

# The Conferment of Martyrdom: Retracing Bernard Mzeki's Life from his Formative Years in the History of the Anglican Church in Zimbabwe until his Death (1890–2013)

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## Abstract

The conferment of martyrdom is a thorn in the flesh in the Anglican Church today. Bernard Mzeki has been commemorated annually since the late 1930s as a martyr in the Anglican Church of Zimbabwe. This is because Mzeki died a mysterious death on 18 June 1896 during the period of the first War of Liberation (*Chimurenga*) in Zimbabwe. Although there are other factors that might have contributed to the death of Mzeki, the church strongly believes that he died for his Christian faith. Whilst it is a fact that the Church of the Province of Central Africa does not have official, written criteria to confer martyr status, the mystics surrounding the death of Mzeki—as documented by Farrant (1966) and Broderick (1953)—authenticated his martyr status. In this regard, the martyrdom of Mzeki remained unique from the 1940s during the bishopric of William Paget, who accepted the unwritten “bottom-to-top” procedure in canonising his martyrdom. It is interesting to note that from the 1990s the church in Zimbabwe has had figures like Rev. Peter Wagner and Mrs Mandeya, who were presumed to have died for their faith, but were not recognised as martyrs. In the same period, Zimbabwean Bishops like Ishmael Mukwanda and others were advocating for an official, written procedure to canonise them. It is based on the above analysis that this article will examine the role played by Mzeki in the strengthening of the Anglican faith in Zimbabwe.

**Keywords:** Anglican Church of Zimbabwe (ACZ); Bernard Mzeki; conferment; canonisation; Church of the Province of Central Africa (CPCA); martyrdom



## **Introduction**

The formative history of the Anglican Church in Zimbabwe (hereafter ACZ) is incomplete without mentioning the well-known martyr, Bernard Mzeki. His martyrdom is recognised in the lectionary of the Anglican Communion worldwide. He is celebrated and venerated annually in the ACZ, in the Church of the Province of Central Africa (hereafter CPCA) and in the Anglican Communion worldwide. Many shrines, institutions and objects have been named after him all over the Anglican Communion as a way of showing his importance and position in the spirituality of the Anglican Church. While his history and life have attracted numerous researchers as they seek to examine the reasons behind his death, his martyrdom remains a mystery in today's ACZ. Therefore, the intention of this article is to explore Mzeki's ministry in Mashonaland, Zimbabwe, and to critically look at the account of his mysterious death that took place on 18 June 1896. In addition, this work explores the authenticity of Mzeki's martyrdom conferment, considering the political, socio-religious and economic context of the late eighteenth century that may have contributed to his demise. Finally, the article recounts the historical role he played in the spirituality of the ACZ.

## **Martyrdom**

It is important to clarify the meaning of the word martyrdom in its original and contemporary context. This is important because the definition shall be used as a precursor and parameter to the mysterious death of Mzeki. Generally, a martyr in the Greek word *martus*, means witness—a person who testified his faith to death. It should be pointed out that (before the Greek martyrs) the apostles in the early centuries faced heavy persecutions until they suffered death for their convictions and faith. During this period, the term *martus* came to be used in the sense of a witness of Christ who suffered the penalty of death because of his/her faith. Hence, martyrs were Christians who suffered the extreme penalty of death upon refusing to deny their faith in God. In further setting the parameters, the definition and the laid down foundation of the theology of martyrdom will be presented below in order to have a scholarly understanding of martyrdom versus the death of Mzeki. This will be done by tracing the technical terminology on the basis of the etymological and semantic use of the term *μάρτυς*, which was transformed from its original meaning “witness” to the technical term for a Christian martyr. The martyrdom of Polycarp is one of the Christian martyrs who experienced a very special kind of death, one that was public and which showed witness to the martyr's ultimate offering on God's altar.

## **Anglican Conceptualisation of Martyrdom**

In Anglicanism, the process is not canonised as it was done in the Roman Catholic Church. The Anglican Communion, and specifically the ACZ, commemorates individuals who would have died as the result of their Christian faith (Cross and Livingstone 1997, 1444). The approach is an informal bottom-up process of recognising martyrs. Firstly, it begins at the local level, as a particular community remembers the individual and venerates him/her. As time goes by, the commemoration spreads and is adopted by other parishes in other places. Eventually, the entire national church officially recognises the martyr, giving him/her his own patronal day to be remembered throughout the country generally. The feast day corresponds

to the day of death, the day when the martyr entered into glory. Each province of the Anglican Communion has its own unofficial way of celebrating martyrs, though they all tend to share a common set of ancient saints from the Roman Catholic Church derived from the calendar and included in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, since the Anglican Church is a Protestant Church which emerged from the Roman Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation.

The Lambeth Conference of 1958 (a special meeting held every 10 years in the Anglican Communion by all the bishops, chaired by the Archbishop of Canterbury), confirmed what is mentioned above, namely that those martyrs who were recognised by the Roman Catholic Church before the tenth century and since the break with Rome in the sixteenth century, are generally still considered to be saints and martyrs in the Anglican Church. The Lambeth Conference added heroes and heroines to be commemorated, whom they referred to as those holy people whom the church synod or an individual church praised as having had special benevolence who have lived and died since the split with Rome. Such muted terms are considered to be a reversion to a more simple and cautious doctrine which emphasised the empowerment and autonomy of all members and components of the church. It must be stated that in the Church of England, King Charles I of England was the only person to have been treated as a new saint and not a martyr by some Anglicans, following the English Reformation. He was included briefly in a calendar of the *Book of Common Prayer*. This celebration was, however, considered neither universal nor official in the Anglican Communion worldwide. Many Anglican provinces listed him as a martyr and not a saint, or as neither, especially provinces in Africa. This means that the Anglican Communion did not have and still does not have a system or a liturgy to canonise, acknowledge or confer martyrdom.

