

Desmond Tutu Hope and Suffering (1983)

1982-09-1

Presentatain to Eloff Commission, Sept 1, 1982

The Divine Intention

Preamble

My Lord and members of the Eloff Commission, I want to start by expressing the appreciation of the South African Council of Churches to the Commission and its officers in their dealings with the Council. They could very well have hamstrung our operations by taking away our books and records. Instead they examined our records in such a way as to dislocate our work as little as possible – for this we are grateful.

Secondly, I want to indicate briefly at the beginning what I hope to elaborate in the body of my submission.

My purpose is to demonstrate from the Scriptures and from hallowed Christian tradition and teaching that what we are as the South African Council of Churches, what we say and what we do, all of these are determined not by politics or any other ideology. We are what we are in obedience to God and in response to the gracious Gospel of His Son, Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Ultimately we owe loyalty not to any human authority, however prestigious or powerful, but to God and to His Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ alone, from whom we obtain our mandate. We must obey the divine imperative and word whatever the cost.

Everything we do or say and everything we are must be tested by whether it is consistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ or not, and not by whether it is merely expedient or even acceptable to the Government of the day or whether it

Hope and Suffering

is popular. To understand the nature of the Council, its aims, objectives and activities requires that you appreciate the theological *raison d'être* of its existence. Without this biblical and theological justification you will almost certainly misunderstand what we are about. Consequently, I want to underline that it is not the finances or any other activities of the SACC that are being investigated. It is our Christian faith, it is the Christian churches who are members of the SACC who are on trial. It is our Christianity, it is our faith and therefore our theology that are under scrutiny, and the central matters at issue are profoundly theological. As a Commission you are being asked to determine whether our understanding and practice of the Christian faith can pass muster. We are on trial for being Christian, and that by a Government which itself claims to be Christian. It may be that we are being told that it is an offence to be a Christian in South Africa. That is what you are asked to determine. And that is a theological task through and through.

I will show that the Bible describes God as creating the universe to be a cosmos and not a chaos, a cosmos in which harmony, unity, order, fellowship, communion, peace and justice would reign and that this divine intention was disturbed by sin. The result was disunity, alienation, disorder, chaos, separation, and in the face of this God then sent His Son to restore that primordial harmony to effect reconciliation.

By becoming a real human being through Jesus Christ, God showed that He took the whole of human history and the whole of human life seriously. He demonstrated that He was Lord of all Life, spiritual and secular, sacred and profane, material and spiritual. We will show that Scripture and the main stream of Christian tradition and teaching know nothing of the dichotomies so popular in our day, which demand the separation of religion from politics, etc. These I will demonstrate are deeply theological matters which

The Divine Intention

affect the nature, work and attitudes of the SACC. Our God cares that children starve in resettlement camps, the somewhat respectable name for apartheid's dumping grounds for the pathetic casualties of this vicious and evil system. The God we worship does care that people die mysteriously in detention. He is concerned that people are condemned to a twilight existence as non-persons by an arbitrary bureaucratic act of banning, without giving them the opportunity to reply to charges brought against them. I will show this from the Bible. I might add that if God did not care about these and similar matters, I would not worship Him, for He would be a totally useless God. Mercifully, He is not such a God.

I will soon show that the central work of Jesus was to effect reconciliation between God and us and also between man and man. Consequently, from a theological and scriptural base, I will demonstrate that apartheid, separate development or whatever it is called, is evil, totally and without remainder, that it is unchristian and unbiblical. It has recently been declared a heresy by a world body of responsible Christians, a body to which the White Dutch Reformed Churches belong and which can therefore not be dismissed as a so-called left-wing radical body, unless you want to use these epithets of the NGK as well, since they have been hurt that their membership of this august body, whose President is present in this Court this morning, has been suspended. If anyone were to show me that apartheid is biblical or Christian, I have said before, and I reiterate now, that I would burn my Bible and cease to be Christian. I will want to show that the Christian Bible and the Gospel of Jesus Christ Our Lord is subversive of all injustice and evil, oppression and exploitation, and that God is on the side of the oppressed and the downtrodden, that He is the liberator God of the Exodus, who leads His people out of every kind of bondage, spiritual, political, social and economic, and

Hope and Suffering

nothing will thwart Him from achieving the goal of the liberation of all His people and the whole of His creation.

The SACC and its member churches, we will show, are not a tuppenny ha'penny fly-by-night organization. We belong to the Church of God, a Church that is found universally, spread out throughout the face of the whole inhabited universe. That is what the Greek word from which we find "ecumenical" means. It is the Body of Jesus Christ of which we are members, and it is a supernatural, a divine fellowship brought into being by the action of God Himself through His Holy Spirit. It is not merely a human organization that is limited by national or ethnic boundaries. It transcends time and space, race, culture and sex, nationality and all the things that men sometimes think are important. I am a bishop in the Church of God – that is what was pronounced over me when I was consecrated – so that I am a bishop of the Church when I go to Timbuktoo, when I go to Korea; I am a bishop of the Church in Russia and in the United States. We belong to something which includes the living in what is called "the Church militant", which includes the dead in what is called "the Church quiescent", which includes the saints in glory in what is called "the Church triumphant". Theologically I have brothers and sisters whom I have never met physically and will probably never meet, but ontologically we are one in Our Lord Jesus Christ, and I know that they are upholding us with their prayers, with their love, with their caring concern even now. Your investigators will know that from their recent visit in the United States. Because of this theological fact of the nature of the Church we express our oneness in all kinds of ways – in our prayers for one another, in making up what is lacking in the resources of another church, and so on. When one church gives to another church either personnel, or material, or money resources that is in fact nothing remarkable. It is as it should be. It is an expression of Christian fellowship, of *koinonia* in Our Lord.

The Divine Intention

We might want local churches to be more self-supporting but it is no aberration for a more affluent part of the Church to give of its wealth, of which it is only a steward on behalf of God from whom all things come. It gives and it receives. There is the mutuality of giving and receiving, as of a loving family. Those who criticize the SACC for depending so greatly on overseas support show their woeful ignorance of ecclesiology, the theology of the nature of the Church of God – when one part suffers the whole suffers with it and when one part rejoices the whole rejoices with it.

