

Maqhamusela Khanyile's life and testimony

Authors' Note

I write this as a white South African woman, born and bred a Lutheran. The search for information on Maqhamusela Khanyile took me a long time and I received much help from other people – and I still have many unanswered questions about this man and the church to which he belonged.

The search began when I was lecturer for Christian Education in what was then known as the Lutheran Theological College at Maphumulo. I had set my students an assignment to write a lesson outline for confirmation class on one of the fathers or mothers in the faith. Two students (who are now deans), Timothy Myeni and Lawrence Khuzwayo, came and asked for permission to write about Maqhamusela Khanyile. 'Who is he?' I replied. 'Don't you know about Maqhamusela?' came the astonished reply. 'He was a Zulu martyr.'

I felt humbled: I had majored in Church History in my theological studies, been a Lutheran all my life and in relatively close contact with some mission work, but I had never even heard of this man. The students showed me *Incwadi yeJubilee*¹ which tells the story of first Zulu Christians in the Norwegian Lutheran mission work. There Maqhamusela's story is written up in one and a half pages with a picture of the first cross erected to remind us of God's grace in this man. That and a half page in du Plessis' *Christian Missions in South Africa*² were the only sources of information that we had.

Since then I have been curious to obtain further knowledge on Maqhamusela. Moreover I wondered why so many Lutherans do not know about him, nor do we thank God for His grace in that man's testimony among the Zulus. On retirement my chance came, and letters, phone calls, e-mails went to the archives of the Norwegian Mission Society (NMS) in Stavanger and in this country, to many persons who might have heard stories about Maqhamusela when they were young, to deans and congregation members, to descendants of the *induna* and of missionaries who were involved at the time. When an Anglican student, (now Rev.) Madodamuzi Khumalo, alerted me to the fact that in the Church of the Province of South Africa *Saints and Seasons* liturgical calendar³ 'the Lutheran martyr Maqhamusela' is remembered on 9 March, contact was made with the archives of that church, too. Frederick Hale's translation of the (Norwegian) missionaries' correspondence (1997) proved to be a goldmine.

When photocopies of the archival material from Norway arrived the trouble started: the missionary documents were in the old Dano-Norwegian that was spoken by the

missionaries in the late nineteenth century. The Norwegian student that I contacted assured me that he did not understand it; Norwegian nationalist governments had changed it so much. Not much of what I needed had been translated by Hale. Therefore it was a real gift when I found persons like Mr Karl Solberg who not only knew that language but translated the material which I sent him with enthusiasm. The details of these sources of information are listed in the bibliography, as also the history books which I consulted. For the present sketch the most important primary sources of information are the reports by Rev Ommund C. Oftebro (not his relative Dr Christian Oftebro) and other missionaries to their headquarters in Norway between 1868 and 1877, and a 1935 report by Father AJ Fowler SSM; the last-named incorporates findings of research. Should you have any new information or other perspectives on Maqhamusela and how we could thank God for him, please send them to the author, Ms M. Nürnberger, c/o School of Theology, UNP, P/Bag X01, 3209 Scottsville, Republic South Africa. Here, then, is his story, as I now know it.

The Setting

Maqhamusela lived in the Zulu Kingdom at the time of King Cetshwayo and *Inkosi* Gawozi. When he was executed on 9 March 1877 he was about 70 years old⁴. He lived near the Norwegian Mission Society (NMS) station Etijowe (Eshowe) in Zululand.

NMS had started mission work in that area in 1844, but there were few converts. Almost all the converts lived on one of the mission stations, on land that had been granted to the mission society by one of the Zulu kings. The residents on these mission stations were composed of families of converts, but also old and often sick women, girls who had wanted to escape forced marriages, foreigners and persons who had found refuge from tribal punishment on the station, criminals and alleged sorcerers (*abathakathi*). The presence of the last-mentioned group on the mission stations was the theme of repeated Zulu accusation⁵ and criticism from colonists⁶, and has since been substantiated by scholars⁷. There were also some boys who lived and worked on the station for a wage and went to school there. The residents on the mission stations were unrepresentative of Zulu society: they were largely 'collections of flotsam and jetsam'⁸.

In many ways Maqhamusela was different. No accusation of witchcraft was raised against him, either before or after the execution, from the side of the Zulus. Moreover he did not want to isolate himself from his people by living on the mission station; he continued to live in his home in the valley at Siqwanjana⁹, about half an hour's walk from the station.

Up to the end of the 1870s the Zulu Kingdom was stable economically¹⁰, the Zulu household being self-supporting, so that there was, until after the Anglo-Zulu War, no exodus of young men to the diamond mines or other wage-paying employment. The King's monopoly of the ivory trade¹¹, his income from the transit of labour from the north-east into Natal, and his large herd of cattle gave him the latitude to show himself a generous ruler, and, surreptitiously, to buy up guns which had been discarded by West-erners.

Yet a shortage of good grazing land continued to exert pressure on the growing population¹² and several waves of cattle diseases¹³ made sensitive inroads into the wealth of the Zulus. The social system of clans with their fixed ranking according to sex, age and descent, the religious framework and the traditional values, while not rigid¹⁴, had

not been confronted from the outside. That is, until European traders and missionaries came.