The paramount questions raised are: Is Mzeki a martyr when compared with the martyrs of the first centuries of the church and by identity and semantics or etymology? Can Mzeki's martyrdom be identified with that of early martyrs like Perpetua and others? It is of significance to mention that the Roman Catholic Church has had a process of canonising martyrs from its earliest times. Hence, to understand the martyrdom of Mzeki, it is important to retrace his brief background history and his ministry in the new Diocese of Mashonaland, Zimbabwe. Furthermore, it is important to look critically at his mysterious death in the mid-1890s, the context of which made him recognised as a martyr in the ACZ, CPCA and in the Anglican Communion worldwide about 40 years later; and to see whether it conforms to martyrdom.

### **Background History of Mzeki's Early Life until he came to Zimbabwe.**

Mzeki was born in Mozambique at the bay of Inhambane, which lies between Lourenço Marques/Maputo and Beira. This place is currently under the Anglican Diocese of Lebombo. His date of birth is considered to be about 1861, if scholarship considered that he was 35 years old at the time of his martyrdom on 18 June 1896. Rev. Gowera, a nephew of the third generation of the family of Mzeki, presents his real name (Gowera 2010). She said that the

real name of Bernard Mzeki was Mamiyeri Guambe Mitseka, who was born on 8 March 1861. She argued that for Bernard to be called Mzeki was the result of failure by the English to pronounce his surname well. During an interview (Gowera 18/06/2016) she informed the author that Mzeki was the fifth child out of eight. He spoke Chopi and Portuguese. Musodza (2011) argues that Mzeki was not his surname per se. In fact, it was his father's first name. It was customary in some parts of Mozambique to give the father's name to the child. For most Mozambicans, the middle name was always the father's name.

Mzeki grew up in a village where he learnt all the survival skills and all the customs of the Gwambeni people. His initial encounter with white people was in his village where he learned that there was a white man who had opened a store. Mzeki had an opportunity to work for him briefly as a storekeeper. Musodza suggests that this European man may have been a Portuguese, since Mozambique was a Portuguese colony during that time. When one considers the fact that when Mzeki arrived in Cape Town at a tender age—a journey financed by selling a horse—one of the languages that he spoke fluently was Portuguese, it is quite possible that he may have learnt the language from this Portuguese man (Musodza 2008, 11).

Farrant states that once Mzeki arrived in South Africa, he was fortunate to find employment at the age of 12–14 as a house servant and gardener at the home of an English family in Rondebosch, Cape Town (Farrant 1966, 9). Farrant (1966) acknowledges that he was too young to be considered for adult employment. Was this not child abuse, one may ask? Racism and cheap labour were at play here. Kawadza (2010) is very specific here: “Bernard Mzeki found work in Rondebosch working for a businessman as a houseboy. Cecil John Rhodes also stayed on the hill slopes of Rondebosch” (Kawadza 2010, 2). Farrant (1966) writes that Mzeki proved to be an exceptionally faithful, obedient and trusted servant. It was during this period in Rondebosch that Mzeki first came into contact with missionary work done by the Cowley Fathers at St Philip's in Zonnebloem. This was a religious community of dedicated men. Farrant (1966) claims that Mzeki was drawn to become interested in knowing more about God. He enrolled at the night school, which was being administered by Fraulein von Bloemberg. He loved school and made tremendous progress in Western education. When he was allowed to join the scripture class, Fraulein commented that “... the young man was suddenly quite different. He always listened with glowing eyes, drinking in every word as if a world, so far unimagined, was coming into existence before his spirit” (Farrant 1966, 58). Mzeki was taught that God loved and cared for him. He responded: “This is something that I have not known. Nobody has ever told me this. I ought to have done something for God, working for him and serving him, if he cares for me so much. Do tell Him, *Inkosazana*, that I am very sorry that I have not done anything for Him, yet, but I didn't know about Him at all” (Farrant 1966, 23).

Mzeki's desire for God grew noticeably. Therefore, he started attending baptismal class for a year and on 7 March 1886, at the Feast of St Perpetua and her Companions, Mzeki and six of his indigenous colleagues were baptised by Father Puller, with Fraulein, the Baroness, a German lady worker, becoming their godmother. As he could not kneel in the immersion font because of his short stature, he stood and dipped his head under water three times. By

accepting this sacrament, he forfeited his family's African traditional religion in which he was brought up (Farrant 1966, 19).

It is important to mention that Mzeki's baptismal date was the same date on which first African martyrdoms were martyred. On Easter Monday the following year, after attending confirmation class, he was confirmed in St Philips Chapel by Bishop West Jones. The Western pen painted Mzeki as someone who was destined for martyrdom.

Notably, he decided to join the full-time ministry. Kawadza (2010, 2) confirms that Mzeki gave up his very profitable employment in Rondebosch to live in St Columba's hostel in order to help the Fathers and the Fraulein with the night school in religious teaching and to do "works of mercy." He had heard that the missionaries were looking for a suitable person to do the cleaning in the house and to fulfil other duties. This he offered to do entirely without pay. He remarked: "This house does serve the Kingdom of God, and to serve God is what I must do since I have become a Christian, therefore this place is most suitable for me" (Kawadza 2010, 2). He continued his studies at St Philips, St Columba and Zonnebloem College as a catechist and did extremely well. Farrant (1966, 58) writes that Mzeki was very intelligent and that he was awarded a "high" prize for religious knowledge in one year, and it is possible that it was the "West Jones Prize." It should be cited that Mzeki had a special and unique gift for languages. He mastered local languages in Cape Town so that he could minister to the local South African people. He also learnt biblical languages such as Greek and Hebrew, as well as English and Latin. This made him useful as an interpreter when the Fraulein went out on mission work to the local Zulu and Xhosa communities. A question is raised: If Mzeki was this intelligent, why was he not made a priest? All the same, Mzeki had already entered into a new world of Western civilisation.