Thirdly, I have already said we owe our ultimate loyalty and allegiance only to God. With due respect I want to submit that no secular authority nor its appointed Commissions has any competence whatsoever to determine how a church is a church nor what is the nature of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When a secular authority tries to do this then it is usurping divine prerogatives and the prerogatives of the Church itself. With respect, we do not recognize the right of the Commission to inquire into our theological existence, and, therefore, into any aspect of our life as a Council, since every aspect of our existence is determined by theological facts, as I have already pointed out. Only our member churches can call us to task. If we have contravened any laws of the country then you don't need a Commission to determine that. There is an array of draconian laws at the disposal of the Government, and the Courts of Law are the proper place to determine our guilt or innocence. This Commission, with respect, is totally superfluous. We have agreed to appear before it only because we have nothing to hide, which does not mean that we are infallible. Our written submission to the Commission acknowledges that we are fallible and have made mistakes, but it is our member churches and not the Government or any other secular authority who are the proper judges of that. And to reveal that we are sinners, as if some major scientific discovery was

Hope and Suffering

being made, is to become quite ridiculous in Christian terms for it is to labour the obvious. We are always justified and we are always sinners. We depend not on our goodness but on the gracious mercy of God. And again the Government or any other secular body has no competence whatsoever to pass judgement on this. God alone can do that. And when the Government usurps God's prerogative then it becomes not just wrong, but blasphemous.

The Government appointed this Commission for a reason that is perfectly obvious and totally unsubtle. It has used Commissions before to deal with awkward customers. I don't impugn the integrity of this Commission and its members in any way, but I want the Government to know now and always that I do not fear them. They are trying to defend the utterly indefensible. Apartheid is as evil and as vicious as Nazism and Communism, and the Government will fail completely for it is ranging itself on the side of evil, injustice and oppression. The Government is not God, they are just ordinary human beings who very soon – like other tyrants before them – will bite the dust. When they take on the SACC they must know that they are taking on the Church of God, and those who have done so in the past, the Neros, the Hitlers, the Amins of this world, have ended up, as I have said before on another occasion, as the flotsam and jetsam of history. Christ has assured us that His Church is founded on rock and not even the gates of Hell can prevail against it. The Resurrection of Our Lord and Saviour declares for all to know that life will triumph over darkness, that goodness will triumph over evil, that justice will triumph over injustice, and that freedom will triumph over tyranny. I stand before you as one who believes fervently what Paul wrote when he said, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

The Divine Intention

The divine intention

In the Constitution of the SACC under the heading OBJECTS we read:

The principal objects of the Council shall be:

3.1 To foster that unity which is both God's will for all mankind and His gift to the Church.

I want to point out that this first object permeates all the other objects, reflected in expressions such as "to co-ordinate the work in Southern Africa of churches", "to undertake on behalf of churches . . . joint action and service . . . and to encourage joint action and service . . ."; "to do all such things to encourage all such things . . . calculated to reduce divisive factors . . ."; "by developing dialogue with people of other faiths and ideologies".

It can be said that the search for the unity of the Church and of humankind is a central concern of the SACC. But is unity a central biblical concern or is it just peripheral to the life of faith, something to be engaged in as an optional extra by those who are temperamentally suited to do so? I want to show that the SACC and its member churches have their agenda and their programmes in this matter determined by what the Scriptures have revealed as the will of God, the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ. I want to stress that this concern for unity is not something that was introduced by the ecumenical movement from its inception. No, the Scriptures declare that unity; the unity of the entire creation was God's intention from the very beginning of creation. The SACC is thus caught up in a divine mission; it is a fellow worker with none other than God Himself; it is an agent of the divine mercy and compassion and concern not just for the world and not just for human beings, but for the whole of creation.

Let us start at the beginning where the Bible seems to

Hope and Suffering

start, and that is with the creation of all there is. We find our sources in the sublime stories contained in the first eleven chapters of Genesis. Some have sought to dismiss these stories as myths, meaning that their truth content was no more than that of fairy tales. But those who do so are dull, unimaginative souls who would ask Wordsworth – writing about a host of golden daffodils “dancing in the breeze” – which band was playing, and who were their dancing partners. No, in these chapters we have the evocative, imaginative, highly symbolical language of poetry conveying to us some of the most profound theological, or if you like, spiritual and existential truths about God, about ourselves and about the rest of God’s creation, and no advances in technology or science will be able to produce anything to contradict those truths – true science cannot contradict true religion.

The first creation narrative reaches a climax in Genesis 1:26 when God says, “Let us create man in our image and likeness to rule . . .” Human beings are created, so St Augustine of Hippo tells us, by God, like God, for God. God creates man to become His viceroy, His representative to rule over the rest of creation on God’s behalf. In olden times the Emperor’s statue received the same honour and respect as the Emperor himself and represented him where he could not travel in his vast domains. That is the high privilege bestowed on each human person, male and female, as the passage goes on to explain – that each human being is God’s own representative, own viceroy or ambassador, and no mention is made of race or nationality or colour. It is the fact of their being created by God that endows them with this infinite and eternal value. But note also that they are expected to rule over the rest of creation on behalf of God. So already in those early verses of the Bible we get definite adumbrations of the Kingdom of God, about which the New Testament is so explicit and to which I want to refer later.

The Divine Intention

May I point out that the biblical author depicts the primal state of affairs as being such that harmony, unity, fellowship and friendliness abound. Poetically and symbolically this is done by saying that every living creature was at this stage a vegetarian. There was no bloodshed in God's creation according to His will and intention. There was no bloodshed, not even for blood sacrifices. Nature was not yet red in tooth and claw.

The second creation story speaks about the idyllic paradise of Eden in which Adam and Eve lived happily. There was abundant food. Adam named the animals to demonstrate his hegemony over all creation. Adam and Eve were as innocents abroad, communicating directly with God, who visited them as a man visits his friends, "walking with them in the garden in the cool of the evening". The animals did not prey on each other. The lion gambolled with the lamb. The picture we have is of a creation at peace, abounding in harmony, unity and fellowship. This was God's intention for the entire universe because unity means peace, prosperity, fellowship, justice, wholeness, compassion, love and joy *et al.* conveyed in the virtually untranslatable Hebrew word *Shalom*. It was a condition in which God's will was being done, in which His laws were being obeyed.

The Bible declares that things then went horribly, badly wrong because sin entered God's creation. There is no speculation about the origin of sin. We have a phenomenological account of what followed in the train of sin. The primal unity was disrupted. Where there was unity, there was now disunity, harmony was replaced by disharmony. There was alienation and hatred and enmity. Fellowship and communion were destroyed, and it was not just humankind that was affected: the rest of creation fell with the human beings. The ground brought forth thistles. There was murder and death (Cain/Abel), war and strife. And the Genesis stories culminate in the shattering story of

Hope and Suffering

the Tower of Babel, where human community and fellowship become impossible – human beings can no longer communicate with one another because God has confused their languages and people are torn apart. That is the ultimate consequence, according to the Bible, of sin, separation, alienation, apartness. It is a perverse exegesis that would hold that the story of the Tower of Babel is a justification for racial separation, a divine sanction for the diversity of nations. It is to declare that the divine punishment of sin had become the divine intention for humankind. That is a position the Bible would not support.

