

THE CHURCH AND VIOLENCE

The role of the church in politics has become an important (and often divisive) part of the political process in South Africa today.

High profile church leaders expressing their own opinions *without* any mandate whatsoever from rank-and-file church members, call for support for the External Mission of the ANC, for sanctions and disinvestment, and attempt to explain away the so-called "armed struggle" as being a "just" war.

The fact is that given the circumstances which actually prevail in South Africa, pronouncements by these men lend respectability to revolutionary violence.

The crisis of leadership in South African Christian Churches has given licence and latitude to individual radicalism in the name of the church. These individuals gather in organisations like the South African Council of Churches and present their thinking to the world as consensus South African Christian thinking. This is, in fact, *not* the case.

It is time that the West closely examined both the motives and the mandates of these men and that a great deal of sincere and unbiased investigation was carried out into what *really is* consensus Christian thought in SA. Emotional rhetoric and propaganda are one thing, facts another.

Chief Buthelezi and Inkatha have repeatedly called on the Anglican and Catholic churches, in particular, to answer the following questions. Replies, if any, have



Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu: "Although the church does not condone violence, there comes a time when a choice has to be made . . . there is a point where the church will support armed struggle, there is a point where I would support armed struggle . . . I will support until death the aims of the ANC."
(Press interviews, Sapa, Reuter, Australia, January 1987.)

been totally inadequate. These questions are, of course, relevant to all church groups in the country and abroad.

(1) Will churches in South Africa encourage and support blacks who cling to non-violent tactics in opposition to apartheid?
(2) Do the Anglican and Catholic churches believe that there are alternatives to violence in bringing about radical change?

(3) Do these churches view blacks committed to violence and the armed struggle as waging a "just" war? Can a "just" war be declared by holy default?
(4) The Catholic church has stated that while it does not approve of the violence of the State and the violence of the ANC armed struggle in SA, it ". . . respects the conscience of people who have come to a different decision from church

leaders in this matter."
 (Quote: Archbishop Denis Hurley, past chairman of the Catholic Bishops' Conference.) Does this mean that the Catholic church believes that individual Christians are free to adopt a contrary stand? Does Archbishop Hurley also leave it to individual Christian conscience's to decide whether they tolerate people "necklacing" their political opponents?
 (5) Why is the ANC not attacked for doing so many of the things which in terms of the Bishop's own statements are indefensible? Has the church been intimidated by violence?
 (6) Is it not time that the church went beyond its statements of understanding why we have got violence in South Africa and sought consensus about why it should condemn that which it understands?
 (7) Do these churches afford Inkatha the right to exist and to hold different views from the External Mission of the ANC? If so, will they do anything to defend that right to exist?
 (8) Do they support the view (of some) that the External Mission of the ANC is the "sole and authentic" voice of black South Africa and that it has a right to demand subservience and obedience? Is this dictated unity morally legitimate?
 (9) Given the limitations of our day and age and national environment, is there a black group in South Africa which is more democratic than Inkatha?
 (10) The Anglican church is an affiliate of the South African Council of Churches. Executive members of the South

African Council of Churches (SACC) openly support the External Mission of the ANC and, in their consultations with national and international church groups, attack and slander Inkatha and Chief Buthelezi and urge organisations to mount propaganda campaigns against Inkatha. Do Bishops of the Anglican Church in SA support the SACC in this regard?

The debate regarding the church and violence in SA, as well as sanctions and disinvestment, has long been obscured by complex and confusing dialogue.

For example, the Anglican church in SA — led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu — has never called for sanctions and disinvestment. Powerful groups of individual church members (black and white) have made their opposition to this anti-apartheid tactic quite clear.

Archbishop Tutu, nevertheless, calls for sanctions and disinvestment at every opportunity and openly denounces those who do not agree with him — many of whom are Anglicans.

Following a major statement by President Ronald Reagan opposing sanctions, Archbishop Tutu's reply seemed to be somewhat at odds with his holy calling: "The West, for my part, can go to hell . . ." he said.

On a recent visit to Australia he told reporters he would "support until death" the aims of the African National Congress. (Sapa, Associated Press reports, *The Citizen*, January 9, 1987).

It is the stated policy of the ANC to kill for political gain and to "seize power" in South Africa. To this end it receives arms and ammunition from the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc. Bombs are placed in city shopping centres, in rubbish bins at bus stops and land mines are placed on country roads — among other acts of



General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches, Dr Beyers Naude. "I am convinced that if we are not given the opportunity for the expression of non-violent resistance in this country, violence and bloodshed will continue . . ." (Speech, Johannesburg, January 1987)

terrorism. Elements within the ANC are known to want to assassinate Chief M G Buthelezi and statements in ANC broadcasts and publications are phrased in such a way as to encourage this.

Archbishop Tutu explained to Australian reporters that the aim of the ANC was to limit violence and bloodshed to the "lowest possible level . . ."

Is this explanation and his blessing for the ANC acceptable to his church and to church members?

In an interview reported from Sydney (Reuters) Bishop Tutu was quoted as saying: "The church never condones violence. But there comes a time when a choice has to be made. A time can come when it is justifiable to overthrow an unjust vicious system by force."

Is this Archbishop Tutu's way of saying that he has made his

choice?

By this apparently unqualified support for the ANC, is Archbishop Tutu telling the world that he can now accept the political assassination of opponents of the ANC — as happens by means of the barbaric "necklace" of burning car tyres and in other brutal attacks?

The horrific practice of "necklacing" was, after all, approved of by the Secretary-General of the ANC, Mr Alfred Nzo, in an interview with the London Sunday Times.

Archbishop Tutu has also called for a socialist State in South Africa.

Would the majority of Archbishop Tutu's SA congregation support his opinion that the free enterprise system in SA must be replaced by socialism in an ANC government led by an executive strongly influenced by Communists?

Time and again, while expressing his personal opinions, Archbishop Tutu has stated quite clearly that he believes that "non-violence calls have not worked . . ." (All quotes from newspaper files.)

In an interview reported by Reuters from a religious festival he attended in Powys, Wales, Archbishop Tutu was quoted as saying that should he one day give support for violence ". . . it would be a merely traditional position of the church that it is justifiable for Christians to overthrow an unjust dispensation . . ."

The question now needs to be asked. Does Archbishop Tutu believe that day has come? Does he believe that it is too late for decency and democracy to prevail? Does he believe that bloodshed is really all that is left?

Archbishop Tutu, the President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Rev Allan Boesak, and the general secretary of the South African Council of Churches, Dr



President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and UDF founder, Rev Allan Boesak
"Every attempt at peaceful protest since 1960 has resulted in some kind of massacre. If this continues we must face the possibility of a violent explosion of gigantic proportions"
(Speech, Los Angeles, January 1987.)



Catholic Archbishop Denis Hurley: "When violence is so widespread, it is not for us to make pronouncements about just or unjust war . . . The church has never approved of violence in South Africa . . . but we have to respect the conscience of people who come to a different decision from church leaders in this matter . . ." (Press statement, Durban, 1986.)

Beyers Naude, have all (in their support for sanctions) claimed that "blacks are prepared to suffer" in the struggle for liberation.

Just how great do they envisage that suffering to be? Can they produce a representative number of fathers and mothers who will openly state that that they are prepared to watch their children starve to death (or be brain damaged through malnutrition) if sanctions

deprive them of their jobs and the means to support their families? There is no social security in South Africa. People are cash dependent.

In their support for the ANC (with its programme of violence) as well as sanctions and disinvestment, are Archbishop Tutu, Dr Boesak and Dr Naude — and their families — going to suffer in the same way as the black masses? That is the crux of the matter.