As soon he heard of plans to establish Anglicanism in the then Rhodesia—by the newly appointed Bishop George Whydham Hamilton Knight Bruce for the newly created Diocese of Mashonaland, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe)—Mzeki and others offered themselves to do missionary work as catechists. They travelled through Beira as part of the "pioneer column" to evangelise the Shona people in Zimbabwe.

The British Empire and church in Mashonaland moved into African territory simultaneously. The Mashonaland region was inhabited by the Shona people who lived in the north of what is now Zimbabwe; a landlocked region between the Zambezi River to the north and the Munyati River to the south that included Rhodesia's capital, Salisbury, during Mzeki's years. The local Shona people had been brutally conquered by the Ndebele people from the west, but now both came under the British rule, in particular the British South Africa Company of Cecil John Rhodes. This was indeed part of the scramble for Africa of the late 1880s, where Cecil John Rhodes and his company hoped to enrich themselves by trading, mining and settling in Mashonaland. Settling permanently in Rhodesia meant pushing the locals from their land. Rhodes aimed to bring the three C's; that is commerce, civilisation and Christianity to the African population. In 1891, Mzeki was left in Mangwende village in

Marondera by his Bishop Knight-Bruce, after the bishop had negotiated with chief Mangwende to leave him there to establish the Anglican Faith.

### **Outline of Mzeki's Ministry in the New Diocese of Mashonaland, Zimbabwe**

Chief Mangwende allowed Mzeki to build a large mission hut in his village, which served as church, school and dwelling. Musodza (2008, 85) comments that the environment in which Mzeki was left to establish Anglicanism was very different from South Africa, with which he had become so familiar. It was also different from his childhood background in Gwambeni, Mozambique. In Mangwende village, in Zimbabwe, the catechist lived among the indigenous Shona local people who had a different political, economic and socio-anthropological way of life, something which the European missionaries had failed totally to comprehend.

Interestingly, Mzeki learned the Shona language and was already speaking it without any trace of foreignness within a short period of time. It was indeed his first task to master the Shona language, so as to get closer to the Shona people. He reached out to the Shona through word, song and deed.

According to Snell (1986, 11), Mzeki's life was rooted in prayer. He was raised in a tradition of Catholic practice based on personal austerity, self-discipline, penitence and the sacraments. Significantly, catechumens like John Kapuya, Chigwada, Miyewu, Mutwa and others began to gather around his mission hut seeking physical and spiritual help. He eventually married Mutwa, a relative of Chief Mangwende. According to Bakare (interview 13/04/2016), Mutwa was given away by a white man, Mr Williams, and not her own people. His wedding became the first to be recorded in the marriage registrar in Rusape. The close relatives of Mangwende did not appreciate this marriage union.

Mzeki, as the teacher (*mufundisi*), began regular instruction in the basics of the Christian faith, which was contrary to African traditional religious ways of life. Mzeki was part of the team that was involved in translating the teaching materials. It is emphasised that Mzeki contributed greatly to this work and was a critical person in the process of establishing the Anglican Diocese of Mashonaland from its genesis. Mzeki's Christian teaching was not received well by the custodians of the African Traditional Religions because it dismissed everything that identified the Mangwende people. As catechumens gradually increased in attendance and were affected by the famine and hunger of the mid-1890s, Mzeki cultivated a sacred grove after he had cut the *msasa-mukuti* trees of the *Shumba* totem to increase food production; something he was presumably permitted to do so by chief Mangwende. Mzeki's close relationship with the chief was treated with suspicion by the locals. This was because the chief declared every Sunday a *chisi* (resting day), an equivalent to a Sabbath day of the Jewish people where no one was allowed to do manual work. The chief allowed those who wanted to attend mass at the mission to do as they wished. The Shona did not appreciate any tampering with their sacred grove, which was a place pregnant with religious and spiritual meaning. They cursed him (Mzeki). Furthermore, in 1895, there was a cattle disease that affected many animals in the country. The government ordered all the affected cattle to be

killed as a way of managing the spread of the disease. Mzeki was asked to campaign for the killing of the cattle in the village. In addition, during the same period, there was an outbreak of smallpox in the country too. Mzeki was asked by the government to help with vaccination in Mangwende village. The evangelist in charge of the Seventh Day Adventist mission on the Tsungwesi River had already died of the disease. Mzeki assisted in the vaccination because he had an elementary knowledge of medicine and first aid. Farrant (1966, 160) claimed that the catechist's participation in vaccinating the Mangwende Shona people was one of the crimes raised against Mzeki later by the *nángas*, claiming that he had pierced the flesh of the people and rubbed in poison. Musodza (2008, 91) concurs and adds that drought, famine and locust plagues contributed to Mzeki's murder.

These natural disasters had never happened before since time immemorial. Eventually, they blamed all of these on Mzeki's presence in the village. Farrant states that the spiritual leadership like Demha, Nehanda and Kaguwi (*nángas*), Mangwende's son, Muchemwa and his close cousins, hated Mzeki and everything he stood for. In addition they detested him being a government interpreter of chief Mangwende's customary court and the government's Civil and High courts of the land, and for this as part of his ministry responsibilities. This may have contributed to more hate; and eventually they plotted to murder him (Farrant 1966, 214).

Hinchcliff (1963, 172) notes that although he was of the same colour and very African, that did not make him less of an alien in Mashonaland than if he had been European. The fact remained that he was from Mozambique and a foreigner in the Mangwende chiefdom. The catechist remained an outsider from the religious-political and anthropological structures of the Mangwende people among whom he was sent to spread Anglicanism. Hence, being an outsider and a foreigner also contributed to his demise. The locals did not care about what would befall him. One question remains: Was Mzeki murdered because of his faith, as already portrayed in the church today, or were there other reasons that contributed to his death?