The entire situation at the end of the story of the Tower of Babel cried out for reconciliation, for atonement. Please note that this word atonement is also at-one-ment, meaning at-one-ing, the reconciling of those who are separated, divided; reconciliation means creating friendship, bringing together, uniting those who formerly were at variance, who were enemies before, who were alienated.

The story of the Bible could be said to be the story of God's mission to restore the harmony which was there at the beginning, when His rule, His reign would be acknowledged once again. This is the divine movement and activity in which the SACC is involved as it prays and works for the unity of the churches and of humankind.

The Scriptures reveal on occasion this nostalgia for Paradise Lost in a Paradise Regained. In the descriptions of the age to come, called the Messianic age (after Messiah, God's Anointed Representative to inaugurate God's rule, God's Kingdom), we hear echoes of the time of the beginning.

So Isaiah in Chapter 11 says of the Anointed One:

He shall judge the poor with justice and defend the humble in the land with equity; his mouth shall be a rod to strike down the ruthless, and with a word he shall slay the

The Divine Intention

wicked. Round his waist he shall wear the belt of justice, and good faith shall be the girdle round his body.

Note the following verses:

Then the wolf shall live with the sheep, and the leopard lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall grow up together, and a little child shall lead them; the cow and the bear shall be friends, and their young shall lie down together. The lion shall eat straw like cattle; the infant shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the young child dance over the viper's nest. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for as the waters fill the sea, so shall the land be filled with the knowledge of the Lord. (Isaiah 11:4-9)

Noting this characteristic of looking back in their looking forward, Herman Gunkel, a German biblical scholar, said, "*Endzeit ist Urzeit*" – the end time is as the time of the beginning!

And so God sent His Son to effect reconciliation, to bring about the atonement that would achieve the unity, harmony, peace, justice, fellowship, friendliness, compassion, wholeness which were His intention for His creation from the very beginning. St Paul says, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Jesus, speaking about His coming crucifixion, declares: "I, if I be lifted up will draw all men to me" (John 12:32), underlining that His chief work in the salvation of the world would be a uniting, a reconciling one. And we must recall that Christian tradition, referring to Christ's seamless robe, speaks of it as symbolizing the unity of the Church and so of all humankind. And in St John's gospel is to be found what tradition speaks of as the High Priestly prayer of Our Lord, as recorded in the seventeenth chapter, and the heart of that

Hope and Suffering

prayer is the petition that His followers will be one, with a unity that reflects the unity that subsists between the Father and the Son (John 17:11, 20-23); the unity is not for merely pragmatic reasons that it is economical to have one church building rather than several serving the same community and locality, but because a divided Church is a scandal, making it difficult for people to believe the Gospel of God's love.

The SACC is concerned for unity in all its aspects because it exists to proclaim the Good News of God's love for His world, for which He gave His only begotten Son, in obedience to the commission Our Lord gave to His followers when He said, "Full authority in heaven and earth has been committed to me. Go forth therefore and make all nations my disciples; baptize men everywhere in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and teach them to observe all that I commanded you. And be assured I am with you always, to the end of time." It is because, as St Paul declares, "God has reconciled us men to Himself through Christ, and He has enlisted us in this service of reconciliation" etc. (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). We are engaged in the ministry of proclaiming the love of God for all His people through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ Our Lord, and to proclaim the message of reconciliation which is another aspect of unity, of peace, of harmony, of justice, of compassion, of love, of brotherliness. That is why in its organizational structure the SACC has a Division of Mission and Evangelism, which was established to help the churches in their proclamation of the Christian Gospel through word and deed and the concern to win men and women for Christ, so that converted by the Holy Spirit they would accept Jesus and acknowledge Him as their Lord and Master and their Saviour.

We are concerned for justice, but that is a biblical concern. And we are also concerned about and work for reconciliation. And we have a division called the Division of Justice and

The Divine Intention

Reconciliation, to work for real peace and brotherhood in our land and throughout the world. I will return to this later.

St Paul waxes quite indignant when he thinks the unity of the Christian community has been jeopardized or undermined. In his First Letter to the Corinthians, he is supposed to be responding to questions that the Corinthian church has asked, but because of the disquieting news of factions and divisions in that church, Paul spends the first six chapters dealing with this matter of divisiveness before he deals with their other problems in the next nine chapters. That is strange conduct unless unity was of paramount importance. And he stresses that the Church is the body of Christ endowed with different spiritual and other gifts (*charismata*), having different limbs and organs with different functions – but all designed to function for the good and the benefit of the whole. He stresses the unity, the harmony, the oneness. It is a body in which the natural distinctions of race, status, sex, culture are of no moment any longer. They have been transcended in Jesus Christ Our Lord. He mentions this fact first in 1 Corinthians 12:12–13, and then again in Galatians 3:26–28.

This was what attracted the first converts when they saw this amazing spectacle of Christian *koinonia* and were led to exclaim, "How these Christians love one another!" St Paul exhorts Christians to have the mind of Christ, in Philippians, in order to maintain this precious thing – this unity.

In Ephesians we learn that this was God's intention. Ephesians 1:10 tells of a return to the primordial time of the beginning; and this is what Paul says in Romans 8:19–22.

That is the divine movement in which the SACC and its member churches are caught up. It is to demonstrate in our lives that the Jesus whom we worship as Lord and Master has, as Ephesians declares, broken down the wall of partition which separated Jew from Gentile (Ephesians 2:11–22). This movement, this divine activity, is for bringing together, for

Hope and Suffering

uniting, for reconciling, for atoning. Teilhard de Chardin, the French Jesuit paleontologist, spoke of much the same thing when he said that the whole of creation was moving from a point alpha to its goal in the point omega.

The only separation the Bible knows is between believers on the one hand and unbelievers on the other. Any other kind of separation, division, disunity is of the Devil. It is evil and from sin.

Do I still need to demonstrate that apartheid is evil after all that I have said about the centrality for the Bible of unity and reconciliation?

Apartheid is evil for at least three reasons:

- The Bible declares right at the beginning that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. I showed why this fact endows each person with a unique and infinite value, a person whose very hairs are numbered. And what makes any human being valuable therefore is not any biological characteristic. No, it is the fact that he or she is created in the image and likeness of God. Apartheid exalts a biological quality, which is a total irrelevancy, to the status of what determines the value, the worth of a human being.

Why should skin colour or race be any more useful as a criterion than, say, the size of one's nose? What has the size of my nose to do with whether I am intelligent, etc.? It has no more to do with my worth as a human being than has the colour of my eyes.

