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BRIEF NOTES ON THE LIFE OF THE LATE REV BASIL CECIL MANNING

As the youngest of 11 siblings, Rev Manning was born in Cape Town on 7 July 1942. He did not spend much of his formative life in Athlone because he soon moved with his parents to Newclare, Johannesburg, in 1945 and grew up in Hamilton Street.

Growing up under the strict guidance of a religious family, he worshipped at the Congregational Church opposite ABC, and later at Founders Memorial Church.

Newclare Primary School was where he did his Sub-A to Standard 5, after which he moved to William Hills High School in Benoni where he attended his classes from Standard 6 to 10. His Blackness was revealed to him the hard way in that daily train journey from Newclare to Benoni. The racial segregation on the train was the microcosm of the apartheid spatial development in the image of the Group Areas Act. The train was his first conscious experience with apartheid, or white supremacy in motion. Everything was segregated on racial terms right from the ticket sales to the coaches and their different standards. There was no illusion or confusion about the apartheid fact that he was not welcome in the "whites only" places because he could never be white. That political reality made him to embrace his identity as nothing else but Black.

Though the schooling system was designed to under-educate the Black child, unintended circumstances prevailed. Some of the politically conscious teachers at Williams Hill High used the school education to enlighten the learners about their true identity and political conditions. Rev Manning was the beneficiary of these anti-regime sentiments.

His first job was as a bookkeeper at Solly's Clothing in Delvers Street, Johannesburg. He also worked at Fashion Trade Suppliers for a year. However, he carried on with his pursuit of education and enrolled for teacher training at Rand College of Education. After completion of his studies, he worked as a school teacher at Noordgesig Secondary School, and later at a primary school in Heidelberg and Newtown Primary School.

He would later pay more attention to his spiritual calling and served as a Sunday School Teacher. Subsequently, he took up a position as the Secretary of the Founders Memorial Church. He went on to study at the Theological Seminary in Alice in the Eastern Cape. He was ordained as a Priest at the Founders Memorial Church in January 1968.

It was during his studies at the Theological Seminary that he became increasingly involved in the activities of the University Christian Movement (UCM), for which he served in the position as the Secretary. It is in the UCM where he met and led with his Comrades like Sabelo Ntwasa, Steve Biko, Madibeng Chris Mokoditsoa, Barney Pitso, Mokhele Motlhabi and others.

The UCM was the spiritual foundation from which the Black students would review their participation in multiracial organisations like the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) and proceed to form the South African Students Organisation (SASO) - the pioneer organisation of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). The UCM Black Caucus played a pivotal role in this regard. Of course, Rev Manning was among this conscious lot. As a matter of historical fact, that constructive initiative of political and intellectual independence placed Rev Manning among the Founders of the BCM and the foremost theoreticians of the BC philosophy.

It is the fearless and selfless efforts of revolutionaries like Rev Manning that the people were able to emerge from the political doldrums or political lull that followed the banning of the older liberation organisations like the ANC and the PAC. It is under the overall leadership of the political activists like Rev Manning that every segment of the Black community was revisited and revived under organisations like SASO, NAYO, UBJ, BAWU and many others.

The 1972 Workers' General Strike, the defiant Viva Frelimo Rallies and the June 16 Uprising owe their fermentation to the political brewing that was worked out by the likes of Rev Manning under dangerous circumstances.

The re-ignition of the revolutionary fires exposed Rev Manning to the spotlight of the apartheid Security Police. He left the country in August 1968. The World Council of Churches offered him a scholarship to study at Kings College London for a Masters of Theology.

He remained in the United Kingdom from 1968 to 1982. During that period, he became active in the Anti-Apartheid Movement as the Executive Secretary under the auspices of the London Borough of Lewisham.

Of cardinal importance for the intensification of the struggle, Rev Manning played an instrumental role in coordinating and consolidating the BCM organisations in exile. Those efforts culminated in the formation and launch of the exiled Black Consciousness Movement of Azania (BCMA) in London on 12 April 1980. Rev Manning was trusted to be the inaugural International Chairperson of the BCMA. That very same conference took a resolution to establish the Azanian National Liberation Army (AZANLA) as the continuation and consolidation of the earlier efforts by the Azanian People's Liberation Front (APLF) or the Bokwe Group, as it was commonly known.

AZANLA is part of the liberation armies that worked hard to form the South African National Military Veterans Association. In accordance with the law in the democratic dispensation, it has since been reconstituted into the AZANLAMVA.

From 1982 to 1991, Rev Manning moved to Botswana and continued with his political activities, while he also served as the Principal of Kgolagano College of Theological Education. During the same time, he was heavily involved in community development work in the rural areas of Botswana. He returned to South Africa in 1993 and joined AZAPO as a political platform to continue his liberatory activities inside the country. At the time of his falling, he was a Member of AZAPO Central Committee as the Guest of the President.

As an intellectual and activist of Black Theology, Rev Manning never sought to separate spirituality from politics. Accordingly, in 1993 he served as the President of United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) and a member of the Centre Against Racism and Against Sexism (CARAS) Trust.

Sadly, Rev Basil Manning transitioned on Saturday, 21 October 2023 at the age of 81.