

**The Expulsion of Mary Calata:  
The Disturbance at St Matthews Missionary Institution,  
March 1945**

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This article examines the disturbance at St Matthews, an Anglican missionary institution in the Eastern Cape. By focusing on the case of one student, Mary Calata, I will attempt to illustrate the sometimes fraught relationship between the Anglican Church and black politics during the post-Second World War period.

**The incident**

During the night of Saturday, 24 March 1945, at around 21:30, shortly before “lights out”, male students were heard singing in the vicinity of the Boys’ Boarding Department. On investigating, the House Captains and Head Boy were met by a volley of stones: this signalled a general attack on the hostels where the majority of students were already in bed. The rebellious students led a fierce attack on the hostels, which continued until about 23:00, during which time they attempted to intimidate the rest of the students into joining their protest. In the meantime, the House Master and Warden, the principal of the institution, attempted to get the majority of the boys to defend the hostels. However, after coming under sustained attack, during which sticks and stones were used as weapons, the two members of staff and a substantial number of “loyal” students were driven into one dormitory. This dormitory was then attacked and one of the staff members seriously injured.<sup>1</sup>

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1. This account is drawn from the following sources: Cory Library for Historical Research, Rhodes University, Grahamstown (hereafter Cory): PR 3087, Report on Disturbances among Students, March 24 to 28 by H.C. Williams, 28 March 1945; Interviews with Doctor C.E. Hundleby, King William’s Town, 23 June 1980 and Bishop Ernest Sobukwe, Alice, 9 January 1981; *Daily Dispatch*, 26 March 1945, 27 March 1945, 28 March 1945, 29 March 1945; *King William’s Town Mercury*, 29 March 1945.

There was considerable confusion and it is unclear from the available evidence what happened next, except that the staff members and students escaped from the dormitory and met in a secure area to consider their options. The number of rioting students had swelled to roughly 130 (most of whom had apparently been identified by torchlight, though in the confusion and the dark this cannot have been particularly accurate) and approximately 55 had escaped this group to join the loyalists. The rioters eventually moved up a hill overlooking the institution. During the course of the long night, an attempt to burn down one hostel was foiled, but there was damage to windows and doors.

The police from Keiskammahoek were summoned and they called for reinforcements from King William's Town. Their presence prevented the students from launching an attack on the Girls' Boarding Department. Evidence suggests that the group of boys detailed to attack the girls' hostels refrained from doing so because they were unsure how many policemen were guarding it. The police in turn could not act because of the darkness and the number of rioters strategically positioned on the hill.

Sometime around 01:00, negotiations were begun. Canon A.E. Jingiso volunteered to mediate between the Warden of St Matthews, C.H. Williams, and the rioters. The rebellious students presented the authorities with four demands. Firstly, they insisted that all the House Captains should resign and that they be given the right to appoint their own captains. They also demanded the right to appoint their own House Master and insisted that he be an African. In addition they insisted that no student be punished for having taken part in the riot and moreover none should be expelled. Finally they demanded that the rules in the Boys' Boarding Department be drawn up by students, not the authorities.

The institutional authorities considered these demands to be unacceptable, although they did not tell the students this. Instead the students were told that their demands would be considered at a meeting the following day, but that this was contingent upon them returning to their dormitories. The students refused and remained on the hillside until morning. On Sunday morning, the boys, armed with sticks, descended the hill so as to partake of their breakfast. A contingent of 12 police had arrived under the command of Lieutenant Huxham and Williams urged him to arrest the ringleaders who had supposedly been identified during the night.

Interestingly, within the context of South Africa in the 1940s, Huxham decided that a conciliatory approach was best and he favoured

talking to the students in an attempt to persuade them to cooperate with the authorities. Having inspected the damage to property and also to injured persons, Huxham still could not be convinced that the ringleaders should be removed. The Native Commissioner for Keiskammahoek was then called to address the increasingly restive students, but no attempt was made to arrest them. Williams, irritated at what he considered the limp-wristed response of the law enforcement authorities, then pushed forward with a plan that entailed sending the ringleaders home as the staff wanted them out of the institution before dark. Accordingly those students identified as ringleaders left the institution aboard lorries at 12:00.

Meanwhile threads of unrest had spread to the Girls' Boarding Department and the girls refused to partake of lunch. Following a meeting between the Warden and students, it was agreed that the remaining boys would go to their dormitories with the concession that they could renominate their House Captains. At 19:45, however, it was discovered that a plan existed for a joint disturbance of both boys and girls, but this was foiled by the hostel staff. Although Monday began normally, it was clear that the girls were restive and that the boys were involved in a wider plot to create unrest over the Easter weekend and particularly on Good Friday. The sending away of the ringleaders had evidently not had the desired effect of returning the institution to order.

It was feared that bloodshed might result and so senior staff met on Tuesday morning to come up with a response. Present at this meeting were E.B. Drake, the Housemistress, C.E. Hundleby, T.P. Marks, M.M. Jamieson, M.H. Taylor and the Warden, H.C. Williams. The fear factor must be understood within context. In an Anglican institution and a small religious community, it is more than likely that most staff would have been attending the three hour Good Friday service between 12:00 and 15:00, leaving the institution vulnerable. We need also to remember that Keiskammahoek was a remote *dorp* buried in the lush foothills of the Amatola mountains and St Matthews was a couple of kilometres from the town. This sense of isolation fed into a state of general unease. The nearest major town, King William's Town, was some 20 miles away along a winding gravel road, heavily rutted, making rapid transport impossible.

It was decided that on Wednesday, 28 March 1945, the college should be closed, but that it should reopen the following day. All students who had not demonstrated loyalty to St Matthews were to be sent home. However, all students who had been returned home would be afforded the opportunity to apply for readmission, though their

applications would be carefully sifted. It was decided to obtain a vote of confidence from the general staff and to inform the Bishop of the Diocese, the Department of Education and the Circuit Inspector.

