

BRIEF REVIEWS

Rise Up & Walk: The Autobiography of Bishop Abel Tendekai Muzorewa. Edited by Norman E. Thomas. Nashville: Abingdon, 1978. Pp. 289. \$9.95.*

One of the cardinal rules of writing an autobiography is that it must interest beyond the narcissistic circumstances of the author. Furthermore, it must appeal to a special audience, be it a political or literary one, and thus attain a significance beyond the personal scope of the autobiography itself. An autobiography must not depict every episode in the autobiographer's life. Rather, the episodes must focus on actions that justify its writing. It is disastrous for one to write because someone persuades him that his life is important enough to warrant it. An old African proverb says that one must not look at oneself too long in the mirror. Bishop Abel Muzorewa, however, seems to have overlooked those wise words.

There is always something odd about an African who writes an autobiography because the genre runs counter to the anti-individualist philosophy of the African people. In fact, the "self-praiser" is often labelled a witch. Thus, to most Africans, childlike enthusiasms about one's childhood are often thoroughly embarrassing—tolerable only as a trait of foreigners. Comment on oneself is significant only if it contributes to history. In this book, we are dealing with an approach in which the virtues of precolonial African states are projected as the vices of the dark ages. The author glorifies the present at the expense of Africa's past, despite the fact that we know we are dealing with the conquered Shona people who founded the great Monomotapa Empire and left us the Zimbabwe Ruins. It is as though the Egyptians were to praise the occupation of Egypt by the Asians whom they detested.

It can be assumed from the author's approach that we are not dealing with a political analyst, but with a man more likely to blunder through folly than through intention.

The weaknesses of the book notwithstanding, it gradually becomes clear that colonial life cannot be but a miserable existence. Those who bring "prosperity" turn out to be murderous highway bandits, cruel barbarians dumped by their home country out of desperation for material resources and a need to stabilize society at home. Accustomed to a life of poverty and subjugation in their home country, the settlers become worse than the rulers they are fleeing from. This is what Muzorewa discovers on his first journey to Rusape. He further discovers a beast nearer home—a white farmer who kills Africans for no other reason than that they have trespassed on "his" land, a traditional path that had been used for many years by the Shona people.

Even missionaries such as D.R. Murphee were of no help in hard times. They gave the Muzorewas little aid, despite the fact that it was they who had instructed Muzorewa's father to study theology and give up his good farm-

* This book review was written just prior to the Zimbabwen elections in late 1979. *Ed.*

land. The elder Muzorewa's work in South Africa did not involve the missionary responsibilities he had been trained to assume. But nobody really cared. What was worse was that the Muzorewas had none of the imaginative political solutions that led other Africans to establish their own churches (Africa Church, Church of Ethiopia, Church of Zion, Shembe, etc.). Instead, even the rude expulsions from the place where the junior Muzorewa had come to seek employment were interpreted by him as a calling from the Lord: "Here was a complete stranger telling me to go back to work for the Church." Muzorewa sees the demonstrations that took place after his banishment as so unique that "nothing in the history of the country could be compared with it." This is, of course, a gross exaggeration. The history of Zimbabwe is far too long and too great for it to be reduced to a single event. It is not surprising that in his attempt to enlist God for these very mundane pursuits, Muzorewa believes he is gifted with the powers of healing. The experience of the rebellious and powerful Shave spirit-force of the Shona convinces him that such "possession" should be exorcised through prayer. Muzorewa's tameness is transformed through his experiences of discrimination in America.

As we wade through the book, we are moved again to ask, is justification there for the writing of this autobiography? The answer comes as the struggle for liberation in Zimbabwe heats up. Of this the author says, "[a]lready the African nationalist has promoted an anti-Church feeling which had swept across the country" Muzorewa is clearly a man of great energy and faith. The problem is that his faith is based on false assumptions. He believes in liberation, but has not the intellectual and physical aggression to make the ultimate sacrifice, which for him, would be to break with the powers that operated in the colonial period. He is outraged at the oppression of his people, but the outrage does not go far enough, consequently it does not threaten the enormous forces of occupation. His is a personal outrage, often tempered by the powerful propaganda of the colonialist regime. The very missionaries who are training and guiding him would privately call him "honest, simple and naive." Yet such naivete often emphasizes the high degree of deceit to which the white society has gone to maintain its hold in Africa.

Muzorewa, an African stripped of traditional power, fails to learn that the foreigners are not impressed by pious word, but take further advantage of him and his countrymen because of those words.

Muzorewa's internal protests against white oppression and his pleas for Christian understanding become tragicomic against the background of massacres, the bombardments against villagers as the struggle for liberation begins in earnest in 1967. He continues to protest while others rush into battle. Yet Muzorewa tells us, "I do not subscribe to the romantic and unhistoric view that the liberation struggle is won by armed clashes between the forces of liberation and the liberation army." Could this be rationalization? Surely, anti-colonial struggle is, in most cases, physical, requiring sacrifices that relate to actual military battles. Of course, liberation is a total process, involving opposition to all forms of colonial oppression. However, where an armed struggle has taken place, it is the great loss of life that must receive the central focus in Zimbabwean politics. Yet he is still incapable of making

clear political decisions. He is baffled by the support he gets in London from the same whites who oppose the liberation of Zimbabwe.

