

Reconciliation: a task for all

DR BEYERS NAUDÉ received a standing ovation at the Summer School in Cape Town when he made a moving appeal to South Africans of all races to make the difficult and problematic task of reconciliation a priority in their lives.

"There is a time for confrontation," said Naudé, "but there is also a time for reconciliation." The time had arrived for a process of deep and meaningful reconciliation to start in the country, he said.

He likened reconciliation to a "process of inner healing" which needs to take place in the lives of millions of people, to give birth to new attitudes and a new willingness to bury the past.

Addressing the topic of reconciliation in the final session of the "Issues in Transition", Naudé, respected church leader and Idasa board member, said apartheid had "driven so many wedges between us that reconciliation will take a long time, but we've got to do it".

"Let us tackle this task, let us have faith in the potential of our country."

Disappointment and frustration would undoubtedly be part of the reconciliation process "but I have no doubt that it can be done", said Naudé.

He warned that reconciliation at grassroots level was also essential for the success of the negotiation process. "If the process of negotiations fail, do we realise what the implications are for our country?"

South Africa had never in its history experienced such a rapid and meaningful process of transition and many were understandably confused and overwhelmed as a result of these profound changes.

However, South Africans should grasp the challenge of reconciliation as a new responsibility, creating in the process a new culture of faith in the future.

Naudé said reconciliation was needed not only between black and white in the country,



Reconciled: Beyers Naudé and Alex Boraine at the Summer School.

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but also between blacks ("apartheid has spawned anger, distrust and hatred in the black community") as well as in the white community where estrangement and feelings of bitterness and resentment are causing divisions.

Everyone in the country - individuals, the government, political parties, business, social institutions - had a contribution to make to reconciliation, and symbolic gestures like whites visiting townships and expressing concern were very important. "There are many small ways in which to express concern, willingness to reconcile... it doesn't need much publicity but it grows."

Reconciliation, said Naudé, implied taking

seriously all forms of anger, frustration, dissatisfaction and fear that people may be experiencing. "We must understand something of the depth of the the pain and suffering that the policy of apartheid has inflicted on millions of our people."

Whites need not take personal responsibility for all the suffering in the black community but unless the policy of apartheid was openly condemned as the cause of this suffering, meaningful reconciliation would be impossible.

The fears of the white community, even if these were not always legitimate, need to be openly discussed. This implied a greater challenge to blacks "but it can happen", said Naudé.

Whites, on the other hand, often wrongly believed that they had to make all the sacrifices in a new South Africa. Blacks had been making a meaningful contribution to the country for years and whites had to inform themselves of this.

win over angry students

The minister then replied that the problem could not be addressed with available resources, which would only cover "slight improvements". However, he believed that the government could discuss its difficulties regarding resources with those who are aggrieved and negotiate a process by which to address their expectations.

Dealing with the issue later in his own address, Rensburg said it was totally unacceptable to consult the education community after policy has been formulated. He added that although there was massive resentment over skewed resources in education, the department was falling into the classical trap of believing that by equalising resources it would have

solved the problem.

The education renewal strategy, he said, was conceived within the Department of National Education and composed entirely of government officials. "Under these conditions, the strategy is a recipe for trouble, and my advice to Minister Pienaar is to acknowledge that 75 of the 76 submissions received pointed out that it was an illegitimate exercise," said Rensburg.

Preparing for the "really new" South Africa was not merely a matter of pragmatic adjustment but required a fundamental change of approach, he said.

"And this needs to be signalled to the people of South Africa."



Louis Pienaar