- Secondly, the chief work that Jesus came to perform on earth can be summed up in the word "Reconciliation". I have already demonstrated that in what has gone before. He came to restore human community and brotherhood which sin destroyed. He came to say that God had intended us for fellowship, for *koinonia*, for togetherness, without destroying our distinctiveness, our cultural otherness. Apartheid quite deliberately denies and repudiates this central act of Jesus and says we are made for separateness,

The Divine Intention

for disunity, for enmity, for alienation, which we have shown to be the fruits of sin. For this reason alone apartheid is totally unchristian and unbiblical, for it denies not just a peripheral matter but a central verity of the Christian faith.

Professor J. Durand in his response to Professor J. Heyns' article in *Stormkompas* has these words to say:

The fact that the irreconcilability of people does not pass by the churches is more than just an unfortunate state of affairs. Basically we are concerned here with a contradiction of the nature of the Church. If I read Ephesians 2 correctly, in which the Apostle Paul deals with the partition of separation, which is eliminated in Christ, then the mere existence of the Church is already a negation of the artificial and ideological separation of the people. How is it still possible that such separation can be preached and lived as the will of God and in accordance with the Gospel?

It is to the credit of the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk in Suid-Afrika* that it channelled the problem of the South African society back to its theological core – reconciliation – at the session of the synod in Belhar in 1978. The decision reads, "The Church wishes to express as its conviction that the apartheid policy and/or separate development such as that upheld by the authorities is contrary to the Gospel:

1. Because as opposed to the Gospel of Christ's objective, which is the reconciliation of man with God and with his fellow man, the forced separation of people on the basis of race and colour is most deeply founded upon the conviction of the fundamental irreconcilability between people who are separate in such a way;
2. Because the system that is evident from such a policy

Hope and Suffering

necessarily had to lead and led to an increasing polarization between people, especially because practice showed that within the system one sector of the population, viz. the Whites, is privileged and that consequently the requirement of the Gospel that justice apply to all has not been met, and

3. Because not only the dignity of the unprivileged sectors of the population is affected but also the dignity of everyone concerned with it."

One sometimes has the impression that those people in, e.g., the Dutch Reformed Church who do know about the above decision dismiss it too lightly as just another example of a decision by a church against apartheid. But the theological implications of this decision cannot be ignored. As a result of it a deeply penetrating question is directed to the church or churches who maintain that the policy mentioned can in some way or another be supported or backed theologically. These churches (and all churches together with it) are asked about the truth of their own church-being in South Africa.

● Thirdly, when moralists are uncertain about the moral quality of an act, etc., then they will ask what the consequences of that particular act or policy or whatever are. If the consequences are evil, then the act being evaluated is declared to be evil. Apartheid treats human beings, God's children, as if they were less than this. It manipulates persons and treats them as if they were means to some end. Immanuel Kant declared that a human person is always an end, never a means to an end.

I said that in the Old Testament we already had foreshadowings of the teaching about the Kingdom of God, for instance in man acting on behalf of God to rule over all

The Divine Intention

creation. It was God's intention to rule as sovereign Lord, and in His Kingdom He was absolute ruler and He demanded undivided loyalty to Himself alone. That is why Israel, His chosen people, are constantly castigated by God's spokesmen, the prophets, for their disloyalty which is likened to adultery since Israel is married to Yahweh, God alone. The Devil and the powers of evil have usurped God's rule and, as it were, God has permitted them to set up their counter kingdom. This world is in the power and control of the evil one, consequently there is evil, war, disease and death. God's children – many of them are held in bondage and in shackles by the evil one and his minions. But God would intervene through His Messiah, the long-expected One, the Anointed One, and when He came He would inaugurate the Kingdom of God. It is this long-awaited One who is referred to in the earlier quotation from Isaiah, who will be imbued with God's spirit. Christians believe that this Promised Messiah has come in Jesus Christ Our Lord.

We believe that God has intervened decisively in and through Jesus Christ, who is very God Himself and yet who became a real human being in that act of stupendous divine condescension called the Incarnation – God becoming man. By this act, God declared that human history is important, and that all of human life is important.

God declared that He is a jealous God brooking no rival whatsoever: "I am the Lord your God and you shall have no other gods beside Me." But He was and is the Lord of all life. When Jesus came and found people who were sick or hungry or naked – He did not send them away with a pious "We will pray about it". No, He fed the hungry, He healed the sick, He cleansed the lepers, He drove out demons. And in doing all of these things, He was demonstrating the presence of His Father's Kingdom (Luke 11:14–20). When the imprisoned John the Baptist asked whether Jesus was indeed the Messiah, Jesus pointed to the things that He was doing,

Hope and Suffering

including physical, material things, here and now, as signs of the Kingdom (Luke 7:18–23). All of these things were thoroughly religious and spiritual but many of them were so physical, so material, so secular, so profane. Jesus applied to Himself words out of the book of the prophet Isaiah in His first recorded sermon, as words that aptly summed up His mission (Luke 4).

I want to underline that these are thoroughly political, thoroughly mundane things. If we are to say that religion cannot be concerned with politics then we are really saying that there is a substantial part of human life in which God's writ does not run. If it is not God's then whose is it? Who is in charge if not the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ?

On the Church and politics we could say much, much more. Is it not interesting just how often people and churches are accused of mixing religion with politics? – almost always whenever they condemn a particular social political dispensation as being unjust. If the South African Council of Churches were to say now that it thought apartheid was not so bad, I am as certain as anything that we would not be finding ourselves where we are today. Why is it not being political for a religious body or a religious leader to praise a social political dispensation?

I need to point out that in the Old Testament God was first experienced by the Israelites in the event of the Exodus. That was how they came into contact with God. They were at the time just a rabble of slaves. They did not encounter God in some religious event such as a sacrifice or at worship; He revealed Himself in helping them to escape from bondage, and what could be more political than helping captives to escape? And it is this political event of the Exodus which becomes the founding event of the people of God. It becomes the paradigmatic event of the Bible, so that, looking at what God did in the Exodus, they extrapolate backwards and say

The Divine Intention

that a God who did so and so, must clearly be the God, the Lord of creation; and they can extrapolate forwards and say that a God who can choose a people in this way, must be a God who has a purpose for them, and that is why we said at the beginning that God has taken human history seriously, unlike the nature gods. And when God redeemed us in Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, it was not through a religious event. No, it was through an act of execution, used against common criminals, a judicial event that would be sanctioned, not by the ecclesiastical leaders, but by the political ruler in Judea.

