

ALBERT JOHN LUTHULI COLLEGE

A speech given by Bishop A. Zulu at the opening of the College at the Theological Seminary at Edendale.

The decision to honour the memory of the late Chief Albert John Luthuli by naming this college after him is, I believe, inspired. He was a man of many parts. He became famous for his political exploits with the result that many of his other qualities were almost submerged. Those of us who were intimately associated with him know full well that he would have desired to be remembered first as a christian. This point needs to be emphasised especially in our day when many people doubt the relevance of the christian faith in the struggle for building a happy and free South African society. All his labours were the expression of his christian faith. That for him all men were meant for fellowship with one another was evident in his relationships not only with black persons of every ethnic group but also with white people. His faith saved him from hating his political opponents while he did not hesitate to criticise and to condemn the inhumanity and injustice to which black people were subjected.

The naming of this college after Chief Luthuli is timely also for his memory as a politician, and that for important reasons. Firstly, the volume and harshness of oppressive legislation makes swift and frequent changes in black strategies inevitable. The result is that acts of wisdom and courage in one period can appear trite, foolish and even cowardly in another. Secondly, historical facts have been presented to the black community, through schools and by other methods of propaganda with the twist that renders blacks amenable to control by dominating authority. Thirdly, powerful unfriendly spirits desire that black heroes of the past should not be remembered because the memory of them is hurtful to consciences that choose darkness rather than light. Until the black man writes up South African history it is essential that monuments of presently scattered achievements by the black man should be erected as signposts along the way. Tonight's event marks out this college as destined to serve this function and for this reason it is most highly welcome. One is reminded of a prophetic utterance by the distinguished English statesman, Edmund Burke when he said, "People will not look forward to posterity who never look backwards to their ancestors".

It is thrilling to know that future generations of South Africans will find inspiration and strength when they see this college and reflect upon the truths and ideals for which Luthuli lived.

While certain elements in our society would belittle the contribution of black christians towards building the church and the general service of the country, it is right that the name of Albert Luthuli should be raised and shouted from the housetops.

In former ages, the mercy of God would not allow his

justice to bring about the fall of Jerusalem until he had sent a succession of prophets to show them the way. In our time, it pleased the Lord not to bring judgment upon South Africa until he had raised, among others, Albert Luthuli whom he endued with the faith and integrity that gave him the moral force of the passive resistance and the economic boycott campaigns of the early fifties. That those noble efforts failed to bring about more humane attitudes in this country's human relationships must be seen as the basic reason for much of the violence that threatens the peace and happiness of our land,

When Chief Luthuli became a political leader, his credentials as a great christian had been widely recognised. His genial spirit, his respect for men and women of all ages, of all cultures and economic standing, together with his deep commitment to humble service of individuals and groups had made him an acknowledged leader in many areas of life. Christian missionaries appointed him to serve on the staff of a Training College as one of the first two black men to hold responsibility of such a kind in Natal. Later, successively and often simultaneously, he became President of the Natal African Teachers' Union, President of the Durban and District Football Association, President of the Natal African Cane Growers Association, President of the Natal Mission Reserves Association, President of the Natal African National Congress, and, finally, President of the South African African National Congress.

At a time when the ecumenical movement was at its infancy, Chief Luthuli was recognised as an honoured leader of the wider church. In that capacity he travelled to India in 1938 as one of a representative South African delegation to attend the third International Missionary Conference in Tambaram. A few years later, he was elected for two terms, as Vice-President of the Christian Council of South Africa, the predecessor of the present South African Council of Churches. At about the same time, his own church sent him to the United States of America on a fraternal visit.

As a man, Chief Luthuli possessed an amazing capacity for suffering. He seemed to understand more fully than many, the need for cheerfulness when people suffer for their convictions. He displayed this trait most eloquently, first, when he sacrificed the joys of life as a successful teacher at a renowned institution, the old Adams College. He chose to respond to the request of his home community to become their chief. Later, that same gift of self-sacrifice enabled him to abandon the chieftainship when the government forbade him participation in national politics as chief. The incident gave proof of the ancient truth that a man finds his life by losing it. He ceased to be chief of Groutville, a tribe of little significance in the country and became instead the much loved and revered chief of the majority of South Africans. Multitudes from Cape Town to

the Limpopo and from Durban to Mafeking, hailed him and sang his praises as "OUR CHIEF"

It is not without significance that many chiefs have enjoyed greater political freedom since the government's failure to muzzle Chief Luthuli. Chief Luthuli's endurance in suffering served him well during his imprisonment with one hundred and fifty-five others during the notorious Treason Trial of the late fifties. On discharge, it was a delight to watch him lead groups of people, many of them much younger than himself, singing and dancing as if they were returning from a wedding party. Nor do I forget his perfect mastery of emotion on one occasion in Pretoria.