The decision to send the recalcitrant students home was sprung on the student body and a general announcement was made at 07:30 on Wednesday morning. By 13:00, under police presence, most students had left the college. Only 55 boys and 27 girls remained as the teaching programme recommenced with a church service. According to Williams' report on these disturbances, there was "great penitence among those sent home who would have done well to have considered the consequences previously".<sup>2</sup>

### **The report: Causes and attitudes**

The "Report on Disturbances among Students" prepared by H.C. Williams provides us with the fullest account of the events at St Matthews, and although it is a somewhat partisan analysis, it nevertheless exposes deep flaws within the institution. In his report, Williams attempts to examine the causes of this outbreak, but without contextualising it within the bigger picture of the tensions within the country. The Second World War had created considerable dislocation and there was growing frustration at the shackles of segregation and the constrictions imposed by white power.

It is clear that the disturbance was a protest against institutional authority, symbolised by the authority of the Captain's Court and especially four draconian captains. The Captain's Court was a student's disciplinary tribunal, sanctioned by the institution, in which the college captains decided upon and meted out punishment to errant students. Power wielded by the inexperienced corrupts: the captains had a large amount of freedom to exercise their authority along the lines of the English public school system and they could impose punishments on students whom they did not like; their influence with the authorities could also be used against certain individuals. This Shepstonian-style authority which existed at St Matthews was bitterly resented by the majority of students and it explains the split between loyalist and rebellious students.

Although Williams appreciated the hostility of students to the Captain's Court, he robustly maintained that this was not the true cause of the disturbance. "It is clear", he wrote, "that far from being an objection

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2. Cory: Report on Disturbances, p 1.

to local rules, the riot was an organised attempt at Communism, to overthrow authority and impose mob law”.<sup>3</sup> In a close examination of the rioters, Williams found that two of the ringleaders came from East London, two from Queenstown and three from Johannesburg. One of the ringleaders from Johannesburg was believed to be a paid agent of an unspecified organisation there. The evidence for this belief turned on the fact that aspects of the disturbance were minutely planned. It would appear that the disturbance had been planned for November 1944, but the leader William Thabane had called it off because of the proximity to the examinations. Apparently an African member of staff who had resigned in December 1944 had known about this plan, but had not warned the authorities.<sup>4</sup>

Whilst Williams was aware that below the surface of local, institutional gripes there were more profound forces at play, his notion that the disturbance was inspired by communism prevented him from understanding the full extent of student animosity. The common mantra of communism is, of course, a red herring which conceals serious systemic failure. Antagonism amongst students towards the system of captains and courts was very real, but this was a metaphor, as Jonathan Hyslop puts it, for opposition to national authority which suppressed African aspirations felt particularly by the youth, many of whom had political connections.<sup>5</sup>

Student militancy was still in its infancy, in the sense that unrest was localised and to an extent relatively benign and naïve, a point which has been made by Cynthia Kros<sup>6</sup>; yet the signs at St Matthews suggested that the disturbance could spread to other institutions. Williams believed that the disturbance at St Matthews was a harbinger “of very widespread unrest which will make itself felt among the African people”.<sup>7</sup> In identifying a nascent radicalism amongst African youth, Williams also recognised that there was a growing and persistent demand that Africans be placed in charge of their own education,<sup>8</sup> and indeed this was probably

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3. Cory: Report on Disturbances, p 3.

4. Cory: Report on Disturbances, p 3.

5. J. Hyslop, “Food, authority and politics: Student riots in South African schools 1945-1976”, in S. Clingman (ed), *Regions and Repertoires Topics in South African politics and culture* (Raven Press, Johannesburg, 1991), pp 84-115.

6. C.J. Kros, “They wanted dancing and not merely the Lambeth walk: A reassessment of the 1940s school disturbances with particular reference to Lovedale”, African Studies Institute Seminar Paper, University of the Witwatersrand, 27 July 1992.

7. Cory: Report on Disturbances, p 3.

8. Cory: Report on Disturbances, p 3.

a deeply entrenched attitude, because a residual racism was evident at missionary institutions.<sup>9</sup> Ideas of Africanisation fuelled the views of people such as J.D. Zeka, an influential teacher attached to the Bantu Secondary School in Queenstown, who noted that there was “some fundamental wrong in the run[ning] of the general machinery of the school” since St Matthews had experienced a disturbance only five years previously.<sup>10</sup> C.E. Hundleby, as president of the Association of European Teachers in African Education, believed that all teachers should seriously consider solutions to calls for Africanisation, which he considered to be a looming threat to African education.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Bishop and the Priest: The Calata case**

Of the roughly 200 students who had been suspended and sent home, about 90 were refused readmission. J.K. Zeka complained to Margaret Ballinger, a member of the St Matthews Council and the Native Representative for the area, that “no tangible reasons were given to the parents for such refusal” and this had led to much “dissatisfaction and unrest” within the African community.<sup>12</sup>

Prominent amongst those students expelled for their role in the disturbance, was Mary Calata, whose father, the Reverend James Calata, was Chaplain-General of the African National Congress (ANC) and one of the most senior black clergymen in the Anglican Church. He was to wage a tireless and determined campaign to have his daughter reinstated in St Matthews and to clear her name. This created a considerable dilemma for St Matthews, regarded as one of the foremost Anglican Colleges for Africans in the country. Because of the expulsion of Mary Calata, oppressive controversy settled on the institution and its Warden, H.C. Williams. James Calata was a popular figure and Williams found himself criticised and indeed ostracised by many, as he complained to Margaret Ballinger.<sup>13</sup> The disturbance and its aftermath had depressed Williams and he had become disillusioned, yet he remained unrepentant. He wrote:

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9. Interview with R.G.S. Makalima, Alice, 4 December 1996.
  10. William Cullen Library, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (hereafter Cullen): Ballinger Papers, A410 B2. 5. 50, J.K. Zeka – M. Ballinger, 23 July 1945.
  11. Cited in: Cory: PR 3682, H.C. Williams – R.H.W. Shepherd, 20 April 1945.
  12. Cullen: Ballinger Papers, J.K. Zeka – M. Ballinger, 23 July 1945.
  13. Cullen: Ballinger Papers, A410 B2. 5. 50, H.C. Williams – M. Ballinger, 13 October 1945.

