



# The making of a Saint

IN paying tribute to one of our fallen MK Commanders Dawn has this to say:

"This is an eulogy for a giant, this is our belated epitaph. This is an obituary we could not read at your lonely grave the dirge we never sang. To you Dear departed Commander, Commissar, Fighter and Hero this is our silent salvo in your honour. It is in place of a deserved gun salute.

These are tears that dried on mothers chicks, the words that stuck in our unbelieving throats. This is our love, our pain, our loss. This is an affirmation of a vow. As man lives, so shall he be sung in after-time. Blackman lived nobly, he graced our world with virtuous attributes and left us a legacy of good to imitate."

This is a fitting praise for the late extraordinary Reverend Mandla Msibi who was popularly known as Blackman — the RISING DOWNTRODDEN. So come with us as we attempt to narrate the story of the Christ-like revolutionary life he lived in its totality.

In August 1980, an important Consultation was held in Lusaka by a collective of comrades who had worked with the churches at home together with the leadership of the ANC to map out ways and means of consolidating the contacts already established with the Church community and how new ones could be established. This event was officially opened by Cde. President O.R. Tambo.

The aftermath of this day was the birth of the Church Front and the adoption of a Programme of Action. The primary target at that point in



*The late Revd. Mandla "Black Man" Msibi, left, with Revd. Mogoba.*

time was to work mainly amongst Christians, though we understood that we had to develop and begin work with other religious communities as they exist in our country.

Two political reasons can be cited as important factors that ultimately influenced the ANC to concentrate more on the Churches. Firstly, the Church is historically responsible for the socio-political and economic crises that have torn apart our beloved country on racial lines. Apartheid doctrine is historically the product of Christian — justification of exploiting indigenous christians and religious black

people. Lastly, the church was born within the womb of christianity. It was, therefore, important for the ANC to remind the church of its prophetic role — to completely brake away from the Satanic Pretorian regime. This was a priority.

Rev. M. Msibi was subsequently assigned the enormous task of leading the Church Front. He was ordained in 1989 at the Union Bible Institute in Natal. After ordination he ministered at Springs until he moved to Durban and became the General Secretary of the Young Men's Christian Association. (YMCA).

It was during his christian and political activities within the YMCA that he became very close to the Black Consciousness Movement — the healthy first stage of one's political awareness — and subsequently became an activise member. He worked very close with outstanding church leader of that time, like Rev. Mashwabada "Castro" Mayathula. He was recruited into the underground network of the movement and became an outstanding activist.

In 1977, he was commanded by our leadership to leave the country and join the external structures of the movement. Like an MK combatant he responded positively. In his lifetime as a christian and a priest he was able to destroy the myth that for a christian to be revolutionary is a breach of faith with God. To identify with the suffering masses, the poor, and to practically participate in the struggle was for him qualities of a true christian.

Hé made the ultimate sacrifice — laid down his life in struggle for his country and people. Behold! this is the



making of a Saint!

In the external mission he could have joined the local churches and have a secure non political life, or he could have pursued other educational interests either than being a full time activist of the movement. However he understood why he left the country. He hated the existence of the apartheid regime, and the divine task of destroying that which is not of God—was not yet over.

He was a trained cadre of our glorious army Umkhonto we Sizwe. Occasionally he penetrated the enemy battle lines inflicting unforgettable blows upon it. Rev. M. Msibi — the Rising Downtrodden died on the battle field in 1980 in Swaziland where he with young communists like the late Cde. Mduduzi Guma also known as "Conquerer Ntwana". Yes he died gloriously in his trench with his boots on.

Let us honour this Saint with our revolutionary deeds. Since his time the church front has grown into a Department of Religious Affairs. It has as its sub-structure the Inter-Faith Chaplaincy the role of which is to develop and foster inter-faith understanding and co-operation in our country within our community.

Just prior to his untimely death Blackman in 1980 attended a Consultation of the WCC in Holland on Racism. His contribution to this conference left an indelible mark on all those present who have always perceived the ANC as a movement removed from the christian community. An assertion which is very far from the truth if you consider the many christians who founded the movement. It is a history that the ANC is proud of. After all the black oppressed majority comprise about 75% of the christian church in our

country.

The late Cde. Rev. Msibi like many of his predecessors like Rev. Dube, Rev. Calata Rev. Rabushane was a pioneer of the Dept of Religious Affairs. He made an outstanding contribution to our struggle and left an indelible imprint on all his comrades in arms. We remember him

by his cheerfulness compassion and devotion to duty. His life was an eventful one and full of meaning. His path to political consciousness has great relevance to our people — believers and non believers alike.

Let us all carry the spear of this fallen combatant and christian soldier, a son of our beloved country, South Africa.



Rev. Frank Chikane, Addressing the Conference on Children Repression and law in Apartheid South Africa.



APARTHEID victim Ntabiseni (seated), surrounded by her wellwishers in Harare. From left: Cde Oliver Tambo, Mrs Lisbet Palme, her mother Anna and Archbishop Trevor Huddleston.