Muzorewa's attempt to lead Zimbabwe to liberation seems destined to fail precisely because he has established no constituency. Riding on the undesirable euphoria surrounding the liberation of Zimbabwe, he already behaves as if he has a constituency. Twice he leads a delegation which included the actual leaders of Zimbabwe, Mr. Nkomo and Mr. Sithole, intent on negotiating a constitutional settlement with Ian Smith. "We realized that it was the guerilla incursions which had forced Smith to want to talk with us as *Political Leaders*" (emphasis added). However, the sentiments of those with a political base are clear: "If both Mr. Ian Smith and Bishop Muzorewa were put before me, I would choose to shoot Muzorewa first before I shoot Mr. Smith." Yet Muzorewa does not get the message; he dismisses such statements as "an insatiable lust for power." Indeed, the once ardent churchman is gradually abandoning his churchly responsibilities for an uncertain future. We hear him talking of the leaders, Mr. Joshua Nkomo and Mr. Sithole, as though they were mere boys. Of Nkomo, the oldest political leader of Zimbabwe, he says, "[w]hen it seemed Nkomo was going all out to divide people and organize a congress, *I called him to my home* (emphasis added). The Bishop attempts to convince us that he felt it "imperative to clear the air . . . concerning Mr. Nkomo's drive for power". But the Bishop's position at this stage is that of a man keen to retain his power as A.N.C. President. This growing preoccupation with his role in the struggle for liberation leads him gradually to assume that he alone is acting in accordance with the needs of the Zimbabwean people. He dismisses the significance of the armies of the two major liberation organizations, claiming that he derives his authority from the masses of Zimbabwe. "The faith of the people in me was one of the heaviest crosses I have ever carried." We can scarcely believe that this is the same man who was drafted by the leaders of the two political organizations to fulfill a campaigning role. Lacking a profound understanding of politics he is guided by the simplest explanation of events. He makes a bizarre claim—" [t]o my surprise we alone of the A.N.C. supported One-Person, One-Vote. Ndabaningi Sithole, Joshua Nkomo, Robert Mugabe and their delegates all opposed it." It is difficult to imagine that Muzorewa is talking about the very leaders who have made maximum sacrifices in the struggle for the liberation of Zimbabwe.

Muzorewa's lack of political judgment leads him to the simplest conclusion that Frontline States are lukewarm in their support of the cause of liberation in Zimbabwe, or worse still, may intend to thwart Zimbabwe's liberation struggle. He is surprised that the British do not support his position: "[t]o our surprise the British did not stand with us either, for they are too busy trying to please the Frontline States who supported the Patriotic Front, and its contention that the future leaders of Zimbabwe should be named outside the country."

It is almost with a sense of desperation that Muzorewa decides to go back into Zimbabwe, after a frustrating period of self-exile. He is welcomed by a massive gathering of Zimbabweans, estimated at 500,000. Inevitably, he interprets this as an expression of support for him and his political stand. A more shrewd political analyst would have seen in this a general demand

for a free Zimbabwe rather than his personal support. However, Muzorewa is now, to himself at least, as infallible as the Pope, to use President Nyere's warning statement to him. Commenting on the Geneva Conference, Muzorewa says, "[i]t was the Patriotic Front, together with the Rhodesian Front, who wrecked the Geneva Conference. Together they formed what I call an 'undemocratic front' as they united to oppose universal adult suffrage." It is this approach that eventually leads him to enter negotiations with Ian Smith. This he does without sufficient consultations with the active political leaders of the liberation movement. The agreements they reach are inevitably denounced by the entire world. Muzorewa's private armies terrorize opponents. The bombings of the guerilla and refugee camps continue even when Muzorewa is serving as "Prime Minister." Indeed at the very moment of negotiating with Smith, Smith's forces kill an estimated 3,000 Zimbabweans in the refugee camps.

This carnage does not deter Muzorewa. His lack of a political base combined with his megalomaniacal sense of authority lead him inevitably to serve as an unwitting tool of Smith's political strategy. Because of political pressures emanating from the Frontline States, Anglo-United States fears, and the intensifying guerilla struggle, a new London Conference is arranged. Smith, of course, abandons his protege. The true leaders of Zimbabwe emerge, and a new election takes place. The escalation of these events relegates the Bishop to the background. He has lost the power of which he once boasted.

Meanwhile a new and free Zimbabwe is to celebrate its liberation. The costs of that liberation have been very high and it will be a long time before the scars are healed. The scenario now opens for the liberation of the last region of minority rule—South Africa.

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