I am of a very strong opinion in the case of Calata.

While it is clearly of value that a Christian should hold the political position that he does, the political feeling he is bringing back into the African Church is disastrous. The absence of episcopal discipline for the utterances and activities of such as he, makes my work increasingly impossible. If I received as much support as he does, I should remain here longer than I intend to.<sup>14</sup>

Yet the evidence suggests that Mary Calata was expelled for the flimsiest of reasons. Williams informed Calata that his daughter was guilty of intimidating the younger girls into not eating their lunch and this “was responsible for the trouble in the Girls’ House”. Mary had therefore “shown a sympathy with disloyal agitators, which is quite unbecoming in either a student of St Matthews College or a prospective teacher”.<sup>15</sup> It also appears that the internally constituted committee which had been set up by Williams immediately after the disturbances to examine individual cases, was not communicating sufficiently with parents, many of whom were ignorant of the broader issues and resident in far-flung rural areas; they understandably felt helpless.<sup>16</sup> Instead a bland Kafkaesque communiqué was issued by the committee:

As a result of the recent serious disturbances at this College, the Committee of Heads of Departments in the College have considered in great detail the part played by your child.

The unanimous decision of the Committee is that your child should not be permitted to return to this College ...

The seriousness of the disturbances makes it quite impossible to reconsider this decision.<sup>17</sup>

Calata expressed his dissatisfaction to the Bishop of Grahamstown, Archibald Cullen, under whose diocese St Matthews fell, and asked that a commission of inquiry be appointed to investigate.<sup>18</sup> As he informed Z.K. Matthews, Professor of African Studies at the University College of Fort Hare, his daughter “was never at any time made to understand that she was one of the suspects”.<sup>19</sup>

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14. Cullen: Ballinger Papers, H.C. Williams – M. Ballinger, 13 October 1945.
  15. Cullen: Calata Papers, A 1729/D 2, H.C. Williams – J. Calata, 17 April 1945.
  16. For instance: Cullen: Calata Papers, J.M. Ciske – J. Calata, 22 April 1945.
  17. Cullen: Ballinger Papers, Notice to Parents, 6 April 1945.
  18. Cullen: Calata Papers, J. Calata – Bishop of Grahamstown, 29 April 1945.
  19. Cullen: Calata Papers, J. Calata – Z.K. Matthews, 11 May 1945.

According to Calata, neither he nor his wife had found Mary to have any sympathies with the rebellious students.<sup>20</sup> Mary's statement, a copy of which was sent by her father to the Bishop, put a different spin on the matter. On Sunday, 25 March 1945, when she returned to the institution after having attended Sunday-school, she was informed by Patrick Ncaca, a senior student and one of the Sunday-school teachers, that he had been expelled for allegedly being involved in the disturbance. However, he considered himself to have been innocent and Mary expressed sympathy with his plight. She then went to the kitchen to help prepare lunch with the waitresses and prefects, each of whom she mentions by name. Whilst in the kitchen, at about 12:30, Mary witnessed a group of girls go down to the Boys' Department; but they were stopped by two staff members, Nurse Walaza and Mrs Mattross. When Mary rang the first bell, both Walaza and Mattross were outside the dining-hall, trying to persuade the girls to go into lunch. After the second bell, the girls entered the hall, but only the head girl partook of the food. Mary denied having intimidated the younger girls as she was mostly in the kitchen and the food boycott was a spontaneous action. She "did not sympathise with the agitators".<sup>21</sup>

If Calata had hoped for any redress from the Bishop of Grahamstown, he was to be sorely disappointed. Cullen told Calata that he had received numerous reports on the St Matthews disturbances and that he had

... perfect confidence in the wisdom and judgement of the Warden and other authorities in their handling of the matter. If I were to cause a special enquiry to take place in the case of one pupil who has not been allowed to return I would have to do the same in the case of countless others.

Cullen believed that Mary's defence of her actions would have been "well considered" by the institutional authorities. He would send Calata's letter onto Williams, "but the whole affair was so grave that I cannot possibly consider any kind of interference with the discretion of those who are carrying a most heavy burden".<sup>22</sup> He believed that any further inquiry would not be in the interests of St Matthews, as this would undermine institutional authority.<sup>23</sup>

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20. Cullen: Calata Papers, J. Calata – Bishop of Grahamstown, 29 April 1945.