I want to quote some strange words. I will explain afterwards where they come from, M'Lord. I start on paragraph 2 and the heading is *Rest in the Status Quo*:

The other extreme however is still more fatal to the Church's effective witness to the world, and that is acquiescence in unjust conditions. Silence may never be kept about the social implications of the Gospel of Christ. There can be little doubt that the present low level of the spiritual life is in no small measure due to the dilution of the eternal principles. The whole Church longs and prays for a revival, but is it psychologically sound to expect enthusiastic, joyful spiritual life among those living in misery, hunger and privation? Moses and Aaron also claimed to quicken new hope and courage in the hearts of their enslaved people, but what do we read in Exodus 6:8? But they did not listen to Moses on account of the despondency and cruel bondage.

The Charge against the Church: The strongest charge against the Church is born exactly out of the conception of many that she has not grieved over the ruin of Joseph, but acquiesced in this in the conditions of injustice, exploitation and coercion. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1931 made a survey in a vast suburb of

Hope and Suffering

Berlin among a thousand former members who had left the Church. Not one of them recorded objections against the doctrines of the Church as a reason for cessation. The great charge was that the Church had no eye or ear for justice or for the oppressed. The Church identified only with those on the sunny side of life, who pledged their support; not high moral ideals, but self-interest dominated its attitude. The Church was on the side of the vested interest of ruling classes. Instead of rebuking or condemning their despotism and injustice, she admonished the poor and oppressed to be docile, to bear their hard burden patiently, to hope for better conditions in the hereafter, to suffer the ills of the present in order to receive the heaven of the future. Our Church in South Africa must honestly face the charges brought against her. She is too much inclined to demand support and respect of members on account of past services to the people. The city labourer wants more than this. The past leaves him cold. He wants to know what the Church does for him here and now. In former years the reverence in respect of which the Church was regarded, silenced her members even though they differed from her, but now the city dweller is much more critically inclined, and he is more candid to air his grievances. One of the most hopeful signs in our cities is that the Church is so close to the working classes. Today she is almost exclusively supported by the working classes. Today she is almost exclusively supported by the labourer, by the low paid person. These constitute her office bearers and her best members.

There are weighty reasons why the Church cannot stand aloof from the labour struggle.

- The first is because her own future is concerned with this matter. The working class will always predominantly stay in urban areas. If the Church loses her influence over them, she misses her calling; she misses her opportunity

The Divine Intention

to plead their cause with the affluent and to interpret their views to others; she misses the opportunity to act as their parent and protector. If she loses their loyalty and trust, she loses exactly that class out of whom she was born, and to whom her founder belonged. If she only becomes the religious community of the higher ranks and classes, she can be assured of a peaceful yet certain death.

- The second reason is that the Church takes up a unique position in the life of the people. It is difficult to conceive of a united leadership to protect the workers. We must look for a body that is in no ways compromised to one or other viewpoint. The only one is the Church because she rises above politics. She also enjoys the trust of the people. They are already very bridle-shy of others who pose as friends but always harbour ulterior motives.

- The third reason is that it is in the interest of the spiritual case of the Church herself and that she also caters for the social economic interests of the workers who are so much exploited and extorted.

- The fourth reason is that the Christian doctrine is the best antidote to capitalism on the one hand and communism on the other. Both pay homage to a pure materialistic ideology, while Christendom proclaims the eternal truth, that man cannot live by bread alone but by God's word.

- The fifth reason is that conditions in South Africa are still redeemable. The Christian churches in Europe for many years showed no sympathy towards socialism; they preached loyalty to the king, the indispensability of class divisions, submission and patience. The socialists continuously clashed with the churches' protection of the existing established social order and with their conservatism. The result was that the Church was [preaching to] succeeding generations that were suffering the castigations of an atheistic socialism. Too late she

Hope and Suffering

awakened to the realization of how much right and fairness in the midst of excesses the workers had on their side, and today we find a disillusioned and penitent Church that must accept the fact that she has in a large measure lost her hold on the working classes. Our present working class in South Africa still has an inborn respect for the Church, which accounts for much in spite of attacks on religion from many sides. If a man now feels convinced in his heart that his Church is one with him in his legitimate striving for justice and protection, a new gratitude, love and loyalty towards the Church of his fathers will inspire him. The inherited respect must be supplemented and strengthened by actual experience of the Church's support and assistance, or else it may totally disappear in the second and third generation of workers. At this stage the absolute division between the new materialistic ideology and the old religion can still be avoided. The bitterness of their struggle has not yet eaten so deeply into the heart of our working classes as in other countries. The Church is still near them, among them, and co-operating with them, but what is required is the impression, the certainty among them that she is a positive support in their struggle. They have not gained this impression to the full.

Now, that is not a statement by the SACC. It is a statement made by the Dutch Reformed Church, published in a book entitled *Kerk en Stad*. It was in preparation for the Volkskongres in July 1947. It is quoted from a paper that was delivered by Dominee Dawid Botha, the Moderator of the Sendingkerk. The paper, "The Kingdom of God and the Churches in South Africa", was delivered at the National Conference of the SACC in 1980, and Dominee Botha added, in remarkable language that is bound to warm the hearts of all supporters of the liberation theologies:

The Divine Intention

In a most outstanding paper read by the Rev. C. D. Brink at the Volkskongres, the case is put even stronger. He said: "The aim of the Church is to bring about social justice. Justice must be done to the poor and oppressed, and if the present system does not serve this purpose, the public conscience must be roused to demand another. If the Church does not exert herself for justice in society, and together with the help she can offer, also be prepared to serve as champion for the cause of the poor, others will do it. The poor have their right to say: I do not ask for your charity, but I ask to be given an opportunity to live a life of human dignity."

That is a White Dutch Reformed religious leader. I do not know whether those who accuse us of being political will say that that was true of the DRC as well.

Our God does not permit us to dwell in a kind of spiritual ghetto, insulated from real life out there. Jesus used to go out and be alone with God in deep prayerful meditation, but He did not remain there. He refused to remain on the Mount of Transfiguration, but descended to the valley beneath to be involved with healing the possessed boy. He was the man for others, prodigal in the giving of Himself precisely and because He was a man of prayer, a man of God. That is our paradigm. He did not use religion as a form of escapism.

That is why He could say that we must love God and that we must love our neighbour as well, quoting from the Old Testament. These were two sides of the same coin. The one without the other was unacceptable. Love of God was authenticated and expressed in and through love of our neighbour. This is what is often referred to as the vertical dimension (relationship with God) and the horizontal dimension (relationship with our neighbour) in our Christian faith. The First Epistle of John is quite firm and unequivocal about this aspect of our Christianity: 1 John 3:15-18, 4:19-

Hope and Suffering

21; and the Epistle of James 1:27; 2:14–17.

