

18 Brookdale Way
Hilton 3245
25 August, 1994

Dear Sheila,

Pat told me about Bill's going when I got back from the Bethel Clinic on Tuesday night. Thank you for letting us know so promptly. I still have the copy of his autobiography with me and felt that apart from the chapters he wrote after his return from Italy, he had not done himself justice. It will take time to assess what his real significance has been in SA church history. Merely being the first SA born bishop, a fact on which the press has seized with stultifying condescension, is not in itself all that significant. Much more remarkable is how he responded to God's leading throughout his life from its spiritually improbable beginnings in theosophy to the marvellous ways God used him to bless so many, like ourselves. Again and again Bill seems to have been put into a position, then grown into it so that he and the position were transformed.

Ever since I stood in awe of you as the SCA travelling secretary ('She that cometh...') it came as a great surprise to discover that your father disapproved of both priests and schoolmasters as 'parasites'. Was he that much of an auto-didact? He clearly was a better judge of bulls than Bills. I thought that Bill's close association with Guy Butler must have won him some credit in that part of the world, but possibly poets, who usually are a part of 'clerisy', were only a superior species of parasite.

One of my first encounters was playing tennis at St Paul's when as the Pete Sampras of the Dunlop Maxply he was firing aces at us. This was awesome enough, but his extra ten years stretched the gap between us still further, and made him about five student generations older. Was he always older than his years?

Years later we served together on the SCA (EMW) National Committee. This brought me into contact with Bob Laburn, another staunch senior friend. A good deal of our agenda in those days seemed to be concerned with Western Cape orthodoxy compared with the chaotic pluralism of Natal. In the middle of all this came his election to Bloemfontein. Apart from the single contact at Kenton, ('We walk straight so you'd better get out of the way', and the wonderful time fishing from your father's dinghy) we did not hear much about your Bloem activities until its surprising end: that instead of ascending the episcopal ladder, Bill took 'Irish promotion' by becoming the General Secretary of the fledgling SACC. Presbyterians suspect that the episcopate has its origins in controlling the money supply and this post set Bill well on the way to some high post in the burgeoning ecumenical bureaucracy. (Bishop Wand of London was alledged to have grumbled that the trouble with the WCC was that it had 'too

much German theology, too much American money and too much Dutch bureaucracy'.)

I know that later Bill did not rate his work at the SACC very highly. In retrospect, he judged it had been based on the wrong assumptions: as if the strongholds of apartheid could be cast down apart from the Holy Spirit. Perhaps the 'Message to the people of South Africa' epitomized this futility. We worked on discussions and drafts for for a long time. Unequal yoking with the Christian Institute which had access to more external funds, and correspondingly was more subject to external pressures setting its agenda, engendered tension with the SACC which was after all, was nominally the representative of the churches but whose constituency hardly supported it enthusiastically. Bill showed me a WCC document on racism, the latest fashion in sins, that seemed to require a response. After naming racism as the sin of our times, the document then made certain suggestions about how it might be combatted. While the sin named might be racism, the analysis and remedy were Marxist: 'one size fits all'. Much to their chagrin, Reinhold Niebuhr lumped liberals and Marxists together as being two species of utopians: the one 'hard-shell', the other 'soft-shell'. Jesus did likewise when he lumped Pharisees and Herodians together as 'hypocrites'. (We don't realize how obvious the family likeness of sinners is, and will repudiate violently any resemblance between his mortal sin and my peccadillo.)

To me it still seems strange that after taking so much time and trouble in thrashing out a statement, in the end, such an important pronouncement as the 'Message' set out to be should have been left to three of us (the other two were Ben Englebrecht, then editor of 'Pro Veritate' and John Davies, then Wits Anglican chaplain). The three soon became one: John wrote the final draft. Single authorship meant a prophetic trumpet rather than a committee playing tissue paper and comb.

Clearly the description of apartheid as a 'heresy' stung John Vorster, the Prime Minister, and in his surly and bullying manner, he warned clergy not to meddle in politics. Bill realized that a shouting match would get nowhere: the churches would have to formulate 'orthopraxy' as well 'orthodoxy'. So SPROCAS was born. Thus more than 20 years ago under Bill's leadership, six teams were mobilized and the first drafts written. By 1976, the SACC had largely come to reflected the interests of the black majority, which is why so many white Christians suspected so much of its work.