### **Mzeki's Mysterious Death and its Interpretation.**

To understand the death of Mzeki from a broader perspective, one should consider Ranger's (1987, 145–146) view that the local resentment and hostility against Mzeki, in addition to British imperial expansion, created the forces that resulted in his murder and the conclusion of his promising mission. In early 1896, Mashonaland joined a rebellion which had been initiated by the Ndebele from the west a few years earlier against the Pioneer Column. The Ndebele resistance against the British rule through the British South Africa Company of Cecil John Rhodes, inspired the Shona from the east, although the Ndebele were once upon a time their harsh oppressors. It came as a surprise to the white community in Rhodesia, including the Anglican missionaries, when the Shona joined in the rebellion which was later popularly known in the 1950s as the First *Chimurenga*. Ranger (1987, 146) states that the Shona indigenous local people had earlier also started resistance to the new colonial white rule. They expressed hatred against the burning of infested cattle and the collection of hut tax,

which the white administrators imposed on them. In addition, the natural disasters were also blamed on the presence of the whites and anyone who was associated with them. This included Mzeki, for in the mid-1890s Rhodesia experienced a tumultuous period of natural disasters. This indeed poisoned relations further between indigenous local people and the new imperial white rulers.

According to Noll and Nystrom (2011, 28), Muchemwa, one of Mangwende's many sons, had taken particular offence at Mzeki's entrance into the Mangwende community. They hated him and planned to kill him. Early in June 1896, Father Foster, the priest in Manicaland, sent a messenger to all the catechists and teachers urging them to seek safety and protection in Penhalonga at St Augustine's Anglican Mission School. Frank Ziqubu and some of their converts at Makoni's village took heed of the order and travelled to Penhalonga for safety. The messenger reached Mzeki and he was informed of the revolt of the First *Chimurenga* that was to take place in Rhodesia. He refused to run away, citing his canonical obedience to his bishop (who had already resigned) who had told him to remain in the village. His wife was three months pregnant. Mzeki responded by sending a messenger with a reply to Father Foster's letter: "Mangwende's people are suffering. The Bishop put me here and told me to remain. Until the Bishop returns, here I must stay. I cannot leave my people now in a time of such darkness" (Noll and Nystrom 2011, 28).

Snell (1986, 29) recorded that no villagers visited the mission. Those from the mission community who went up to Mangwende village returned with sad news. Muchemwa publicly and violently threatened to discipline all the villagers who had disobeyed the declarations made by the spirit mediums not to be associated with Christianity and Mzeki. Those who had attended the evensong were in serious trouble.

On a very cold Wednesday, 17 June 1896, the catechist and his wife decided to put up in the kitchen hut to warm themselves by the fire for the night. According to Snell (1986), Mzeki went out to the other hut where the young man, Samuel Munyanyi and others were sleeping in order to comfort and encourage them. They were afraid of the violence which Muchemwa and his team of uncles had promised to those who were staying in the mission community. They had declared to the village the death of the *mufundisi* whom they accused of being a sorcerer (Snell 1986, 29). As he returned to his own kitchen hut to join his wife, Mutwa, Mzeki suddenly saw a strange light. The hills were ablaze with fire, bursting into flames, one after another. This was a signal for trouble. Mzeki knew something was seriously wrong. Farrant (1966, 199) differs from Noll and Nystrom (2011, 29) in the sense that before the couple saw the fire in the hills surrounding their mission, they had just taken in a stranger who arrived late and asked for lodging. On the cold midnight of 18 June, Muchemwa and Ziute, a chief's son and two cousin brothers, visited the catechist and his pregnant wife, Mutwa. There was loud knocking at the kitchen door. Mzeki made an enquiry as to who was visiting them at such an hour. They made an announcement that they had brought very urgent bad news to them. They lied to the couple that the European troops had killed Mangwende and that the matter needed their immediate attention. Mutwa tried to prevent him from opening the door but eventually Mzeki stepped outside. According to Snell (1986, 21), Ziute,



who used to attend Martins at the Mission with his mother, Mutwa's other uncle Bodjgo and Saridjgo entered the kitchen hut and crouched by the fire after complaining about the cold winter weather of June. They repeated the false account of the attack on Mangwende by the British South Africa Company troops. Suddenly, they knocked Mzeki over, dragged him outside, and Bodjgo stabbed him with a spear in the presence of Mutwa. The three men ran off into the nearby darkness and dense bush of the hillside, thinking that they had left him dead.

Gowera (interview 18/06/2016) gave an impression that as soon as the catechist opened the door of the kitchen hut, Mzeki was immediately assaulted by three men, one of whom drove a spear deep into his side. Mutwa stepped out and attempted to prevent the assault throwing herself on top of Mzeki, but the men dragged her back into the hut. When she emerged again after a little while, the three men had gone. Mzeki seemed to be dead. Farrant (1966, 216) claims that when Mutwa heard the murderers depart, she crept outside. She saw Mzeki lying there, bleeding, and ran to find Mayemu, Chigwada's wife. He had already staggered up the hill behind his house and managed to wash his wounds at the second spring up the hillside and lay down at a small granite outcrop higher up the hill. Crouching in the bushes, something told Mutwa that Mzeki was still alive. She returned, accompanied by Mayemu and found out that her husband was no longer by the front door of the kitchen hut. They searched for him, calling softly. They found him by the spring washing his wound and trying to make a bandage with his shirt. He told them that he was very sick and weak. They helped him to crawl to the flat rock of the hill above the spring. It was a cave, a good place, because it was sheltered behind other rocks. Mzeki pleaded with the two women and Kapuya to leave him. Farrant (1966, 216), Gowera (2010, 11) and Noll and Nystrom (2011, 29) state that the catechist managed to give a message to his wife, that even if he was dying, the work of God would continue with those who would follow him.