From 1873 Zululand was ruled by King Cetshwayo. As his predecessor, King Mpande, King Cetshwayo was realistic in his assessment that Christians would not give the king or Zulu tradition unquestioning obedience: their primary loyalty would be to God. Therefore Christians were considered rebels¹⁵, persons who had sided with the whites against their own people¹⁶. Torstein Joergensen found the following verbatim record of a conversation between King Cetshwayo and Rev JL Kyllingstad in 1876:

The King: But look here, *Umfundisi* (teacher)! We cannot permit that our soldiers run to the school and become believers; because then they are running away from the King's service, and we lose our army. The believers are of no use to us and never serve us, as they are lost to us and the service when they attend school. We must refuse permission for you to take them away from us and do not permit that a soldier should become a believer¹⁷.

Not only in the question of giving unquestioning obedience, but also in terms of Zulu lifestyle Christians were misfits. They were dubbed 'believers with pants', referring to the insistence of the Norwegian missionaries that becoming a Christian involved all sorts of behaviour that was foreign to Zulu culture such as wearing European dress, not drinking beer, learning to read¹⁸. Maqhamusela's *induna* summed up the strangeness of the new way of life in the claim that the Christian faith was not for them (his family) or for the Zulu nation¹⁹. Threats were hurled against Zulu men who wanted to become Christians: 'We'll soon take your trousers off'²⁰. Maqhamusela's refusal to wear trousers will be taken up later.

After his coronation Cetshwayo had let it be known publicly that, although he could not forbid mission work to be done in his realm, any of his soldiers who wanted to become Christians would be killed²¹. His soldiers were to be men of war and not men of books and prayer: that spoiled them as fighting men²². Cetshwayo's desire for fighting men was not only a matter of status; he saw that he needed an army subject to his authority for several reasons.

Initially, Cetshwayo had considered only the small Boer republics to the north-west of his kingdom as enemies. Official land grants had been made to Boers by Zulu potentates; for example King Mpande had ceded land in return for Boer help to gain the Zulu kingship²³. However, the boundaries were unofficially extended by land-hungry Boers several times. The Boers were enemy number one.

Cetshwayo was aware of the tension between Boer and British and speculated on British help against the former when he requested the Natal government to recognize him by attending his installation as king of the Zulus in 1873²⁴. Theophilus Shepstone exploited this invitation to the hilt: he not only crowned the Zulu king western-style, he also required him to agree to a treaty prohibiting him from making war without British consent, and included something like a basic rule of law for the king's subjects. Among other practices, executions without the procedure of a formal, Western-type court case were forbidden. Another item in the treaty was that the king should grant permission to mission societies to evangelize the Zulus. This Cetshwayo contested, and finally conceded in return for British alliance. However he set the above-mentioned condition of disallowing baptism, especially of warriors.

For a time people and chiefs had looked the other way when there were baptisms²⁵, so that classes of baptismal candidates grew in number: in 1876 that at Eshowe registered twelve²⁶, while there had been seven baptisms²⁷.

Soon, however, an assertion of Cetshwayo's authority became critical. Disconcerting instances of Zulu regiments and chiefs defying the king's command tarnished the king's authority in the face of chiefs who were ready to overthrow him²⁸. Also, there was restlessness among the Zulu age regiments (army) which were called up for agricultural and building tasks, but not for combat²⁹. Yet the 'washing of the spears' was in itself an important item in the recognition of a new king³⁰. Authority within the 'push and pull forces of centralization and internal forces of political and economic decentralization'³¹ was slipping away from the king. Finally, there was growing disillusionment with the British.

According to the coronation agreement Cetshwayo was not free to go to war without British approval. When he claimed British intervention against land seizures by the Boers he was promised a commission of enquiry by the Colonial government to investigate the legality of opposing claims to land³². The commission did not publicize its findings, which, incidentally, were basically pro-Zulu and against many Boer claims³³, until the bubble was ready to burst. The reason for withholding the findings was that the Colonial Secretary in London was most unwilling to alienate the Boer Republics; he wanted them as allies in expanding the capitalist economy north of the Limpopo. To this end he had to secure the trade route to the north to access the legendary wealth of this area³⁴. Into this scheme an independent Zulu Kingdom did not fit, and pretexts for military action in order not only to curb its power but to attain military conquest were sought, most notably by the High Commissioner and Governor of the Cape Colony, Sir Bartle Frere³⁵.

On the issue of war there were opposition forces in Natal, notably the Lieutenant-Governor of the Natal Colony, Sir Henry Bulwer³⁶, and Bishop John Colenso, by then already deposed. The latter supplied the Aborigines Society in Cape Town³⁷ and England with critical comments and new information on the reports from the warmongers' camp. The last-named party was clearly gaining precedence in the colony. In England, the more positive outlook on the 'natives of the colonies' among the public went hand in hand with austerity measures in administration and military expenditure in these colonies. This explains the tug-of-war between the Colonial Office and Frere on the question of going to war. All this provides the background to the execution of Maqhamusela.

Who was this person, Maqhamusela Khanyile?

The Norwegian Lutherans had gained an entrance into Zululand from Mpande in 1844. Although the first missionary, Rev (later Bishop) HPS Schreuder, had to labour for 14 years before he could report a single baptism³⁸, these missionaries (as those of other societies) had established some relationship of trust with the Zulus, notably because of their medical knowledge and other benefits to be derived from them such as blankets, soap, chickens.

However, one man came to the mission station 'Because he has been touched by the gospel, and not in order to get things for himself'³⁹. That is the first report on Maqhamusela to hand; it was written by Oftebro, the missionary under whose preaching he had come to believe. Although the sub-chief Jubane Mpungose was his relative⁴⁰, Maqhamusela

Khanyile was not of royal blood. There is some disagreement in the sources concerning his possessions. Oftebro stated in the above-mentioned report that he had been fined so often that now he did not have a single head of cattle; however other missionaries say that Maqhamusela was busy building a cattle kraal⁴¹, that his cattle were sick⁴², and Fowler was told that after the execution Maqhamusela's few cattle were carried off to the chief⁴³.