21. Cullen: Calata Papers, Statement by Noluthando Calata, no date [April 1945].

22. Cullen: Calata Papers, Bishop of Grahamstown – J. Calata, 7 May 1945.

23. Cullen: Calata Papers, Bishop of Grahamstown – J. Calata, 19 May 1945.

Cullen was deeply disappointed, indeed shocked, by the whole affair which he believed had “alienated the sympathies of many who were hitherto friends of the Bantu people” and “put back the march of events a very great deal”.<sup>24</sup> As he told Calata:

That the lives of persons who have given up their lives, or were seeking to give up their lives, to the advancement of the life and privileges of the African people should have been put in jeopardy of those same lives through mob-violence on the part of those whom they were seeking to help, seems too dreadful to contemplate.<sup>25</sup>

Although Cullen grossly overstated the significance of the St Matthews disturbance, this was perhaps understandable, given the liberal paternalism of the 1940s. Cullen was also rooted in the establishment and established practices of the Anglican Church – he occupied the cautiously moderate ground within the Church and so found student rebellion completely incomprehensible. It would take time and severe political strains before Cullen would emulate the lead taken by Archbishop Geoffrey Clayton and take a stand against unjust laws.<sup>26</sup>

Williams was in no mood to compromise, however, as he had “overwhelming evidence” that Mary Calata “was one of a small group which by threats of reprisals persuaded the majority of girls to refrain from eating their midday meal”.<sup>27</sup> In addition, what stood against Calata was the track record of his children: his eldest daughter had been expelled from St Matthews in 1938 and his second daughter had been forced to transfer from that institution to Lovedale.<sup>28</sup> “If I am to secure”, Williams informed Calata, “that we do not suffer a recurrence of these periodic disturbances, as I firmly intend to attempt to do, then we should gain by refusing readmission to any who showed irresponsibility or disloyalty at the time of the riot”.<sup>29</sup>

In Williams’ eyes, Mary’s version of events was inaccurate and he expressed his annoyance that Calata would not respect the decisions of the seven senior staff members who constituted the committee

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24. Cullen: Calata Papers, Bishop of Grahamstown – J. Calata, 7 May 1945.

25. Cullen: Calata Papers, Bishop of Grahamstown – J. Calata, 7 May 1945.

26. See: A. Paton, *Apartheid and the Archbishop The life and times of Geoffrey Clayton* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1973), pp 205, 271, 277, 283; J.S. Peart-Binns, *Archbishop Joost De Blank Scourge of Apartheid* (Muller, Blond & Whie, London, 1987), pp 93, 106.

27. Cullen: Calata Papers, H.C. Williams – J. Calata, 15 May 1945.

28. Cullen: Calata Papers, J. Calata – Bishop of Grahamstown, 29 April 1945.

29. Cullen: Calata Papers, H.C. Williams – J. Calata, 15 May 1945.

investigating the disturbance. As he noted, they had “given tremendous energy and worry to the welfare of this work”; each was “fully alive to the seriousness of these prevalent riots and their damaging effects on the future education” of the African people.<sup>30</sup> It is unfortunate that the deliberations of this committee do not seem to have survived; nor, except in the case of H.C. Hundleby, is there any evidence relating to the six other staff members who served on this committee. Hundleby (known as HB to his friends) had come to St Matthews from Britain in the 1930s in search of a quiet teaching life; he could hardly have picked a more remote and idyllic spot in which to create his corner of England in the Eastern Cape. Benign, charming, easy-going, somewhat weak and not overly energetic, he would not rock the boat and so would endorse the Warden’s position.<sup>31</sup> From an examination of the available evidence, it appears that the Warden exercised a strong pull over the committee.

The committee maintained that the frequency of disturbances at educational institutions and the fact that unrest was on the increase, could be laid either at the door of agitators, “subversive influences at work in school or in city locations”, or as a result of inefficiency and lack of clear aims in African education, especially at the primary level.<sup>32</sup> In a letter to Calata, written at the end of May 1945, Williams noted that within the last two months “nine serious riots” had broken out and some “500 students have suffered for their unthinking folly and disloyalty”.<sup>33</sup> Three points had emerged from the investigation of the St Matthews unrest. Firstly, there was a group of ringleaders prominent in the unrest who had initially been educated at a rural secondary day school whose principal was allegedly an active communist. Secondly, another group had been educated up to the junior certificate in day schools in Johannesburg. Thirdly, from a total of 40 rebellious students, at least 31 had been educated up to junior certificate in day schools “not under Guardian influence”.<sup>34</sup> The inference was that students might have been politically corrupted before coming to St Matthews: certainly students from urban areas, such as Johannesburg, were subject to an array of influences, social as well as political.<sup>35</sup> Kros, in her paper on the disturbance at Lovedale

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30. Cullen: Calata Papers, H.C. Williams – J. Calata, 26 May 1945.
  31. Interview: Ruth White, Grahamstown, 27 January 1998. White knew Hundleby well and in the 1970s would collaborate with him on a publication. Prior to this, Hundleby had also completed a PhD in linguistics.
  32. Cullen: Calata Papers, Fragment on causes of St Matthews disturbance, no date.
  33. Cullen: Calata Papers, H.C. Williams – J. Calata, 26 May 1945.
  34. Cullen, Calata Papers, St Matthews disturbance, no date.
  35. See: C. Glaser, *Bo-Tsotsi The Youth Gangs of Soweto, 1935-1976* (James Curry, Oxford, 2000), especially Chapters 2 and 3.

Institution in 1946, has graphically illustrated the extent to which students were subject to outside influences as “at least some of the leading students were plugged into broader networks”.<sup>36</sup> Such influences undoubtedly became imbedded in the fabric of the rural missionary institutions.

Students at St Matthews also fraternised with those from other nearby institutions, notably Healdtown, Lovedale and Fort Hare: inter-institutional sports events, debates and other social functions brought students from different backgrounds together. Political discussion and political deprivation formed an inevitable point of departure on these occasions, serving to unite students. The geographical remoteness of St Matthews also contributed to the radicalisation of students who had considerable time to interrogate the political issues of the day unencumbered by any extraneous influences.