Mzeki was exhausted. Therefore, Manyemu and Mutwa decided to prepare some food for him and gave him a blanket to cover him since it was very cold on the hill in winter. They crept down the hill and quietly went to the kitchen hut. They could hear some shouting from the distance since there was commotion in the mission; everyone was running away, looking for somewhere to hide. They quickly made a pot of thin porridge with milk, collected some blankets to warm Mzeki and started to climb the slope again. They halted in terrified amazement, twenty metres away from the cave. They were almost blinded by a great and brilliant light like an angelic thunderstorm. The whole hillside was lit up, and there was a noise like many wings of great birds. The noise came lower and lower, and as they crouched on the ground, covering their eyes, the women saw with their own eyes that in the centre of the light, where Mzeki lay, there was a strange glow. They were frightened and hid themselves, shaking from head to foot. After a long time, the noise ceased and they looked up again. The light had gone, and they crept up the hill to the rock. Mzeki had gone. They never saw him again. The huge rock had cracked, the bark of a big tree nearby was torn and only smoke and blood stains remained in the cave, where Mzeki had lain. It is written that the death of the catechist was indeed a mysterious death. Mutwa and her friend suddenly heard a rushing sound and a swirling, darting flame leapt down from the sky to the place where

Mzeki had apparently lay dead. Farrant (1966, 216), Gowera (2010, 11) and Noll and Nystrom (2011 29) all confirm that this phenomenon was also seen by the fleeing catechumens.

According to Farrant (1966), later in the night Mutwa and Mayemu stood staring at the empty rock. They were still trembling from their ordeal of fear, and now it seemed the impossible had happened. Mzeki had been very weak, yet he had disappeared. If he had dragged himself, he could not have gone far. Later in the morning, Mutwa saw Muchemwa, Mangwende's son, ransacking everything he came across in the mission, killing Mzeki's goats, chickens, and burning the huts of the mission. Mutwa ran and hid herself in the bush for five days, and later went to her family. Mzeki's body was never found. Gonde (interview 11/05/2016) suggested that if Muchemwa had destroyed everything of Mzeki's, he would definitely know where Mzeki's corpse was. In November, Mutwa gave birth to baby girl. After three days her father wanted to give her to chief Mashayamombe as his wife. She remembered the words of her husband and escaped during the night and went to St Faith's Mission in Rusape.

Broderick (1953, 78) relates a different story of the death of the catechist. Whilst he agrees to a certain extent with some parts of the account, he posits that five days elapsed between the day of the attack and the death of Mzeki. Broderick's account notes that Mutwa gave Mr Pelly the following account of his death:

Very early one morning, while it was still dark, someone knocked at the door of the hut where she and Bernard were sleeping. She thought something must be wrong as it was still so early and she told Bernard to get out of another door and escape to the hills. But he told her to let them in. On opening the door in came four men, two of them sons of Mangwende and one a nephew. They said they were cold and she made up the fire. Suddenly, they attacked Bernard and stunned him with an axe, they dragged him outside, stabbed him and left him for dead. Bernard became conscious, crawled away and hid himself under a rock.

His murderers, feeling sure he would die, did not trouble to search for him, and finding that the catechumens had escaped, contented themselves by taking Bernard's wife prisoner. She escaped each night for five days and in company with one of the catechumens, washed and fed her husband. On the fifth day, she came and found him dead. There is a story current among the natives today [1945] that the murderers were kept away from Bernard, as he lay hidden in the rocks by a white shining figure which, as it were, kept guard over him until he died (Broderick 1953, 78)

### **Reasons behind Mzeki's Death in light of his Conferred Martyr Status**

By critically looking at these death narratives regarding Mzeki, one can notice that there are commonalities and differences in accounts of the mystical death of Mzeki. Although the church has recognised Mzeki as a martyr because of this mysterious death, some think that his death had nothing to do with Christian faith. However, there is general acceptance that he was taken to heaven.

The following sections also discuss the views of some prominent church leaders, as expressed during interviews for the research underlying this article.

### **Mzeki's Relationship with the Whites**

One can notice that political factors contributed to Mzeki's death. The white settlers had treated the locals very harshly. In reaction, the locals organised the First *Chimurenga* of the mid-1890s to fight white political rule. Neither Mzeki nor anyone associated with him was spared. Because of Mzeki's tolerant Christian nature, it was difficult to differentiate him from the white political agenda of colonisation. In this regard, he was considered a white incarnate. Inasmuch as some may argue that Mzeki died because of his association with the whites, the fact remains that his association with the whites was influenced by his Christian faith; hence he deserved martyr status.

### **Mzeki's Opposition to Traditional leaders**

Research results, mainly from the interviews, indicate that the other major contributing factor to the death of Mzeki was his teaching, which was contrary to that of African traditional leaders, including the African traditional healers. What triggered tension between the traditional leaders was basically his Christian approach; again proving that he was fit for martyr status.

### **Mzeki's Marriage to Mutwa**

The general claim is that Mzeki's marriage to Mutwa and the resulting land issue, ironically fuelled the anger of the Mangwende villagers to shout "down with Mzeki." The reason why Mzeki married this local girl without any reservations might have been influenced by his Christian ethics, which discourages segregation. For the Mangwendes, this marriage is the one that caused natural disasters such as the small pox, locust plague, drought, famine and the cattle disease of the mid-1890s. To put an end to these natural catastrophes, the Mangwendes decided to eliminate Mzeki. While the Mangwendes considered killing Mzeki for causing bad omens within the society, Mzeki accepted his death due to his Christian faith; once more confirming that he deserved martyr status. Considering the contextual economic, socio-religious and political factors raised, one could argue that these disqualify the martyrdom of Mzeki. One could conclude that Mzeki was killed not necessarily because of his Christian faith, but rather that it was due to other factors. However, just like Jesus, people who killed Mzeki misunderstood his Christian ethics, therefore the fact remains that he died for his faith, making him a martyr.