Maqhamusela's son, Simon Mhlongo, Ntshingwayo by pre-baptismal name⁴⁴, thought that he was about 70 when he was executed⁴⁵. He was a warrior and a member of the Hlaba regiment and a polygamist⁴⁶. The great wife, Macasana, was blind and the half-sister of Umbulawa, who had been sent to monitor the execution⁴⁷. Macasana had a daughter and died (unbaptized) in 1879. The second wife, Umyembezi, survived two husbands, Sifo Mkwanzazi and Ndodayendhlu Langeni, and gave birth to the latter's posthumous son, Mhlongo, after she had married Maqhamusela. She then bore Maqhamusela at least one more son, Gideon⁴⁸. She and her children were baptized when they returned to Eshowe in 1881⁴⁹.

Maqhamusela had been touched by the preaching and life of the missionaries and his neighbours nicknamed him '*Umntu Wesonto*' – the Sunday Man/the Prayer Man,⁵⁰ because 'at any time he used to pray aloud, sometimes in the bushes at the roadside'⁵¹. In spite of the long and steep path to the station he came to Sunday worship regularly and sometimes to morning prayers⁵².

Oftebro's first report to hand states that Maqhamusela had made no commitment to baptism, but was 'waiting for the Lord to open the way to the kingdom'⁵³. As Prince Cetshwayo had, for a time, shown a real interest in the new faith⁵⁴, Maqhamusela and others may have hoped that upon accession to the Zulu throne he would relax the prohibition against baptism. Sadly, this hope did not materialize.

According to Oftebro's report five years later (1873) Maqhamusela had talked about confronting King Cetshwayo with the anomaly of allowing his subjects to listen to the preaching of the gospel while prohibiting baptism; then the king could go ahead and kill him. Oftebro stated that Maqhamusela was not afraid to testify to his faith and '(he) says the nation is going in the wrong direction'. Such open criticism of the king was potentially dangerous and shows up another facet of Maqhamusela's desire for baptism.

Maqhamusela's frustration also made him critical of the missionaries' theology that not only faith in Christ but also baptism is essential to salvation. He contended that God would have to open up a new avenue to salvation, as non-baptism was not his own fault⁵⁵. However, the missionaries complained that Maqhamusela was still bound by old ways, for example he continued socializing with a neighbour who was in disrepute⁵⁶ and attended beer parties⁵⁷.

While Oftebro was away on furlough in 1873 Maqhamusela asked the person temporarily in charge of the mission station, Rev Kyllingstad, to request Bishop Schreuder to speak for him before King Cetshwayo⁵⁸, who thought highly of the Bishop. The latter wanted to gauge Maqhamusela's sincerity, and on 18 June 1873 Maqhamusela gave a clear testimony before him and a group of Christian elders at Entumeni. At an opportune moment Schreuder made the request to the king. The reply was evasive: according to protocol Maqhamusela was to make his request through the lower ranks of the *amakosi*. Here, on 12 July 1873 Maqhamusela was met with dismay by his family members and hostility by others. To Maqhamusela this was a clear warning that baptism would be

severely punished. Nevertheless he requested to be enrolled in the baptismal class. Some time later attendance was interrupted: he first wanted to finish building his cattle kraal.

Then an unnamed son of his froze to death while herding the livestock of the chief⁶⁰. Maqhamusela withdrew from the missionary (Kyllingstad) completely; after a week he came to the mission station to request prayers for his son to be admitted to heaven. At the end of the conversation the missionary directed the father's concern towards his own relationship with God. That afternoon Maqhamusela was in the baptismal class again.

A year later Rev Gundersen, who was noted for his gentleness, again reported irregular attendance at baptismal class⁶⁰ as Maqhamusela followed the Zulu custom of shunning social gatherings in a time of bereavement. Another reason he gave was that his cattle were sick, and, in truth, there were successive waves of rinderpest in Zululand at this time⁶¹. Gundersen noted that Maqhamusela was finding it difficult to learn for the classes, 'learning' here meaning memorizing Luther's Small Catechism! However, Gundersen continues, Maqhamusela preached long sermons which – to the missionary – 'sounded spiritual enough but . . . not to the point and on strange themes'. Probably the pastor's training in Western discursive thinking and problem formulation converged with the widely held conviction of Western cultural superiority to produce what is possibly ethnocentric assessment.

To serve the King and give his heart to God

On the other hand Gundersen was sensitive to the motive behind some aspects of Maqhamusela's behaviour, which other missionaries had censured. 'He wants to become a true believer as a true Zulu, . . . serving the king while he has given his heart to God'⁶². Maqhamusela had continued wearing the head-ring, that Zulu symbol of manhood. As a concession to the missionary⁶³ he wore a shirt over his *beshu* (loin-cloth), but no trousers⁶⁴. He defended his stance by referring to the New Testament insight that the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking (Rom 14:17), nor of clothing. His son Mhlongo/Simon had also been enrolled in baptismal classes and later wore the same attire⁶⁵.

Maqhamusela wanted to serve the king and serve God. Serving the king was a matter of some ambivalence. Every regiment was called up to perform royal service periodically, either to fight, to police, to do manual labour in the royal kraal or on the king's fields, to herd his cattle or simply to attend royal festivals⁶⁶. Since to fulfil one's duties, to *khonza* (give vassal service), was a sign of loyalty to the king, a fine was imposed for failure to render that service, and, according to Oftebro, Maqhamusela had already forfeited all his cattle as fines⁶⁷.