The committee blamed the increasing level of educational unrest on the deterioration of missionary institutions “from both a Christian and civic point of view”; it argued that the African youth had become increasingly ill-disciplined and in this sense the missionary endeavour was failing. The youth however also had few role models: teachers, for instance, were well-respected members of the community, but in many cases were “irresponsible, often dishonest, and all too frequently immoral”. The committee also pointed a finger at the management of African schools which fed the missionary establishments. Managers of these schools were generally “inefficient and often corrupt”. However, the committee also stressed the underdevelopment of African areas and hence the poverty of many of the schools and the fact that acceptable standards were difficult to maintain, and so the youth could not be blamed “for growing up to disrespect honesty and morality and discipline”.<sup>37</sup> Williams, therefore, considered that following a hard-line course of action would ultimately prove beneficial to the wider cause of African education. As he told Calata: “... there is no future for our work whatever unless those whom we are here to assist first know the meaning of discipline”.<sup>38</sup> In response to Calata’s complaint that his daughter had been “judged guilty without a proper trial in Institutional courts of Justice”,<sup>39</sup> Williams pointed out that the suspension of students was always considered by the disciplinary committee which consisted of seven staff members and its findings were then sent to the Department of

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36. Kros, “They wanted dancing”, pp 14-22 (citation on p 19).

37. Cullen: Calata Papers, St Matthews disturbance, no date.

38. Cullen: Calata Papers, H.C. Williams – J. Calata, 26 May 1945.

39. Cullen: Calata Papers, J. Calata – H.C. Williams, 31 May 1945.

Education.<sup>40</sup> He had confidence in this process “and every angle of investigation which may have proved useful to African education has been explored”. The process would not be reopened.<sup>41</sup>

A perceptive circular to all parents by J.D. Zeka, called for the Anglican Church to set up a commission to investigate on-going disturbances in St Matthews.<sup>42</sup> Bishop Cullen, it has already been noted, had rejected a similar call by Calata, because he did not believe this to be in the best interest of St Matthews.<sup>43</sup> However, Zeka argued that it was not the students who should be held responsible for the disturbance, as they were “the poor unfortunate victims on whom the parasitic causes feed”. He also fingered, without specifying, structural deficiencies within the institution which caused these outbursts. Zeka noted, as well, that the suspension of students put a heavy burden on economically stretched parents and he suggested that the institution had been unreasonably punitive in expelling 90 students without a formal enquiry. This circular was “a very special appeal to all parents and guardians to urge for the immediate remedy for the trouble”.<sup>44</sup>

Zeka’s appeal to African parents gets to the bottom of one of the major problems which has bedevilled African education, a factor still prevalent some sixty years later: parental involvement in the education of children. Yet the point needs to be made that a parent’s involvement in the education of his children is a middle-class concern and the majority of students in St Matthews came from working-class backgrounds. Research throws up few cases of parents getting actively involved in educational issues; in many instances students were forced to fend for themselves. In this sense, Calata was something of an anomaly. Calata suggested that Zeka arrange a meeting of parents to be combined with the annual conference of the Cape African Congress (ANC) to be held during the first week of July 1945.<sup>45</sup> Calata’s efforts to receive redress for his daughter had proved fruitless and he wanted the Congress to debate the issue and to adopt a strong resolution, as he felt “much disgusted over this affair”.<sup>46</sup> The Calata case was about to take a new twist.

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40. Cullen: Calata Papers, H.C. Williams – J. Calata, 5 June 1945.

41. Cullen: Calata Papers, H.C. Williams – J. Calata, 26 May 1945.

42. Cullen: Calata Papers, “There is no time to stand and stare”, issued by J.D. Zeka, no date [May, 1945].

43. Cullen: Calata Papers, Bishop of Grahamstown – J. Calata, 19 May 1945.

44. Cullen: Calata Papers, “No time to stand”, no date.

45. Cullen: Calata Papers, J. Calata – J.D. Zeka, 8 June 1945.

46. Cullen: Calata Papers, J. Calata – J.D. Zeka, 8 June 1945.

It is possible that Calata's lack of discretion created the rumour that he would address the ANC on the question of the St Matthews disturbance, a scenario which alarmed Bishop Cullen.<sup>47</sup> Rumour feeds the historical process.<sup>48</sup> Calata emphatically denied the rumour, but in a sleight of hand, pointed out that as president of the Cape Congress he would have to allow the issue of school riots to be raised, but that this would be discussed nationally, focusing on all disturbances that had taken place and not merely the one at St Matthews. "I might add", he wrote to Cullen, "that question has been raised at the Senate and House of Assembly and several Newspapers [sic] have published comments on it. It has therefore resolved itself into a National [sic] issue".<sup>49</sup> Whilst the Bishop understood Calata's dilemma, he warned that he might face "personal embarrassment ... as it is not seemly that matters which might seem to affect one of our own church institutions should be debated by an outside body with a priest in the Chair". Cullen was concerned both theologically and personally about "the unwisdom and the undesirableness of priests accepting office in any political organisation". This had always been Church policy and accordingly he told Calata that in future he would direct all priests in his diocese not to "hold office in any political or semi-political body".<sup>50</sup> He firmly chided Calata:

I know that those who hold such offices are frequently away on other affairs from their own missions without first obtaining the Bishop's permission. And this is not in order. I am glad that you have had this experience, but I am fast coming to the view that it ought now to come to an end.<sup>51</sup>

Clearly Cullen had grown weary of the entire saga being stoked by his meddling priest, yet the issue of student unrest had mushroomed, as J.D. Zeka makes clear in a letter to Calata. Plans were afoot to hold several meetings across the Eastern Cape and to mobilise parents, so that the Department of Education would be forced to hold an independent enquiry. Disturbances at a number of institutions – St Matthews, Clarkebury, Shawbury, Emfundisweni and Marianhill – would be considered.<sup>52</sup> Zeka was highly critical of Bishop Cullen's approach to the question of the St Matthews unrest. "It is a pity", he informed Calata, "that the Bishop should be a true 'European' and cease to be a Christian.