### **Conferment of Martyrdom on Mzeki**

History is silent regarding the actual process that the Anglican Church engaged in to confer the status of martyrdom on Mzeki; yet the church refers to him as a martyr. This study has discovered from the qualitative and quantitative research that the ACZ, CPCA and the Anglican Communion worldwide clearly do not have a process or system in place—or a liturgy in its church history—that allows them to bestow or confer martyrdom status, as compared to the Roman Catholic Church which has instituted the process of conferment or canonisation. The same is absent in the Anglican Church, yet we have such figures as Mzeki who are venerated as martyrs but with no traceable criteria or public function sanctioned by the church to bestow the order of martyrdom. Mutungura (interview 12/02/2016) said clearly

that there is no trace whatever in the firsts Acts of the Anglican Diocese of Mashonaland in its establishment in the 1890s. There is also no trace in the rules and regulations of the church that describe the Acts of the five Dioceses in Zimbabwe in their formations, let alone in the Canon Law of the CPCA.

### **Bishop Edward Paget authenticating Mzeki's Martyrdom**

Geoffrey Gibbson (1973, 29) wrote a biography of Bishop Paget in the early seventies. The book is entitled *Paget of Rhodesia: A Memoir of Edward, the 5th Bishop of Mashonaland*, where he expands interestingly on how the Bernard Mzeki Shrine came into existence. At this juncture, it is important to briefly look at who Paget was. According to Gibbson (1973, 29), there had been four bishops before Bishop Edward Paget. He was bishop of the Diocese of Mashonaland from 1925 to 1957. It is of interest to mention that Bishop Edward Paget had an inclination for the blacks. The cathedral in Salisbury (Harare) always had a very special place in the spiritual life of the diocese because it brought Europeans and Africans together at the synod Eucharist and Ordinations in the late 1920s. Yet, most importantly, the great mass of the African people lived far away in the country districts and never saw and experienced these services. It was one of Bishop Edward Paget's great inspirations to give them a new rallying point, a place of pilgrimage, where they could come in their thousands and camp and worship. Hence, the bishop created the Bernard Mzeki Shrine on 18 June 1936. Hatendi (interview 26/03/2016) added that before the establishment of the shrine, there was already a boys' college built in his remembrance under the influence of Paget. This pilgrimage became an annual event after its creation. Mzeki was, therefore, gradually venerated as a martyr. One could argue that this means the veneration of Mzeki was established by one Bishop Paget and not by a recognised process of conferment by the church. It would mean that Mzeki was popularised as a martyr by one person. Hence calling him a martyr was out of ignorance since there is no such thing as canonisation in the Anglican Church in Zimbabwe. This is wishful thinking. It was those who think highly of Mzeki who called him a martyr. But officially, he was not a saint and a martyr. It was unfortunate that he found himself in a denomination which has no notion of martyrdom.

According to Bakare (interview 13/04/2016), the establishment of the Bernard Mzeki Shrine by Paget may have been a political move to have a place where the African Anglicans could meet by themselves in numbers and worship. Perhaps it was a racial issue more than anything else? One may think that because racial discrimination was silent in this period of the late 1930s, the whites could not worship with black people. During this time, the parishes in the low-density areas could not associate with blacks. The whites would have mass in the morning and the blacks would worship in the afternoon. Blacks were not allowed to attend mass at the cathedral. From his background, it meant that Paget wanted to create a place, a shrine where they could meet and worship as a black Anglican community. Makwasha (interview 07/06/2016) said that the African Anglican Christians could easily identify with such a shrine, since it was a borrowed phenomenon from African traditional religion which had the characteristics of shrines in common with the Roman Catholic Church.

## **Contemporary Martyrdom**

Mukwanda (interview 10/05/2016) shared that one of his priests, Rev. Canon Peter Wagner, was murdered in his church in Masvingo. The church wardens came to him and expressed their desire to have him declared a martyr. The bishop responded that he did not believe that he was qualified enough to be able to declare anyone a martyr. The canons of the province were silent on the matter under discussion. They did not provide anything on martyrdom. The bishop was frank enough to admit that there was no documentation that conferred martyrdom on anyone who had died, whatever the circumstances. He was open to say that it was not one of those matters talked about even when one was made a bishop after consecration. It was not one of the subjects that a new bishop was informed of. Such did not exist at all. Tawonezvi (interview 27/06/2016) and Mukwanda concurred that Wagner died for his faith, for he was murdered whilst he was having his morning matins.

Another person of relevance was an old lady, Mandeya, who was said to have been murdered during the time of the schism with the former bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Harare in 2008. It was argued that she deserved to be declared a martyr in the Anglican Church in Zimbabwe. In fact, primary data from mainly interviews showed that there was already a declaration that Wagner and Mandeya were unofficial saints and martyrs on whom the title had not been conferred because the church in Zimbabwe did not have the legal framework in its canons to do so. It is important to mention that Wagner and Mandeya were contemporary personalities and both lived amongst the church community. They could easily be emulated and related to Mzeki, who lived in the eighteenth century and who was from a different context than that of the dynamic church of today. The Anglican Church was challenged to establish a board/council that could look critically at the canonisation of saints and martyrs. This was indeed long overdue for it was believed that there were many people who also qualified for martyrdom, but were unrecognised because there was no procedure.