There is some ambivalence in Maqhamusela's stated desire to serve the king: it became clear in the hearing before Gawozi that 'he had for some time been trying to relinquish his position in the King's service'⁶⁸. The problem was not only personal, i.e. rendering such service being rather difficult at the age of 70 years, but also theological, in that some of the duties would have been out of keeping with the Christian ethic. Already in the earliest negotiations with Zulu kings missionaries had repeatedly requested that Christians be exempted from certain forms of royal service, and be assigned alternative tasks or be required to pay a tax as a sign of the loyalty to their sovereign⁶⁹. At times this arrangement was followed and assignments suited to the skills which the Christians had learnt on the mission stations were set, e.g. building a Western style house for Cetshwayo, carpentry, etc.⁷⁰. However, Christians were called up irregu-

larly and, in one instance at least, their service was used by the Zulu authorities to subvert the aim: the Zulu authorities paid the Christian workers for their work, which automatically stripped the work of its symbol character *askhonza*. Moreover, different sets of men were not paid the same, which caused fierce jealousy which almost ended in rioting at the mission station⁷¹.

This is the background to Gundersen's note concerning Maqhamusela: 'No royal service has materialized, even while scores of boys and men have been executed for not turning up promptly for such service. He is now safe under our protection and calls himself "our man" and considers himself freed from royal service. Poor man!⁷²

'We are approaching a crisis'

On Oftebro's return from Norway Maqhamusela came under that missionary's care again. In view of the risk to Maqhamusela, Oftebro did not include his name in the register of the baptismal class⁷³. One unconfirmed source even claims that he was not included in one baptismal service owing to the danger to his life⁷⁴.

Maqhamusela often requested to be taken to the king himself, or for the missionary to broach the subject of a dispensation to allow him to be baptised. Maqhamusela had made up his mind: 'If they kill me because I believe, they may do so; the Lord will receive me. Has not Christ died for me? *Po, ny'esabelani*' ('Well, why should I fear?')⁷⁵.

Relations between the king and all the missions were becoming increasingly strained but, when an opportune moment opened up, Oftebro cited a previous exception⁷⁶ and asked for the same leniency towards Maqhamusela⁷⁷. Again, King Cetshwayo was unwilling to commit himself, the lower command structures not being present. When Maqhamusela heard this he was disappointed, and consoled himself in the confidence that, although he had not been baptized, 'God would give him a little place in his kingdom up there'⁷⁸.

In his research Fowler had interviewed Esrom Mtshali, the son of the royal supervisor of the execution, Umbulawa, to hear what the father had told the son⁷⁹. He states that 'it would seem that Chief Gawozi made a formal denouncement of Maqhamusela before the Council of Elders and was told to 'put him away'⁸⁰. Fowler also relates that some Christians who had gone to the local chief's kraal had overheard others speaking about the order to kill Maqhamusela. On their return to the station they advised Maqhamusela to flee, but he refused to do so⁸¹.

The above information gives a glimpse of the dilemma in which King Cetshwayo found himself generally, a dilemma that led Etherington to a partial exoneration of Cetshwayo of harrasing and executing Christians⁸². Although the king might have wanted to preserve the good-will of Oftebro and to refrain from alienating white public opinion further, he had to tighten discipline in the army⁸³ and stand by his previous word, given before the council, the *isikhulu*⁸⁴. One must agree with Hale⁸⁵: 'Cetshwayo's relationship to the missionary endeavours in his kingdom . . . can probably not be reduced to a simple, rational formula'.

Oftebro first reported Maqhamusela's death to fellow missionaries, both Lutheran and Anglican (Robertson). A month after the incident he penned his official report to the mission board in Norway⁸⁶. He begins by relating that on Inyezane, which was a Hermannsburg mission station under Rev F Fröhling, a believer called Joseph had been

killed by an *impi* on 4 March 1877 upon the accusation of having poisoned Zulu women. The executioners had stated that they were doing this on the king's orders.

Oftebro continues his report as follows (translation by Karl Solberg and in part by Edwin Froise):

Just five days later a servant came running to report that Maqhamusela had been killed! When I had returned from Mahlabatini, Maqhamusela was not at home – he had gone to visit the family of one of his brothers-in-law. On the day before his death he returned and attended baptismal instruction as usual. I spoke with him and told him about the outcome of my discussion with the King, requesting his agreement to Maqhamusela's baptism.

He thanked me for telling the King that he was one who loved the Word of God. 'If he now has me killed, I will rejoice in it. I am not afraid. Is it not good to die for Christ's name? Did he not die for me? He will give me a little place in his kingdom up there.'

Incwadi yeJubilee 1944 has it that early in the morning of the next day Maqhamusela was called to his grandmother's homestead, which was at the sub-chief's kraal. He was at morning devotions as usual. After prayers he embraced his son Mhlongo-Ntshingwayo and wept saying, 'Farewell my child, I am going, I am called'. By noon he was on his way to Chief Umjejane's homestead. This source states that at the sub-chief's kraal he found the sub-chief, Jubane Mpungose (Umjejane), the sub-chief's brother (Mgcelu), Nyamalala Zondo and another man, a Swazi called Hwayimbane, all of whom tried to dissuade him from his purpose. He was then told to return home and intercepted by them on the way.