Our Lord has shocked many religious people by His parable of the Last Judgement, for here He provides a list of things the doing or the omission of which determines whether we qualify or do not qualify for Heaven, and the things He mentions could not by any stretch of the imagination be called religious in the narrow sense: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and those who are imprisoned – thoroughly mundane, secular activities – and He goes on to say that to do them to the least, the despised ones, is to do them as to Himself. Here He identifies God firmly with the downtrodden, the oppressed, the marginalized ones. And He is only being true to the nature of God as revealed in the Old Testament. The Old Testament prophets speaking on behalf of God rejected the elaborate religious ceremonies of His people. Why? Because they dealt unjustly with the poor and the powerless. Listen to some scathing words from Isaiah 1:10–17, 3–8; and from Amos 5:21–28, 7–12; 2:6–8. Elijah denounces King Ahab because his wife, Jezebel, had caused the judicial murder of a nonentity, Naboth, because the King wanted Naboth's vineyard. On behalf of God, Elijah speaks up against this tyrannical act. The prophets are deeply involved in politics because politics are the sphere where God's people demonstrate their obedience or their disobedience. The prophet Nathan rebuked King David not for a so-called religious misdemeanour but for the political act of causing the death of Bathsheba's husband.

Our religion is concerned about the here and now because that determines to a large extent the hereafter. Time in the Hebrew-Christian understanding has eternal significance, and that is why human lives and human decisions are important. All life belongs to God. The Christian faith believes that God uses ordinary material things as vehicles for God's spiritual grace and divine life, as in the sacraments.

The Divine Intention

Our religion is incarnational through and through.

William Temple, the great Archbishop of Canterbury, referring to this quality of the Christian faith said, "Christianity is the most materialistic of the great religions." We declare that we believe in the resurrection of the body and not in the immortality of the soul. The body, according to St Paul, is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Christians are not dualists who believe that matter is intrinsically evil, and therefore all God's created universe material and spiritual counts for us. The whole of life is important, political, economic and social, and none of these aspects is untouched by religion as we understand it.

It is part of God's mission and purpose for His world to bring about wholeness, justice, good health, righteousness, peace and harmony and reconciliation. These are what belong to the Kingdom of God, and we are His agents to work with Him as His partners to bring to pass all that God wants for His universe. He showed Himself as a liberator God. When He found a rabble of slaves in bondage, then because He is that kind of God, He set them free as the God of the Exodus who takes the side of the poor, the weak, the oppressed, the widow, the orphan and the alien. That is a refrain you get in the book of Deuteronomy – look after these because they represent a class in society which tends to be marginalized, to be pushed to the periphery or to the bottom of the pile, to the end of the queue. God can't help it. He always takes sides. He is not a neutral God. He takes the side of the weak and the oppressed. I am not saying so. I have shown it to be so in the Bible.

Where there is injustice, exploitation and oppression then the Bible and the God of the Bible are subversive of such a situation. Our God, unlike the pagan nature gods, is no God sanctifying the status quo. He is a God of surprises, uprooting the powerful and unjust to establish His Kingdom. We see it in the entire history of Israel.

Hope and Suffering

I want to say what I have said before on another occasion: the Bible is the most revolutionary, the most radical book there is. If a book had to be banned by those who rule unjustly and as tyrants, then it ought to have been the Bible. Whites brought us the Bible and we are taking it seriously.

We are involved with God in His activity to set us all free from all that enslaves us, from all that makes us less than what He intended us to be. He sets us free to enjoy the glorious liberty of the children of God. And all our work is consistent with the Gospel of Jesus, the Gospel of God's love and God's compassion and God's reconciling and forgiving grace.

Our Home and Family Life Division is concerned about the sanctity of marriage and family life. Is that not something pleasing to God in a country that has Family Day as one of its national holidays and then one of the highest divorce rates in the world? We are involved, in this Division, with the causes and the remedies for juvenile delinquency and illegitimacy. The Division is concerned about the status of women and their role in society. Our health educator is seeking to help mothers and others in depressed communities with proper feeding and health care. It all has to do with the wholeness of the Kingdom of God.

The pastoral work of the SACC

Our Division of Inter-Church Aid is deeply involved with community development schemes, helping people to feed themselves and to become more self-reliant. We provide relief in drought-stricken areas and other areas of natural and human disaster. We found money from the worldwide Church, through the World Council of Churches, to contribute R10,000 to the Laingsberg Flood Disaster fund. We help to provide boreholes in arid areas and encourage garden projects. We supply blankets to the needy, the infirm and the aged, especially through funds we get during the

The Divine Intention

August Month of Compassion sponsored by the Division. We put into action our words about love for our neighbour. Can anybody rightly describe any of the work I have so far described as anything but truly Christlike and obeying His command to love our neighbour as ourselves? Could anyone in his right mind want to criticize this or any of our other work as destabilizing? Are we not helping to establish a healthy community in a more just society, that is truly democratic and non-racial?

We in the SACC do many things that in more normal countries would be the responsibility of the State. For instance, each year we help to educate a thousand pupils at high school in rural areas, and we give a hundred new bursaries annually for university and technical education. In other societies we would be lauded for this outstanding work. In our beloved country we are vilified, harassed and abused. Mercifully we do none of all this work to be praised by men. We do it because we are under divine constraint – as St Paul exclaimed of himself, “Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel.” Woe are we if we do not obey that Gospel, to serve God and Christ by serving Him in the least of His brethren. We help to defuse an explosive and volatile situation through our Unemployment Project. In a time of high unemployment the SACC is engaged nationwide in encouraging the unemployed to be involved in self-employment and self-help projects, and yet we are accused of undermining the stability of society. On the other side we have often been attacked for delaying the bloody revolution through these self-help projects. Again we play to no gallery, we do what we believe is right and in accord with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In obedience to Christ’s command, we care for political prisoners, detainees and banned persons as well as for their families and dependants, especially through our Dependants’ Conference. We help to arrange for family visits to political prisoners. What is so sinister about that?

Hope and Suffering

Why are our Dependants' Conference fieldworkers so often detained by the police? We are determined to continue with this and similar work, for we had much rather obey God than man. Why are we in the SACC treated as if this country was somewhere behind the Iron Curtain and Christians must behave as if they were conspirators, when what we are doing is in fact above board and out in the open for everyone to see?

I operate a fund, the Asingeni Fund, at my total discretion, from which I pay the legal costs of people charged with political offences. I should in a normal country be praised for helping with the administration of proper justice, since we claim that it is the right of each person to have the best possible defence. If it is a crime to do all these things I am more than happy, indeed proud to plead guilty to the crime. But I want to declare here, as forthrightly as I can, that we will continue to do this work come hell or high water.

