

Manas Buthelezi, South African theologian, dies at 81

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Manas Buthelezi, a Lutheran bishop in South Africa and one of the great African theologians of the 20th century, died April 20 at age 81.

Buthelezi, former vice president of the Lutheran World Federation, was also active with the World Council of Churches, the All Africa Conference of Churches, and the South African Council of Churches.

“His deep and visionary theological analysis, his prophetic voice, his charismatic leadership, and commitment to ecumenism and global Lutheranism have marked the lives of many people around the globe,” Martin Junge, LWF general secretary, wrote in a letter.

He served for 20 years in the central diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa.

He opened ways to read biblical texts through the eyes of the oppressed that were based on Lutheran teachings of scripture alone, faith alone, Christ alone, and grace alone, LWF wrote in its obituary.

At the 1977 LWF Assembly in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, he led a seminar, “In Christ—One Community in the Spirit,” demonstrating how apartheid had distorted Christian unity through racial segregation, according to LWF. Buthelezi was also a keynote speaker at the LWF Assembly in Curitiba, Brazil, in 1990.

Buthelezi served on the LWF executive committee and council from 1993 to 1997. He retired in 2000.

Engaging in education globally, he studied at Umphumulo Theological College and the University of South Africa as well as Yale and Drew Universities. He was visiting professor in 1972 at the University of Heidelberg in Germany, where he lectured on black theology.