Fowler narrates a different version of the course of events prior to the execution, i.e. that soon after Maqhamusela had left home these four men arrived at his home⁸⁷. Fowler adds the name of a fifth man, Umbulawa, who had been sent by the authorities to witness the execution. When they found neither Maqhamusela nor his sons nor the second wife at home they sent Maqhamusela a message that he was wanted on a hill for a court case, and that when he climbed the hill again Maqhamusela turned into the bushes to pray⁸⁸.

Oftebro's report continues:

When they met him they immediately laid their hands on him in order to bind him. When he asked why they were going to kill him, he was told it was because he believed and wanted to be baptised. He was glad and thanked God, without showing fear.' Fowler adds that his request to be baptized before he was killed was not granted by the executioners⁸⁹. Both state that he was given time to pray. Fowler, possibly citing an early mission bulletin report by the Anglican Rev S. Samuelson (in 'The Mission Field' of October 1877), enumerates that he prayed for himself, 'that God would have mercy upon him and, though he was not baptized, receive him into the Kingdom'. He also prayed for his missionary, his own wives and children, for King Cetshwayo, for his executioners 'and for many Zulus by name. Finally he prayed that Zululand might become a Christian land'⁹⁰.

Oftebro continues:

He then stood up and said, 'Now I am ready; kill me!' – 'Se ngi qedile'⁹¹. The executioners hesitated, not wanting to shoot him. It seemed strange to them to kill a man whose only crime was to believe the Word of God which he had heard. They feared that some evil would happen to them.

Fowler surmises: 'They had come disliking their duty' and listened more and more intently to his prayer⁹². Oftebro merely reports that one of them eventually decided to act; his gun misfired, and he declared that he dare not try again.' Fowler gives further information: Maqhamusela warned the executioners that there would be a heavy thunderstorm, and advised them to run home as fast as they could when they had completed their task. Then Nyamalala Zondo, one of Maqhamusela's relatives, aimed his old-fashioned muzzle-loader at Maqhamusela, but it misfired. Fowler's story continues as follows: 'You, my kinsman, must not slay me,' said the Martyr. Nyamalala refused to shoot again.

'The slayers began to talk excitedly. Why would not the gun go off? Was it safe to kill a man who belonged to Nkulunkulu – the Great-Great-One – and (who) was not suspected of being a wizard? Some evil might come upon them'⁹³. But they dared not return to the king with their task unfinished.

Fowler continues: 'Then the young man, Hwayimbana . . . shot Maqhamusela in the head. A terrible storm broke immediately, the slayers fled for shelter. No one dared to go out in that storm. Umbulawa ran to the desolate home of the Martyr, as the blind wife was his half-sister. He said nothing of what had happened until he was going away next morning'⁹⁴.

Fowler intersperses a note that Nyamalala Zondo was probably responsible for passing on the details of the actual martyrdom. He characterizes Maqhamusela as a man of kindly nature and, in later life, warmly attached to the missionaries personally; sadly, he died unbaptized.

Oftebro and Fowler both report that one of Pastor Oftebro's servants brought the news to the mission station on the morning after the execution. However it is only Fowler who continues that Pastor Oftebro rang the church bell, and with a little company of the faithful, went to the hilltop to bury the martyr's body. It was not there. There was no sign of the body being dragged away by wild beasts, which the people of Eshowe – and particularly Simon (Mhlongo) – affirm had long left the neighbourhood, a claim which was contested by other informants interviewed by Fowler. He continues, 'The Norwegian Christians of Eshowe firmly hold that the LORD buried Maqhamusela as HE buried Moses'⁹⁵. The report in *Incwadi yeJubilee* simply states 'When Oftebro and the Christians arrived on Mpondweni Hill they could not find the body. All was in vain. Even today it is not known what happened to his corpse. It just disappeared'. Neither in his letter to Robertson nor in his official report to the Mission Society does Oftebro mention the unsuccessful search for the body, nor the conclusions drawn by the congregation.

The execution naturally heightened Oftebro's concern for the reputation of the mission among Zulus. He reflects: 'We rejoice that they were unable to accuse him (Maqhamusela) of doing any wrong. He had not left his chief, King, kraal, or Zulu attire. He wore only a shirt, which many Zulus are no longer afraid to do. His only crime

was that he took to heart and believed the Word that spoke about sin and grace... . As far as Maqhamusela is concerned, the Lord has no doubt given him a place with the heavenly hosts (translation by Hale: amongst those that are saved) and not allowed the hope which he expressed to me on the day before his death to go unfulfilled⁹⁶.

Besides the image of mission work to worry Oftebro, there were more immediate concerns: the other Christians on the station. Oftebro reports that Maqhamusela's wife was able to hide, so the executioners did not find her. An unconfirmed report in the NMS bulletin (predating Oftebro's official report) states that she had escaped by lying hidden in the river with only her face above the water⁹⁷. His son, Gideon, who worked for Rev PG Nilsen, was not found by the executioners, nor Simon Mhlongo, who probably fled to Kyllingstad's house, where he worked. Both sons were already attending baptismal classes. They, their mother and perhaps a third child walked⁹⁸ for three nights to escape to Umphumulo, which was in 'English' Natal. Oftebro continues, 'Under these circumstances it is not surprising that our Christians were uneasy. On the following day – a Saturday – a crowd of men from the chief came looking for the wife, claiming that they did not want to kill her, but only to care for her.