Tea-time found him in the middle of giving evidence on behalf of the Natal African Cane Growers' Association. Dr Tomlinson, sent the chief with his party to a little room that served as the Tomlinson Commission kitchen. He was a respected leader of black South Africa, but could not partake of tea with white people. He was not embittered by his humiliation. Rather, it strengthened his determination to struggle to the bitter end for the liberation of South Africa. He saw the arrogance of the white man as the greater enslavement and the one more certain than that of the black man to bring disaster to our country.

Also during his two term ban, instead of self-pitying misery, the Chief reflected the joy of those who regard it as a privilege to suffer for a good cause. It was in that spirit that he travelled with Mrs Luthuli to Sweden in 1961, there to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. All who knew him agreed that no one in South Africa deserved it more than he.

It is right that the South African Church has chosen at last to do something to commemorate a distinguished black christian statesman. Christians cannot afford to support even by their silence, allegations that martyrs for justice in South Africa should be called communists. Such an accusation has been made against the late Albert John Luthuli. Christians should of all people remember that privileged people in former ages accused none other than the Son of God himself of casting out devils through Beelzebub. The naming of this college after our chief will stand out for all time as a contradiction to popular thinking. It will be a proclamation that Albert Luthuli succeeded in his generation to express in real life, the truth spoken by Aristotle in his Politics when he said, "the amount of felicity (happiness) which falls to the lot of each individual man is equal to the amount of his goodness and wisdom and the good and wise acts that he does". May the same be said also of all those who will pass through the walls of the Albert Luthuli College. □

WHITEY by David Muller, published by Ravan Press

A review by Trish Riekert

The title of David Muller's first novel **Whitey** has heavily political overtones which are not borne out by the novel itself. Its concern is social and psychological rather than directly political, although in the South African context it may be false to make this distinction because many of the social ills which the author describes are the direct consequences of a political situation. It also seems, given this peculiar context, that any comment about the Coloured community made by a white man becomes, in a sense, a political statement.

The statement, however, is severely limited by the fact that David Muller chooses to make his observations largely through the private, subjective and often hallucinatory consciousness of an alcoholic white seaman who, in the course of a "bender", finds himself in Cape Town's District Six. He is taken under the protection of "Mommy Stilhuis", the owner of a thriving "smokkelhuis", or shebeen, and a large part of the novel is given up to detailed examination of the psychological states and physical sensations of the compulsive alcoholic. In his attempt to give the oppressive and claustrophobic sense of a mind imprisoned by need, the author goes too far, and the result is repetitive and tedious; while his style, which is often turgid and self-consciously literary, does not allow the experience to rise above the particular.

It is in the fine evocation of the atmosphere of District Six that the author is at his best. Filth, squalor, inertia and appalling poverty combine almost ludicrously with colour, vitality and irrational gaiety to produce a composite and convincing picture. At the heart of this confused variety is the paradoxical co-existence of vice and virtue, of the brutal and harsh with the compassionate and gentle.

Mommy Stilhuis sells liquor illegally, and harbours the most vicious and murderous thugs in return for their protection against the other gangs that roam the district. Yet she is a God-fearing woman, aspires to the respectability of a "house in Athlone" and has only turned to "smokkeling" in order to support her three children and acquire the wealth that would enable her to move out of the corrupt underworld which now supports her. But escape is not so easy, and she watches with dismay as the world to which she has opened her doors claims as one of its own the son that she hoped thereby to save.

John Boonzaier, the hopeful, dignified young man of seven years before has become "Boon", the leader of the "Gympie Street Crew", and stabs a man to death for a bottle of wine. It is unnecessary to trace the process of transformation; thwarted hopes and ambitions, the losing battle against impossible odds form part of a pervasive consciousness of hopelessness and futility against which the strivings of someone like Gertie Smit become almost heroic. It is a fine irony that Whitey "crie(s) out in anguish to God for the return of Boon".

The self-destructive compulsion of the alcoholic seaman is reflected and paralleled in a community that is so restricted by external factors that its ends become self-defeating, and exacerbate its already wretched lot. At the end of the novel it is appropriate that Whitey, after a period of "drying out" in Groote Schuur Hospital, should return to the bottle and also decide to return to the people and district which so vividly externalize his psychological imprisonment. This is a novel rich in potential, but marred by the pompous and inflated style of its author, and, like its chief protagonist, it remains self-enclosed. □