The conversation of Mukwanda (interview 10/05/2016) and his wardens is essential to this article. Surely Mzeki could not be the only, the first and last “martyr” to be recognised in the ACZ and in the Province alone. Peter Wagner could be the second among many others in the land. A paramount question is: If the ACZ was to make Wagner and Mandeya martyrs, how can the church qualify them if she does not have a process of canonisation? Can Mzeki remain as the only celebrated martyr from the eighteenth century who is presumed to be the only one who died because of his faith? The Anglican Church has these questions to answer.

According to Chessen (interview 18/04/2016), there is a need for the Anglican Church worldwide to work on the recovery of structural unity where issues like a common procedure for the conferment of martyrdom could be advocated and practised with uniformity across the Anglican Communion. The church does not have such a unified structure of governance. She has a fragmentary process which is not rigorous. The church is concerned about its unity and the process of conferring martyrs is a very fruitful area for some work as to how the church could be allowed formally to declare the faithfully departed—who would have died for their faith—martyrs. Chessen (interview 18/04/2016) noted that the authority of the Anglican

Consultative Council does not extend to the matter of conferring martyrdom on persons like Mzeki, who was presumed to have died because of his faith. But it was mentioned that it is time for the Anglican Consultative Council to begin to table such matters as a matter of urgency. In addition, he recommended that it was important to have the matter tabled at the episcopal bench of the CPCA, for them to take it up to the Lambeth Conference of 2020. Furthermore, he said that each province could suggest processes to declare martyrs because the Anglican Communion through the Archbishop of Canterbury had a dispersed authority. He was the first among equals but his power was limited. Hence, each province could actually do what worked for them. This means that it will not be easy for the Anglican Communion to come up with a council that could consider the conferment of what is called canonisation, whether it is as martyrs or saints.

Mutamiri (interview 28/04/2016) saw it as a weakness in the Anglican Communion because the church could not recognise the good work which was being done within communities in dioceses and provinces. The church has failed to recognise the sacrifices that people have made for their faith. This reflected negatively on the Christians who were still alive because the church did not have contemporary spiritual role models. From another angle, it is significant for the provinces to share ideas and consult amongst themselves and learn from each other on the way forward on making martyrs. The example given, in which the provinces had already moved forward, was the ordination of women in provinces. Hence, each province could make up its mind on the way forward regarding martyrdom in each individual province in the Anglican Communion.

Gonde (interview 11/05/2016) said that on the issue of the church coming up with a process for the canonisation of martyrs, she could use the existing leadership structures and polity on how issues are raised. July (interview 10/05/2016) suggested that the conferring of martyrdom in the Anglican Church could be tabled at a diocesan level. If accepted, the issue could be taken to the CPCA as well as the Council of Anglican Provinces in Africa Synod (CAPA). If it is taken at that level then it is to be taken to the Anglican Communion through the Archbishop of Canterbury. It is significant that already existing channels are available to deal with issues of the church involving the canonisation of individuals. Gandiya (interview 11/03/2016) concurred and added that it was proper to have grassroots committees that dealt with these issues and made the necessary recommendations. The recommendations were to be done upon research and understanding of the person concerned and in conferring the martyrdom or sainthood depending on the works of the person who had died.

The writer of this article is of the view that if the issue of the ordination of women has succeeded in some Anglican Provinces, then probably having provinces come up with procedures of declaring martyrs in the individual provinces may be the best way forward. However, it must be pointed out that this remains problematic due to the autonomous nature of every diocese, but at the same time valuing collegiality. If considering the model provided by the conferment of Mzeki, namely a “bottom-to-top process,” then there is no need to set criteria. Again, based on Mzeki, mysterious death would remain an integral element for one to be considered a martyr.

The writer noted that contrary to this, during the interviews there were some who showed that they were glad that the church did not canonise as in the Roman Catholic Church. For them it was distasteful. They were comfortable with a church calendar and people like Mzeki on it. Furthermore, they were surprised to know that Mzeki was referred to as a martyr in the Anglican Church in Zimbabwe, since the church did not have a procedure to declare one. Contrary to the fact that the church did not have a process for conferring martyrs, there are some like Chitando (interview 02/02/2016) and others who argued that Mzeki is a martyr because he died according to the account of his death and his faith. They further argued that in the first century, matters of faith were not political because elements of politics and religion were intertwined. In the twentieth century, the church was trying to separate politics and religion, but in the earlier centuries, the two could not be separated as it was in Mzeki's time. The existence of the political dimension did not necessarily eliminate the faith dimension. Hence, it could have been a combination of both for which Mzeki was murdered, but ultimately he died because of his faith. In the earlier centuries, Christians were killed for the same political and religious reasons. They were proclaiming a new faith as Mzeki was, but at the same time threatening an old faith. This could, therefore, be compared with Mzeki's situation and that of the early church and the first century CE. The aspect of Mzeki dying because of his faith was outstanding to this group of respondents. Ruwona (interview 13/04/2016) and Gandiya (interview 11/03/2016) further argued that it did not make sense and it was unnecessary to have a procedure to declare Mzeki a martyr from an African point of view. There was no need for protocol in the case of the declaration of martyrdom of Mzeki. The idea of coming up with a procedure, they argued, was a Western idea. They vehemently declared that there was no one in the ACZ who doubted the martyrdom of the catechist. An example of the conferment of the order of epiphany was given without consultation.

Looking critically at this view that Mzeki is a martyr by merits of the people, opens up a Pandora's Box—especially when the Anglican Church wants to declare martyrs in the present and future without a process of qualifications. Canon Peter Wagner and Mbuya Mandeya are already under discussion as persons who are also presumed to have been murdered due to their faith. David (interview 07/01/2017) argued that the Anglican Church is so different from the Roman Church which has a clear process of canonisation. The Church of England only recognises outstanding figures in their liturgy. Each year they include in the calendar of the church people who over time have come to be regarded as godly examples of Christian living, and not necessarily people who died for their faith. The Church of England only recognises its own people who were clear examples of godliness, sacrifice and service—and Mzeki is one of them. One wonders where the idea of martyrdom of Mzeki came from.