'It was said that a whole army had assembled in a chief's kraal nearby. One chap who walked past here had asked suspicious questions of some Zulu boys who worked for us, and fear gained the upper hand. The Zulu boys who worked at the station fled in haste and those who were in the baptismal class fled in haste, too. In the evening all the women and children streamed into our house and filled the kitchen, the girls' bedroom and our lounge. All in all there were more than thirty people. Men and boys gathered to keep watch. They were afraid that the army, which they had heard had gathered at the chief's kraal, would raid the station. We ourselves were quite at ease and thought they had been scared without reason. The next morning passed peacefully and everyone did his normal work until we assembled in the chapel for worship.'⁹⁹

Every night a little group of Christians fled across the Tugela until the station was virtually deserted. All the NMS missionaries, not only those in Eshowe, felt extremely threatened, and upon advice from Shepstone, delivered by Fynney, left their stations for Natal¹⁰⁰. The missionaries returned after a few weeks, only to flee once again, just before the outbreak of the Anglo-Zulu War. In January 1879 Eshowe mission station was turned into headquarters for a column of the British army, fortified, besieged, relieved by Lord Chelmsford, abandoned, and then destroyed by the Zulus¹⁰¹. The congregation of believers had been dispersed, and with it the matrix of Christian worship and testimony to the Zulus.

Even before peace had been formally signed in September 1880 Oftebro and others were back on their stations, and welcomed by whoever was left of the local community¹⁰². By 1881 some of the Christians had also returned from Natal, among them Maqhamusela's second wife and two sons, all of whom were baptised in Eshowe and given the names Rebecca, Simon and Gideon¹⁰³. Their presence among the people around Eshowe must have been a constant reminder of the man who had testified to Christ so clearly and courageously.

Early commemoration of Maqhamusela

Oftebro¹⁰⁴ quotes unnamed persons as saying at the time, 'He died keeping Sunday (present writer: holding service); he prayed for all of us, and did not show the slightest

fear.' Fowler claims that these words were 'the comment of the slayers'¹⁰⁵. Whatever may have been the case, this obituary is a forceful praise song (*isibongo*) to 'the first person in our (i.e. the Norwegian) Zulu mission to give up his life for the sake of his faith'¹⁰⁶.

However, in Oftebro's account there is no mention of anything that would have made Maqhamusela gain a stature that is out of the ordinary, as we find in Fowler. Oftebro does not mention Maqhamusela's Christ-like forgiveness for his executioners in alerting them to the danger of a storm or of his concern for the future mental health of his relative whose first shot had misfired. Finally he does not mention that not even burial was possible as the body had disappeared and could not be found in a week of searching.

Oftebro and all the official Lutheran publications until Stavem's *The Norwegian Mission Society* of 1918 refrained from calling him 'martyr'. Instead, we find Oftebro's laborious formulation cited above, i.e. that Maqhamusela was 'the first person to give up his life for the sake of the gospel'. In contrast, both Anglican missionary colleagues, Robertson¹⁰⁷ and Samuelson¹⁰⁸ used the term or implied it. It seems, then, that immediately after the death, all hints of commemorating Maqhamusela as a martyr for the Christian faith were deliberately cut short among the Lutherans. One must ask why Lutherans were inhibited on this score.

For one thing this denomination had no tradition of regularly remembering and celebrating outstanding Christians in worship services. According to Kolb¹⁰⁹ Luther had taken a firm stand against calling upon the saints for heavenly intercession and earthly miraculous powers; he condemned it as idolatrous as it takes glory away from God ('Open letter to the German Nobility' and 'On good works'). Also, it was seen to conflict with justification by faith in the merits of Christ. In this conviction the Lutheran liturgical calendar was purged of all saints' days, making no difference between invocation of saints and thanksgiving and edification by them. Luther saw saints not as sinless persons to whom miracles could be ascribed; they are all those who in their word and life 'had announced and pronounced God's saving power in his Word throughout Christian history'¹¹⁰.

However, once Lutherans had been martyred for confessing the reformation faith there was a re-think. When he received the news that two fellow monks had been burned on 1 July 1523 for adhering to his teaching, Luther composed his first hymn in a mood of thanksgiving and defiance. As had been the case with martyrs and saints before them, they had encouraged others, set an example and vindicated the Word by their God-given courage. Subsequently several 'Fathers' Lives' were written by Lutherans for general edification and polemical purposes. However, latitude for liturgical thanksgiving for saints was feared as it would open the door to previous abuse; it was therefore quashed.

The missionaries of this denomination therefore had no liturgical tradition to accommodate public and regular thanksgiving for a martyr. Even calling a person who had died for the faith by that name might be suspect.

A second factor that probably led to muzzling commemoration of Maqhamusela liturgically, or even applying the title 'martyr', was the fear that veneration of him might easily slip into the traditional African ancestor cult, which the Lutheran missionaries rejected for the same arguments as those brought against the invocation of saints.

In the third place, Oftebro and other Lutheran missionaries were keenly aware of the fact that the Governor of the Cape Colony, Sir Bartle Frere, was eager to find reasons for going to war with King Cetshwayo, as explained earlier. For the war propaganda a Zulu Christian martyr, murdered by a non-believing Zulu king, would have been a most welcome argument to justify all-out war.