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47. Cullen: Calata Papers, Bishop of Grahamstown – J. Calata, 19 June 1945.

48. For instance: A. Corbin, *The Village of Cannibals Rage and Murder in France, 1870* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992), from p 7.

49. Cullen: Calata Papers, J. Calata – Bishop of Grahamstown, 20 June 1945.

50. Cullen: Calata Papers, Bishop of Grahamstown – J. Calata, 26 June 1945.

51. Cullen: Calata Papers, Bishop of Grahamstown – J. Calata, 26 June 1945.

52. Cullen: Calata Papers, J.D. Zeka – J. Calata, 19 June 1945.

We know that if he is a 'European', he will lose any sense of justice because justice and Europeanism are incompatible things".<sup>53</sup> Z.K. Matthews had also suggested to C.H. Malcomess, Native Representative for the Ciskei, that the Department of Education should investigate the disturbances.<sup>54</sup>

Calata's strenuous efforts on behalf of his daughter were bringing him into conflict with his diocese and this placed him in a quandary. To him, religion and politics were inseparable, an inescapable fact of South African life. Paternalistic attitudes within the Church were well entrenched and although there were more black than white members, there were no senior black clergy.<sup>55</sup> In 1943, for instance, Calata had been nominated for the bishopric of the Transkei, but his election was blocked by white clergy. Cullen had also warned him to desist from his political activities. Feeling alienated within the Church, he apparently considered a move, though opportunities for Africans were limited. Arthur Blaxall, a priest sympathetic to the African cause, advised caution: "I understand your longing to break away into a new environment – but I plead with you to be sure of each step before you lift your foot."<sup>56</sup>

In June 1945, Calata wrote to B.P. Akena, Provincial Secretary of the ANC based in Cradock, and asked him to act on the St Matthews affair so as to prevent the crisis from escalating; in July, whilst attending the Cape Congress of the ANC in George, he interviewed D.B. Molteno, a lawyer and Native Representative for the Western Cape electoral circle. Calata sought advice on two matters: the legality of the expulsion of his daughter and the Bishop's ban on his political activities. Molteno was not all that sanguine. On the issue of his daughter, Molteno advised Calata to consult the college prospectus, because if St Matthews did not reserve the right of expulsion without the opportunity of self-defence, then a case against the institution could be made. However, Molteno warned that the Supreme Court would have to try the case and that if it was lost, considerable personal expenses would accrue.<sup>57</sup> Calata had

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53. Cullen: Calata Papers, J.D. Zeka – J. Calata, 19 June 1945.

54. Cullen: Calata Papers, C.H. Malcomess – J. Calata, 9 July 1945.

55. Interview: Bishop Ernest Sobukwe, Alice, 20 January 1983; M. Goedhals, "From Paternalism to Partnership? The Church of the Province of South Africa and Mission 1848-1988", in F. England and T. Paterson (eds), *Bounty in Bondage Essays in honour of Edward King, Dean of Cape Town*, (Raven Press, Johannesburg, 1989), pp 116-121; Paton, *Apartheid and the Archbishop*, pp 46-47.

56. Cullen: Calata Papers, A. Blaxall – J. Calata, 17 June 1945.

57. Cullen: Calata Papers, Interview with D.B. Molteno by J. Calata, 3 July 1945.

earlier sought the advice of Z.K. Matthews, also a lawyer, on this issue, as he was apparently considering a legal case against St Matthews:

If you think that I ought to take the matter to a court of law as a test case not only for my daughter's sake but also for many others who have received the same treatment I am willing to do so although as you know I have no financial means.<sup>58</sup>

On the question of the Bishop's ban, Molteno undertook to write to Cullen, intimating the importance of Calata's work within the ANC.<sup>59</sup> True to his word, Molteno did write a lengthy and well-reasoned letter to Cullen, in which he appealed to the Bishop to be tolerant of Calata's political activities, for, as he pointed out, the fortunes of the African National Congress had been revived by a few able men, Calata being the most outstanding. He maintained that "wise and responsible leadership" was vital to the well-being of the African and the future development of the country, but that in the present state of development such a commodity was scarce and therefore needed to be nurtured.<sup>60</sup> Molteno noted that both C.H. Malcomess, a Native Representative for the Cape Province in the Senate, and Ballinger would corroborate his opinions.<sup>61</sup> Mandy Goedhals has observed that Cullen's approach to the issue of religion and politics was somewhat ambivalent<sup>62</sup> and in reply to Molteno he noted that he had not yet made a decision on the matter, but that he would like the input of both Malcomess and Ballinger.<sup>63</sup>

Cullen did consider the matter and in time wrote at length to Calata seeking to balance pastoral concerns with political ones. Cullen did not wish to compromise the work of Native Representatives by forbidding priests under his jurisdiction from active political involvement, particularly when they were as highly thought of as Calata. However, he informed Calata that although he did not require him to forsake his political work, he reserved to himself "complete freedom of action" to do so in the future should he feel it necessary.<sup>64</sup> It is clear that Cullen continued to tolerate Calata's political activities as Calata remained a senior member of the ANC executive until 1949, but there was a *quid pro quo*: Mary Calata would not be re-admitted to St Matthews and the Bishop did not intend to institute an independent enquiry into the

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58. Cullen: Calata Papers, J. Calata – Z.K. Matthews, 2 May 1945.