I think Bill realized his powerlessness as General Secretary, even if he attributed that powerlessness to structural defects in the SACC rather than to the lack in his own spiritual life of the Spirit's infilling. The move to Grahamstown offered a more 'comfortable' existence: to be in the centre of power in one

church as bishop of a dioceses was easier than being marginalized by them all. But Barchester was not to be for long.

For me the greatest change in Bill after his new experience of the Spirit was personal, yet because it dealt at such depths in him, it affected everything else he did in the church structures in which he lived, moved and had his being. His intimidating hauteur gave way to a new quality of authority which because gracious did not oppress with superiority. He had new warmth; instead of cynical wit, genuine humour with himself often its butt. At the Durban Congress on Mission and Evangelism (at which I had been appointed officially as one of the four 'prophets') I found him praying one morning in the chapel and asked him to pray with me and for me because I'd reached the end of my tether: to be scheduled to speak at a certain time, to be under orders not to prepare before hand, but to listen to what the Lord might say during the congress was terrifying to someone still concerned about the image he projected. (We are formed to reflect the image of God and we worry about the image we are projecting of ourselves: how absurd can we get?) But I wept, and he comforted and interceded. He put his arms around me - something I could never have imagined happening before: perhaps we were both changing: he to reach out and me to receive bodily. It is an almost sacramental memory: 'My body for you'.)

I also recall an evening at Bishopsbourne where when Patricia was struggling to find some explanation of what had been happening to her ('was this really the Spirit at work in a new way?') he called me over and asked me to join him in praying for her.

Then 'all too soon' his translation to Capetown. Once again all the irrelevant nonsense of 'the first SA born Archbishop', while those of us who were not Anglicans wondered if the electoral college knew what it was doing, but were delighted that they had been led that way. Here was new hope that his church might take the Lord's priority of unity in a new way and be freed from the traditions that kept us apart and sanctified into authentically holy living.

In the past couple of years I have read the biographies of Michael Ramsey and Robert Runcie. Both suggest that the position is impossible because of the multitude of conflicting expectations. The sheer number of times he is expected to 'say something' almost guarantees that what he (or his chaplains) cobble together cannot be prophetic. The world honours him as one of their own so he cannot be too disturbing unless he speaks heretically. Then it cheers with relief that doctrine doesn't really matter as long as we are all jolly good fellows.

Again, however much his actions as archbishop may have disquieted church and world, nothing he did in his tenure was as disturbing as his decision to retire early to 'do the proper work of a

bishop'. Weren't the ceremonial occasions the real work of a bishop? Did the office not make him the principal courtier who took precedence over those with real power?

Yet as spiritual power increased, ecclesiastical power seemed to diminish. His spell at the SACC had introduced him to structural ecumenicity; released from the archbishopric he seemed to have led a new spiritual ecumenicity: 'anyone who is of the truth, hears my voice'. It is only too easy to wax sentimental over 'spiritual' unity and avoid the awkward implications of the incarnation, some of which are structural. But he never did this. It seems to me that his last struggle showed how seriously he took the challenge to the institutions of the church: its doctrine, its structures and above all its practices. I hope that the letters to the church he sent out from time to time, will be published together as a volume so that they will be accessible as a whole.

We came to you in Grahamstown because we were your friends, and were distressed at what seemed to us to be attempts to ensure that what Bill had received would not be transmitted: the reverse of Paul's passing on to the church at Corinth what he had received from the Lord. We wanted to pray with you and for you. Yet so often this desire to be blessing flowed the other way: we received from you. For that we were very grateful.

It was painful to see how frail he had become when we saw him earlier in the year, and even more distressing to learn that he was no longer able to read easily or to celebrate. The psalmist prays that the Lord will not leave him in old age, and we're beginning to understand something of why he should pray like that.

You will be surrounded with well-wishers, comforters and skilled advisers: the only counsel I would offer (unasked) is that you do nothing in a hurry. Move only when you are sure that the pillar and cloud beckon you elsewhere.

Meanwhile we shall pray for you and yours, and do so with joy and thanksgiving for a life that so signally enriched us. We shall pray above all that your strength may be renewed so that indeed you will walk and not faint.

With love and thanks,

Calvin