A situation of singular ambivalence resulted. On the one hand Oftebro, and most other missionaries in Zululand, were of the opinion that 'some form of British overrule was a precondition for freedom of religion', and this again had 'proved to be absolutely necessary for mission work to be able to proceed'¹¹¹. Oftebro had therefore seen a need for 'material and political humiliation' of the Zulu nation¹¹², and consequently the joint letter of 10 October 1877 from Norwegian, Anglican and Hermannsburg missionaries to Frere numerates details of executions of Christians without a court case having been held. The missionaries even supplied maps and provided information to the British Commander-in-chief¹¹³. The war seemed to be a necessary although very saddening outcome, for which, according to Hernaes, the NMS missionaries, among others, had provided a pretext¹¹⁴. In truth, Oftebro's son assisted British soldiers to find the fleeing King Cetshwayo, a very painful moment for both. It is significant that even the 'political opposition' among the missionaries, e.g. the Bishops Colenso and Schreuder, accepted the need for dismantling the Zulu regimental system, although they campaigned that this might happen without bloodshed¹¹⁵.

However, other considerations stood in tension with the above. While Frere was fired with colonialist visions, the missionaries were motivated by the zeal to preach the gospel to a people whom they loved and considered oppressed. They wanted to be able to return to Zululand as soon as order was restored. The Norwegians were therefore careful not to smear the names of the Zulu authorities. In the terminology of martyr traditions, e.g. the book of Revelation, Zulu authorities would be termed the Anti-Christ or servants of Satan if Maqhamusela were to be popularized as a martyr. The present writer does not accept Etherington's formulation that the NMS missionaries wanted to cripple 'the anti-Christian forces'¹¹⁶; the present writer has not found one instance of such pejorative naming of the Zulus in the material at her disposal. She concludes that Oftebro did not offer this instrument of holy warfare to the colonial authorities. In comparison, the more restrained formulation by Maylam sounds to her more accurate: Frere 'made political capital out of alleged Zulu persecutions of Christian missionaries and converts'¹¹⁷. Of course, the intricacy of the missionary's motivation made no difference to the fact that the information had been supplied and could be made use of by Frere; that outcome cannot be denied.

The fourth factor militating against regular and public commemoration of Maqhamusela among the Christians of the Norwegian Mission after the event was the large-scale displacement of people, the disruption of economic activity, and the plundering of resources by waves of violence sweeping through Zululand¹¹⁸ after the Anglo-Zulu War and the ensuing settlement. The situation afforded no room for the kind of historical reflection that might have led to some form of public recognition of Maqhamusela.

To recapitulate, there was no early commemoration of Maqhamusela. The social turmoil in the wake of the 1879 war undercut communal reflections of this kind. Norwegian Lutherans did not pronounce Maqhamusela a Christian martyr for various reasons.

Neither did Rev Oftebro report the loss of Maqhamusela's corpse, Maqhamusela warning his executioners of the impending storm and its breaking. Nor did he recount Maqhamusela's concern for his relative's peace of mind when he enjoined him as member of the execution squad not to shoot, as narrated by Fowler. These three items portray Maqhamusela as extra-ordinary, in fact, as saintly. If they have an historical basis, their omission from Oftebro's report may have curtailed public remembrance for the same reason as withholding the martyr title. But that assumes that Fowler's report is historically accurate.

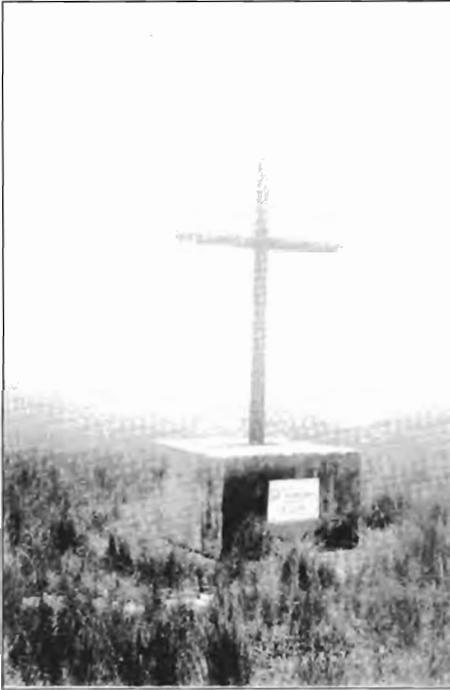
Historical dependability of Fowler's report

The historical dependability of Fowler's version cannot simply be taken for granted. One must take seriously the possibility that those three items enhancing the stature of Maqhamusela are the embellishment of the congregation, the concrete expression of the veneration in which they held Maqhamusela, in terms of which the remembered story was reported to Fowler. The Zulu culture lacked a critical concept of scientific verifiability for what is stated to be fact. Coupled with the tradition of image-laden reports on the lives of great persons (as in the *izibongo* of chiefs), congregational origin of these three items is not improbable. Such legendary outcrops are not unusual in the history of the church either. Some proof would have to be found before accepting these items as more than the later perception and interpretation of the event.

I could not find proof for the historical accuracy of the three above-mentioned items, nor proof against it. According to the archivist of the Norwegian Mission Society, Oftebro did not keep a diary, or it has been lost. No letters from or to NMS missionaries in this period can be traced in their archives. In South Africa no contemporary sources such as Magema Fuze, Cornelius Vijn or Fynney offer proof for or against. The only circumstantial confirmation I could find is notices in newspapers that the weather in northern Natal had been inclement to the extreme on the days around 9 March 1877. Thus the *Times of Natal* of 14 March 1877 states: 'A terrific hailstorm has destroyed all the mealie and pumpkin crop in the north of Zululand and people on the so called disputed territory are fearing a famine.' (See also the *Natal Colonist* of 20 March 1877, the *Natal Witness* of 13 March 1877, and the *Natal Mercury* of 13 March 1877). While not conclusive, it is noteworthy that the story that the missionaries passed on to the younger generation in the nineteen thirties was the Fowler version, as shown by my interviews with descendants of these missionaries such as Ms Ingrid Gorven (nee Rodseth), Ms Levang (nee Froise) and Mr and Ms Karl Solberg. With such slender proof the matter will have to remain inconclusive for the present.