Let me refer again to our Division of Justice and Reconciliation. It tries to keep the public and the churches informed on sensitive and critical issues such as nationalism, foreign investment, uprooting and dumping in forced population removals, the Mixed Marriages and Immorality Acts, Bantustan policy, political ideologies, e.g. Marxism, communism, etc. And we are heavily involved in matters of justice (a biblical concern as we showed) because we believe that real reconciliation can never happen before justice is established. We showed that the Bible and the God of the Bible were destabilizers where injustice, oppression, alienation held sway. The SACC is basically law-abiding and concerned for justice and peace, for reconciliation and unity. But in a real sense because we are opposed to injustice and oppression, we cannot support a system where these are found, and to seek to change such a system even by reasonably peaceful means is to be a destabilizing factor in such a society. We want to dismantle apartheid, and the perpetrators of apartheid don't like that at all. They could

The Divine Intention

hardly regard us as blue-eyed boys because the privilege they enjoy as a result of apartheid is threatened. And so we have the total onslaught of the apartheid machinery turned against us.

Our commitment to dialogue

We are concerned to work for a new kind of South Africa, a non-racial, truly democratic and more just society, by reasonably peaceful means. We as a Council deplore all forms of violence, and have said so times without number. We deplore structural and legalized violence that maintains an unjust socio-political dispensation, and the violence of those who would overthrow the State. But we have consistently warned too that oppressed people will become desperate, and desperate people will use desperate methods.

We have a Commission on Violence and Non-Violence, and are concerned about the increasing militarization of our land, and believe that conscientious objectors should be given alternative forms of national service as in most normal societies. We believe in negotiation, discussion and dialogue. That is why in 1980 we had discussions with the Government to try to arrange for the Government to meet with the authentic leaders of all sections of South African society (for Blacks it would include political prisoners and those in exile), and that is why we call still for a national convention.

I myself believe in dialogue and meeting. I have spoken at all the Afrikaans university campuses, including that of the Orange Free State. In fact the only White university campus at which I have not spoken is the University of Port Elizabeth. I have spoken to some mainly Afrikaans organizations and groups such as *Peil 2000* and *POI STU*. That could not be the attitude of someone out for confrontation, could it? Many in the Black community ask why I still waste my time talking to Whites, and I tell them that our mandate is biblical. Moses went to Pharaoh several times even when he knew that it was

Hope and Suffering

futile. The prophets addressed the kings of Israel time and time again because they were to deliver the message faithfully even if they were being rejected.

The National Conference of the SACC in June 1982 declared apartheid a heresy and said we should have no further dialogue with the DRC until it denounces apartheid as evil. But I want to tell you that we reached this point only after several efforts at holding out a hand of fellowship to the NGK. In 1978 I reminded Dr Geldenhuys, then its ecumenical officer and later its Chief Executive Officer, that my predecessor had written on behalf of our Executive Committee to invite the NGK to send an observer to its meeting and not on a reciprocal basis. He replied to say that his Synod had turned down our invitation. Then we said: Do not let it be an official observer; let it be an unofficial observer; it need not be a mutual arrangement. We do not ask to appoint or allow someone from the SACC to sit on your meetings. He wrote back to say that even this invitation had been rejected.

But nothing daunted, we went on; we invited them to participate in a consultation on racism in 1980, at Hammanskraal. They did not even reply to my letter, except by statements in the press. The consultation at Hammanskraal was quite angry at this action of the Dutch Reformed Churches. But I asked the permission of the consultation; I said I felt that I was under divine constraint to write to the NGK saying that they should please forgive us of the SACC and its member churches for anything we had done to hurt them in the past, but that we believe that nothing substantial would happen in this country to change its unjust structures, unless that powerful and mighty church were to be involved. A small delegation from the Dutch Reformed Church came to see me in what they said must be a totally confidential meeting.

So we have tried to engage them in dialogue, and we have

The Divine Intention

been rebuffed. What more could we do? We are sad at what has happened to them in Ottawa. We do not gloat, and we continue to pray for their conversion, because, and this is my pet theory, once an Afrikaner sees the light of Jesus Christ as other people see it, there is no stopping him, for there are no half-measures with him. When an Afrikaner is committed, and committed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, then he is committed to the hilt.

We of the South African Council of Churches belong to the Church of God, the one holy; Catholic, Apostolic church. What it means is that we belong to something quite tremendous. Those who are for us are many times more than those against us. We belong to this remarkable fellowship, so that we can receive a letter, as we have done, from a Lutheran pastor in Alaska assuring us that he and his congregation are praying for us. When I lost my passport for the first time, I was overwhelmed by messages of sympathy and support from all over the world, but nothing touched me more than to get from the Sunday School children at St James, Madison Avenue in New York, what the children called passports of love, which I pasted up on the walls of my office. How can anyone range himself against this international, this global fellowship?

I want to stress what I said in the preamble: the Church is made up of frail, fallible human beings, and that is true also for the SACC. In the New Testament we hear Our Lord's parable of the Kingdom concerning the wheat and tares. That is a picture, too, of the Church, which is an agent for the Kingdom. The Church is the home of sinners and the school for saints. We always marvel that God can want to use such unworthy creatures as we know ourselves to be. His treasure, St Paul tells us, is held in us, who are but earthenware vessels, so that the abounding glory should belong rightly where it belongs; not to us, but to God.

Hope and Suffering

I have shown that the teaching which we proclaim, which is under scrutiny by this Commission, is based squarely and truly on the Bible. But it is also in line with the teaching of the Church of God throughout the world. It is a fact of life, that can be noted by anyone who has eyes to see and does want to see, who is not biased, that the South African Council of Churches enjoys the support of the overwhelming segment of the Christian community in the world. I am not aware that, for instance, the Dutch Reformed Church, which supports apartheid, enjoys even a fraction of the support we enjoy. I am not boasting; I am just stating a fact. In fact some people criticize us because we have this support, expressed in money gifts to us.

Why do we enjoy such worldwide support? It is possible to deceive some people all the time, but surely we could not be endowed with the ability to deceive such a large body of responsible and mature Christians for so long. We have operated and we continue to operate openly. We report regularly to our member churches, through our National Conference and at every quarterly meeting of our Executive Committee, on which the churches are represented, and they have on the whole been satisfied so far. We do not operate secretly, and yet there are private, secret societies in this land which are alleged – I do not know whether this is true – which are alleged to exercise an enormous influence on some churches and on political leaders, and yet such secret societies are not, to my knowledge, investigated. We do not receive funds clandestinely. They are recorded openly, and yet there are organizations, even religious organizations, some of which were involved in the Information Scandal, which have received clandestine funding, and were set up precisely to undermine a legitimate body such as the SACC, and those sinister organizations are not investigated but continue with impunity to spew forth their poisonous filth. A bank recently lost over a million rand through the

The Divine Intention

malfesance of one of its employees. The court found that she had in fact been assisted by other bank officials, and yet I have not heard that that bank, which deals with far more of the public's funds than the SACC could ever hope to do, I have not heard that that bank is being investigated by any commission. Why not, if we are?