From another perspective, Basvi (interview 10/05/2016) and others concurred that it may not have meant that Mzeki did not have the qualities to be recognised as such. It was simply unfortunate that he found himself in a denomination which has no notion of martyrdom. Siyachitema (interview 17/04/2016) acknowledged that Mzeki was not only a Zimbabwean and provincial figure of significance, but a person who was remembered in the Anglican

Communion as someone who lived an incredibly illustrious life of dedication, commitment and obedience to Christ. Although Mzeki was not an ordained priest, he achieved much more than ordained white priests of his age. Mbona (interview 13/04/2016) pointed out that some of his sacrifices are regarded now as having been unwise, but were not so when one hears of the fact that he was told to leave the mission station and go to St Augustine's Mission where all Anglican missionaries were to stay under protection. He refused, citing his abhorrence of the idea of leaving behind his few converts, especially Kapuya who was not feeling well. After all, in the primary data statistics from questionnaires available, 80 respondents confirmed that Mzeki was fit to be a martyr. Twenty informants refused to have Mzeki to be recognised as a martyr in the Anglican Church.

### **Mzeki in the Life of the Church**

Church leadership has named institutions and chapels after this illustrious son of Africa to show the central place that Mzeki occupies in the life of the Anglican Church in Zimbabwe, and indeed in the entire Anglican Communion today. Farrant (1966, 243) recorded a section of memorials of items, chapels, altars and institutions which are named in memory of Mzeki. This, therefore, emphatically shows that Mzeki is part of the spirituality of ACZ and abroad. These are as follows:

- An Anglican National Shrine in Marondera on the scene of Mzeki's death.
- A concrete cross on Mangwende Mountain, overlooking the Shrine, Marondera, Zimbabwe.
- The Bernard Mzeki College on the site of the old Bernard Mzeki Mission.
- A stained glass window in the Bernard Mzeki Chapel, Cathedral of St Mary and All Saints, Harare, Zimbabwe.
- A reliquary in the St Philip's Church, Chapel Street, Cape Town.
- An Altar in St Cyprian's Church, Langa, Cape Town, inscribed, "Bernard Mzeki *sitandaze*"; meaning Bernard Mzeki, pray for us.
- A reliquary in St Michael and All Angels, Mbare, in Harare, Zimbabwe.
- A Parish of Bernard the Martyr in Atteridgeville, Pretoria, South Africa.
- A Parish of Bernard Mzeki the Martyr in Phokwane, Botswana.
- A small stained glass window, part of the greater window, in St George's Cathedral, Cape Town, South Africa.
- A carved candle-stick, one of the pair in the Lady's Chapel in St George's Cathedral, Cape Town (one candlestick represents Mzeki, the Martyr of Mashonaland and the other represents Manche Masemola, the 15 year-old girl martyr of Sekukuneland, 1928, who was also raised up under God by the Cowley Fathers.
- A mural painting of Mzeki done by Canon Edward Peterson in the Parish of St Cyrene, near Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.
- The Bernard Mzeki School in Esizibeni, Usuthu, Swaziland.
- A stained glass window in the Parish of St Patrick's and All Saints, in Kadoma, Zimbabwe.
- A mural in St Luke's Parish, Kwekwe, done by Mrs Sheila Davies, in Zimbabwe.



- A carved head of Mzeki by Job Kekana in Rhodesia House in London, UK.
- The inclusion of Mzeki's name in the Church Calendar of the Church of the Province of South Africa and of the CPCA.
- The acceptance by the Dean and Chapter of St Paul's Cathedral, London, of Mzeki's name for the new Modern Martyr's Chapel planned as part of the work of restoration.
- 65 photographic slides in colour of Mzeki made by Roy Creeth, Nigel Morgan and Father Robin Burnett.
- Chapel of Bernard Mzeki in the St John's Cathedral in his Anglican Diocese of Matebeleland in Bulawayo.
- Formulation of the Bernard Mzeki Guild.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Mzeki is commemorated in the Anglican Church as a well-known martyr, despite him not having gone through a process of conferring martyrdom. This article advocates that instead of the church setting criteria to canonise martyrs based on devotedness to Christian faith, the church needs to value the role of mysteries in her long history. Mysteries are at the heart of every religious belief, but without mentioning "mystery" it remains shallow. In as much as it is of utmost significance for a church to have well-defined criteria of canonising martyrs, these two factors should never be underestimated: unshaken Christian faith as well as mysterious death. These two factors distinguished Mzeki from any other individuals whom the church thinks might fall in the same category of being martyrs. Several diverse reasons may be given for the death of Mzeki to disqualify his martyrdom, but the fact remains that he died for his faith and up to this day he has no grave on earth, making him a mysterious figure who deserves martyrdom status—even if the church had no set criteria.

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Basvi, Theological Education by Extension Director, 10/05/2016, 13:30, Gweru, Interview.

Chessen, bishop of the Diocese of Southwark, UK, 18/04/2017, 12:46, Harare, Interview.

Chitando, an academic consultant, University of Zimbabwe, 02/02/2016, 9:00, Harare, Interview.

David, former bishop of the Diocese of Rochester, UK, 07/01/2017, 10:05, Harare, Interview.

Gandiya, bishop of the Diocese of Harare, 11/03/2016, 10:00, Harare, Interview.

Gonde, Vicar General, Diocese of Matebeleland, 11/05/2016, 15:30, Bulawayo, Interview.

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Hatendi, former bishop of the Diocese of Harare, 26/03/2016, 9:00, Harare, Interview.

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Mbona, former Dean, Diocese of Manicaland, 13/04/2016, 08:45, Mutare, Interview.

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