Mokonyane for a range of anti-apartheid activities.

As she had done in my case, she would not look on while people suffered around her.

In Standard 5 (Grade 7) she simplified for me what I would years later learn was the thrust of Liberation Theology. "If you are not used to living and being

treated justly on earth, you are going to have problems when you get to heaven because there everybody is equal".

Social justice was therefore a Gospel imperative. To seek justice, peace and dignity on earth was simply a trial run for those who expected to find themselves in heaven.

One day she beat everyone in class except a few because we had decided that 1m x 1m couldn't be 1 square meter. It had to be more.

With the aid of the rod, she taught us an important lesson. Logic has a life of its own and it does not have to sound "nice" to be cogent.

Having learnt that lesson, nothing could be the same again. How could it be?

My most enduring memory of Sr Christine is that of a mother figure who made all "her" children feel special.

Her fellow Companions of St Angela nuns might have lost a sister with her death on Monday, but a generation or two has lost a mother and South Africa a great teacher and gallant freedom fighter.

A requiem mass will be held at the St Angela's Catholic Church tomorrow at 6.30am and the cortege will leave for the Sterkfontein Cemetery at 8am.



Michael "Kaizer" Xuma, 232 Rampa, died in 1937. Burial tomorrow at Diepkloof Cemetery. The service will be held at 10am and the cortege will leave at 9am.

Bongani Sydney Magubane of F294 Umlazi will be buried tomorrow at Umlazi Unit-17 Cemetery. The service will be held at Faith Mission Church at 10am and the cortege will leave at 10am.

NOTICES

service will be held at Umlazi section-CC hall at 10am and the cortege will leave at 1pm.

MAGUBANE

Bongani Sydney Magubane of F294 Umlazi will be buried tomorrow at Umlazi Unit-17 cemetery. The service will be held at Faith Mission Church at 10am and the cortege will leave

We salute and thank you Sr. Christine!

Hamba Kahle our comrade!

Phyllis Naidoo

9 September 2009.09.09

Durban.

Footprints