We are told that we do not enjoy the support of the churches in South Africa. That statement may be true, to some extent, if we mean by South African churches the White part of the Church. In our membership by and large, White Christians form only 20 per cent of our constituency. The Black membership, forming nearly 80 per cent of our constituency, can be said without fear of contradiction to represent that part of the Church that supports the SACC to a very considerable extent. But even if this were not the case, Our Lord has warned us that we must beware when all men speak well of us.

The SACC has acted as mediators in labour disputes, and did so successfully in the Fattis and Monis strike. The SACC, dreaming about what this country has it in her to become, sponsored what was called a "Pilgrimage of Hope", consisting of young people and not quite so young people, 144 of them, who went on a pilgrimage of hope. They were children of all races, and went to the Holy Land, to Switzerland, and then to Taizé, whose massive church is called the Church of Reconciliation. We hoped, we said, that by this we are demonstrating to South Africa our hope that these young people, roughing, loving, playing, praying together, will come back and be able to demonstrate that the Church of God is a foreshadowing, a first-fruits of what South Africa will become.

I think it is important to state that we in the SACC believe absolutely in the centrality of the spiritual; that we are not just a bunch of activist do-gooders engaged in the social gospel. We have as our example and paradigm the Son of God

Hope and Suffering

Himself, who spent whole nights in prayer, had retreats, and then concerned Himself to meet human need. What we do and say stems from our encounter with God and Our Lord Jesus Christ, at worship, in Bible study, in meditation, and in the Eucharist.

M'Lord, you will not find any SACC staff members in their offices if you come to Khotso House at half past eight every morning, because we are in chapel, every day. Every Wednesday at lunch time we have prayers for justice and reconciliation in our land, and some of us have a fast on Thursdays for the same purpose. Once a month we celebrate the Eucharist according to the rite of one or other of our member churches. We start our two-day quarterly Executive Committee meetings with a substantial Bible study, and have a Eucharist with a homily on the second day. Both the executive and non-executive staff have an annual week-long retreat. We have a daily Eucharist, substantial daily Bible studies as features of every National Conference. Before each National Conference I write to religious communities in this country and abroad, asking for their prayers for the conference, which is thus surrounded by a considerable volume of prayer.

As a Bishop of the Church, I am under obligation to pray the Office of the Church twice a day. I want to say that for me the most important – the most cardinal – fact about our life is the spiritual: that encounter with God in prayer, in worship, in meditation.

I am sorry to reveal this secret part of our lives, which Scripture exhorts must not be paraded before men. I have been compelled to talk about it, to show that we try to be persons of prayer, people who try to wait on Our Lord. We may not always hear Him aright, and often perhaps when we hear what He says, we do not like what He is asking us to do, but I want to assure you that we are not politicians. We are attempting to be devout Christians. Speaking for

The Divine Intention

myself, I want to say that there is nothing the Government can do to me that will stop me from being involved in what I believe is what God wants me to do. I do not do it because I like doing it. I do it because I am under what I believe to be the influence of God's hand. I cannot help it: when I see injustice I cannot keep quiet. I will not keep quiet, for, as Jeremiah says, when I try to keep quiet, God's word burns like a fire in my breast. But what is it that they can ultimately do? The most awful thing that they can do is to kill me, and death is not the worst thing that could happen to a Christian.

Our Lord has tried to weld us into a family: people of different races, who demonstrate, however feebly and fitfully, what this beautiful land can be. If only we could begin to treat people as persons created by God in His image, redeemed by Jesus Christ and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. What a wonderful land it would be; and we believe that it will happen, in fulfilment of that magnificent vision in the Revelation of St John the Divine, chapter 7, verse 9.

Of course, it cannot happen without suffering and anguish. Jesus did not promise His followers a bed of roses. On the contrary, and central to it all, was the inevitability and unavoidable nature of suffering. It could be said from this that a Church that does not suffer, cannot be the Church of Jesus Christ. I do not mean we should be masochists. Suffering will seek us out. It is part of the divine economy of salvation.

Interestingly enough, M'Lord, in the Anglican calendar this week we are bidden to think of the Church as the suffering community, and this is the special prayer for this week:

God Our Loving Father, You gave Your only Son to suffer and to die for me. Grant that when we are found worthy to endure suffering for Christ's name, we may rejoice in

Hope and Suffering

our calling and be enabled to bear our part in completing His sufferings for the sake of Your Church.

We are not to be surprised at suffering that comes to us because of witnessing for the Kingdom of God and for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Listen to these words of Our Lord:

If the world hates you, it hated Me first, as you know well. If you belong to the world, the world would love its own, but because you do not belong to the world, because I have chosen you out of the world, for that reason the world hates you. Remember what I said: a servant is not greater than his master. As they persecuted Me, they will persecute you. They will follow your teachings as little as they have followed Mine. It is on My account that they will treat you thus, because they do not know the one who sent Me.

And in Matthew chapter 10:17-22:

Be on your guard, for men will hand you over to their courts; they will flog you in their synagogues and you will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, to testify before them and the heathen, but when you are arrested, do not worry about what you are to say. When the time comes, the words you need will be given you, for it is not you who will be speaking. It will be the Spirit of your Father speaking in you. Brother will betray brother to death and the father his child; children will turn against their parents and send them to their death. All will hate you for your allegiance to Me, but the man who holds out to the end, will be saved.

God's purposes are certain. They may remove a Tutu; they may remove the South African Council of Churches, but

The Divine Intention

God's intention to establish His Kingdom of justice, of love, of compassion, will not be thwarted. We are not scared, certainly not of the Government, or any other perpetrators of injustice and oppression, for victory is ours through Him who loved us.

I end, M'Lord and members of the Commission. "With all this in mind, what are we to say? If God is on our side, who is against us? . . . What can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or hardship? Can persecution, hunger, nakedness, peril or the sword? 'We are being done to death for Thy sake all day long' as Scripture says: 'we have been treated like sheep for slaughter' – and yet, in spite of all, overwhelming victory is ours through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths – nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus Our Lord." Thank you.

Presentation to the Eloff Commission of Inquiry
1 September 1982