59. Cullen: Calata Papers, Interview with D.B. Molteno, 3 July 1945.

60. Cullen: Calata Papers, D.B. Molteno – Bishop of Grahamstown, 7 July 1945.

61. Cullen: Calata Papers, D.B. Molteno – Bishop of Grahamstown, 7 July 1945.

62. Goedhals, "Paternalism to Partnership", p 119.

63. Cullen: Calata Papers, Bishop of Grahamstown – J. Calata, 20 September 1945.

64. Cullen: Calata Papers, Bishop of Grahamstown – J. Calata, 20 September, 1945.

disturbance. Calata was forced to abandon his hard-fought battle on behalf of his daughter in order to remain active within the ANC and to keep his position as an Anglican priest. He thus sacrificed his narrow personal concerns for broader issues; but in the final analysis it was the right thing to do, because Calata had taken on a fight which he simply could not win.

Calata, in despair, then turned to Lovedale and wrote to its principal, R.H.W. Shepherd, in an attempt to secure a place for Mary there. His letter was candid and critical of Williams. "I want you to feel", he appealed to Shepherd, "that you are helping me out of a difficulty which is very great and which touches me deeply spiritually if you accept my daughter".<sup>65</sup> He also included a fairly respectable testimonial from Williams,<sup>66</sup> which the Warden had told Malcomess "errs on the generous side".<sup>67</sup> Admitting that he did not have the evidence to pass judgement on Mary Calata's guilt or innocence, Shepherd nevertheless argued that she could not be admitted to Lovedale without a certificate freeing her of any culpability for the St Matthews disturbances, because without such a certificate the St Matthews authorities would appear in a bad light.<sup>68</sup> This was to all intents and purposes a blunt refusal to admit Mary Calata into Lovedale. Here Shepherd's position was buttressed by a decision of the Association of Heads of Native Institutions, the committee which oversaw the running of African mission schools, that the names of expelled students be circulated amongst all institutions and that any student expelled from one institution because of involvement in a disturbance would only be admitted to another institution at the discretion of its head. The Association believed that the waves of periodic unrest compromised the established order and therefore needed to be tackled firmly.<sup>69</sup>

Shepherd favoured punitive action against miscreants because, as he told Calata:

These riots have ... become so serious, widespread and frequent that concern for the individual has been swallowed up in concern for the whole cause of Native education. If they do not stop completely, Native education in this country is to be paralysed. Those indulging in

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65. Cullen: Calata Papers, J. Calata – R.H.W. Shepherd, 2 August 1945.
  66. Cullen: Calata Papers, Testimonial – Mary Calata, 28 May 1945.
  67. Cullen: Calata Papers, H.C. Williams – C.H. Malcomess, 5 July 1945.
  68. Cullen: Calata Papers, R.H.W. Shepherd – J. Calata, 7 August 1945.
  69. Cory: MS 16, 295, Minutes of the Association of Heads of Native Institutions, 31 July 1945.

such riots are the greatest enemies of Native education the land contains and they are playing into the hands of the other lesser enemies who know well how to use these things to halt progress.<sup>70</sup>

This was a pointer as to how Shepherd would respond to the student unrest at Lovedale the following year. He believed that swift and stern action was needed to stem what he saw as a river of destruction. Shepherd's often forbidding conservatism had been moulded through a life of poverty and hardship; his considerable achievements had been gained through struggle and he could not empathise with those students who became involved in unrest.<sup>71</sup> In response, Calata again sought the intercession of Molteno. He complained bitterly that his daughter would be barred from all institutions and that the authorities of these institutions had ignored the views of the parents. He warned that this type of issue could play out with serious consequences. "It is evident that the matter will resolve", he told Molteno, "into a Black vs White education problem and that will be a pity".<sup>72</sup> He maintained that far from defeating radicalism, such punitive action simply entrenched radical ideas amongst the students.<sup>73</sup>

Although Calata had considered litigation as a means of righting this perceived wrong, the advice he received from Molteno was far from encouraging and basically ruled out any litigious action. Molteno told Calata:

... in order to succeed in an action against the school authorities you would have to prove, not only that your daughter did not participate in the incident that gave rise to the expulsions but that the school authorities had no reasonable ground for thinking that she had.<sup>74</sup>

Such "wide discretionary powers" meant that this was well-nigh impossible, risky and hugely expensive.<sup>75</sup> It is never easy for an individual to take on an institution and for an African in South Africa in the 1940s certainly not a plausible option. With the dice stacked against him, Calata was forced to persist with the only option left to him; he needed to persuade Shepherd to change his mind, itself not an easy call.

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70. Cullen: Calata Papers, R.H.W. Shepherd – J. Calata, 7 August 1945.

71. For background, see: G.C. Oosthuizen, *Shepherd of Lovedale A life for Southern Africa* (Hugh Keartland, Johannesburg, 1970); T.R.H. White, "Masters of the Night: The Context and Evolution of the Lovedale Riot of 1946", *Historia*, 42, 1, May 1997, pp 81-97.

72. Cullen: Calata Papers, J. Calata – D.B. Molteno, 10 August 1945.

73. Cullen: Calata Papers, Unsigned note by J. Calata, no date [August, 1945].

74. Cullen: Calata Papers, D.B. Molteno – J. Calata, 1 September 1945.

75. Cullen, Calata Papers, D.B. Molteno – R.H.W. Shepherd, 15 September 1945.

Again it was Molteno who intervened on Calata's behalf. His letter to Shepherd made no attempt to be tactful and it was couched in forceful legal argument. He warned Shepherd that if Mary Calata was barred from all missionary institutions, then her father would be honour bound to turn to the courts for redress, and this would mean that "a public inquisition into the conduct of the St Matthews authorities with all its attendant unpleasantness" would ensue.<sup>76</sup> He argued:

The issue involved here is not as to the gravity or otherwise of school riots, but whether a child of good family and the daughter of a priest was involved in one of them and whether the authorities had reasonable ground for deciding that she was.<sup>77</sup>