Later commemoration of Maqhamusela

With Oftebro's master text so arid of impetus for commemoration it is amazing that there was informal remembering of Maqhamusela: he remained in the thoughts and everyday conversation of the people of Eshowe, and not only as a player in an episode: within the value system of the Zulu culture he had the making of a hero due to the fearlessness with which he faced death and his concern for the people to whom he belonged ('He prayed for us all', in both Oftebro and Fowler). He was also remembered among the whites who associated with the missionary families. Thus the Norwegian youth who came to Eshowe once a year for a youth camp in the nineteen twenties and



*Maqhamusela's monument on
Mpolweni Hill*

thirties¹¹⁹ would regularly walk to the cross and hear the story. Mention of that cross now needs to be elaborated.

As the political restructuring to achieve the Union of South Africa took shape and the capitalization of its economy came to be accepted, relative calm returned to Zululand. In 1926 a small group of Eshowe congregation members and a missionary formed a committee to collect funds to set up a memorial to Maqhamusela and to the grace which God had given him. The committee was chaired by Mr K.S. Zungu; Mr McJ. Mpanza was the secretary, Rev L.O. Aadnesgaard the treasurer, and Rev M.J. Mpanza, Ms D.J. Zulu, Ms K.J. Ntuli and teacher M.D. Mkhize were members¹²⁰.

Rev S. Solberg (in charge of Eshowe mission station at the time) enthusiastically designed a grand plan for a monument on Mpolweni Hill, the elevation close to the place where the execution had taken place. A huge boulder was to be set up (alternately 1 huge and 4 smaller stones) with a cross

on top, which would be visible for miles away¹²¹. This turned out to be too expensive in the economic depression of the early thirties. In 1939 private contributions, also from members of other denominations, made it possible to erect a humble concrete cross. A marble plate bore the inscription: '*Maqhamusela Kanyile wafela ukukolwa kuKristu kona lapa 9.3.1877*' (At this place Maqhamusela Khanyile died before his time for believing in Christ).

In the meanwhile Anglican interest in Maqhamusela had been rekindled and in 1935 Father A.J. Fowler of the Society of the Sacred Mission began to research Maqhamusela's life. He and the Lutheran missionary at Eshowe station, Rev PA Rodseth, interviewed different persons who had been connected with Maqhamusela or been given information by such people¹²². In this way Fowler managed to gain information which was not contained in Oftebro's reports. His edited findings were published in *The South African Church Weekly Newspaper* of 3 March 1937, followed by an appeal for funds for the monument by Rev Rodseth and a picture of the aged Simon Mhlongo in the same publication the following week. The sketch of Maqhamusela's life which is found in *Incwadi yeJubilee*¹²³ was based on Fowler's report. However, devotional visits to the cross remained irregular.

In 1951 the Lutheran Bible School at Eshowe was given Maqhamusela's name²⁴, a mark that he was remembered. Students and staff of both this institution and of the (Lutheran) Teacher Training College in Eshowe would be given information on the man and visit the cross repeatedly (cf. photo of open-air meeting at the cross in Prospectus of Maqhamusela Bible School, 1951). However, there was no formal commemoration within

the Lutheran church, although the liturgical calendars of the Norwegian Lutherans and, later, the Co-operating Missions and, even later, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa gave an opportunity for it on All Saints or on Martyrs' Day (Feast of Stephen).

By the late 1970s the concrete cross was in bad shape. The Church of the Province of South Africa



The present condition of the marble plate on the monument

Cathedral Parish called together the Christian churches in Eshowe to address social responsibility jointly, and they did this with vigour. Remembering 'our own Zulu martyr, Maqhamusela Khanyile'¹²⁵, they offered the Lutherans help to maintain the site of the cross, and finally collected funds to set up the new cross in 1981. The marble slab of the first cross with its inscription was built into the new base, and an interdenominational service was held at its unveiling on 8 3 March 1981. At present (2000) the cross is named in the Eshowe tourist brochure and is visited by sightseers; a booklet on Maqhamusela by Prof A. Cubbin is on sale at the Eshowe Museum.

From about 1974 onwards one of the parishes in ELCSA (Newcastle) has made 9 March a day of thanksgiving for Maqhamusela, using a simple liturgy. In the 1993 liturgical calendar of the Church of the Province of South Africa 9 March is dedicated to 'Maqhamusela ... an African catechumen of the Lutheran Church in the nineteenth century'¹²⁶. The question remains: when and how do we as Christians thank God for his grace in Maqhamusela, and for the man's persuasive testimony to Christ? That testimony is echoed in those words with which the local community summed up his death: 'He died keeping Sunday (present writer: holding service); he prayed for all of us, and did not show the slightest fear'¹²⁷.

Conclusion

One purpose of research such as that discussed above is to help Christian communities to live in loyalty to one another by acknowledging that as Christians we do not only have a common Lord but also a common history. An important aspect of acknowledging this common history is the need to become reconciled to our missionary history with its strengths but also its undoubted weaknesses and blindnesses.

However, the history of Christianity in our country is only in part missionary; also, it is the story of black Christians. 'Growth, expansion and development of Christianity south of the Sahara has depended on, and been distinctly molded by African initiatives'¹²⁸. Maqhamusela's story is part of that common, often hidden history.

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