Molteno was critical of the attitude that expulsion should lead to blacklisting: "I have never heard it seriously suggested before", he told Shepherd, "that the penalty of expulsion should be re-enforced by the additional penalty of boycott". He pointed out that in the case where education was compulsory, such a ruling could not be enforced, because parents would be legally obliged to educate their children. Molteno concluded that it was "not the fault of Rev. Calata and his child that they belong to a people whom blatant racial discrimination has deprived of compulsory education".<sup>78</sup>

Molteno's intervention and the fear of adverse publicity appear to have led to a rethink within the missionary establishment. Williams wrote to inform Molteno that he would not stand in the way of expelled students being accepted by other institutions and in many cases he had in fact facilitated such transfers. Indeed he had – at St Matthews, three students who had been expelled for involvement in disturbances at other institutions, all of whom were "atoning for previous errors", but in order to maintain discipline, students who had been expelled from an institution could not be readmitted. The case of Mary Calata had caused anguish, but no extenuating circumstances could be found. "We like you", he reminded Molteno, "have the interests of the whole African people at heart, and are keen to do everything in our power which will be conducive to their welfare".<sup>79</sup> For the good of St Matthews, Mary Calata could not be readmitted, but it was up to other institutions to decide on whether to admit an expelled student once all misdemeanours had been fully and frankly disclosed: he would play no part in such a decision.<sup>80</sup>

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76. Cullen: Calata Papers, D.B. Molteno – R.H.W. Shepherd, 15 September 1945.

77. Cullen: Calata Papers, D.B. Molteno – R.H.W. Shepherd, 15 September 1945.

78. Cullen: Calata Papers, D.B. Molteno – R.H.W. Shepherd, 15 September 1945.

79. Cullen: Calata Papers, H.C. Williams – D.B. Molteno, 13 October 1945.

80. Cullen: Calata Papers, H.C. Williams – D.B. Molteno, 22 October 1945.

In the light of this, Molteno asked Shepherd to expedite Mary Calata's admission to Lovedale,<sup>81</sup> and so Mary entered the prestigious institution in 1946. On a human level, one feels for James Calata having expended so much energy and emotion on behalf of his daughter. If he did not succeed in his aim of getting her readmitted to St Matthews and in clearing her name, at least she could continue her education at Lovedale. This case however raises a deeper issue. Calata was able to marshal considerable resources on behalf of his daughter, but what would the future have been of those students whose parents were unable to do so?

And what of Mary herself, the silent and shifty shadow that has dominated this story? She certainly cannot have brought her father much joy, because she was one of those students expelled from Lovedale in the aftermath of the disturbances there in August 1946.<sup>82</sup> Thereafter, like the Fool in *King Lear*, Mary Calata disappears into the cauldron of history, one of the many lost souls for whom education would never become a reality. In the broader scheme of things, the St Matthews disturbance was a minor affair, a nascent struggle born of the frustration and humiliation of being black in a segregated society. The Calata case to some extent teases out this frustration and the feisty performance of James Calata ensured that the affair would reach the wider society.

### Abstract

In March 1945 there was a student rebellion at St Matthews, an Anglican college in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. The students were protesting against the Shepstonian system of authority which existed at the institution, whereby certain students had the power to control and discipline other students. This protest, therefore, divided students into loyalists and rebels. The police refused to intervene and so the institutional authorities closed St Matthews and expelled a large number of students. A committee of senior staff was then set up to probe this disturbance. It produced a report which emphasised that many of the ringleaders were radicalised before coming to St Matthews. However, there were also systemic failures within the institution itself. The case of one expelled student, Mary Calata, is highlighted. Her father, James Calata, was a senior member of the African National Congress and a senior clergyman within the Anglican Church. He fought a campaign to have his daughter reinstated and this brought him into conflict with his

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81. Cullen: Calata Papers, D.B. Molteno – R.H.W. Shepherd, 27 October 1945.

82. Interview: Professor J.W. Maquarrie, Somerset West, 6 January 1991.

bishop, Archibald Cullen. This teases out the tensions that often existed within the Church over the question of politics and religion.

### **Opsomming**

#### **Die Skorsing van Mary Calata: Onrus by St Matthews Missionary Institution, Maart 1945**

In Maart 1945 het 'n leerling-opstand by die Anglikaanse kollege, St Matthews, in die Oos-Kaap uitgebreek. Die leerlinge het teen die Shepstone-stelsel van outoriteit by die instelling, waarvolgens sommige leerlinge beheer en dissipline oor ander leerlinge uitgeoefen het, geprotesteer. Hierdie protesaksie het leerlinge in onderskeidelik lojaliste en rebelle verdeel. Die polisie het geweier om tussenbeide te tree. Vervolgens het die skoolowerheid die kollege gesluit en 'n groot aantal leerlinge geskors. 'n Komitee van senior personeel is aangestel om die aangeleentheid te ondersoek. In hulle verslag is beklemtoon dat talle van die voorbokke in die protes reeds radikaal was voordat hulle by St Matthews aangekom het. Daar was egter ook sistemiese probleme binne hierdie onderwysinstelling. Die geval van een geskorste student, Mary Calata, word uitgelig. Haar vader, James Calata, was 'n senior lid van die African National Congress, asook 'n senior ampsdraer in die Anglikaanse Kerk. Hy het geveg vir die hertoelating van sy dogter tot die skool, wat gelei het tot konflik met sy biskop, Archibald Cullen. Hierdie voorval weerspieël die spanning wat dikwels in die Kerk rondom politiek en godsdiens bestaan het.

#### **Key words**

African education; Anglican Church; Archibald Cullen; James Calata; Mary Calata; missionary education; protest politics; student unrest.

#### **Sleutelwoorde**

Anglikaanse kerk; Archibald Cullen; James Calata; Mary Calata; protespolitiek; sendingskole; studente-onrus; swart onderwys.