



A CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH

WHAT CHARACTERISES THE STATE CHURCH CONFRONTATION IN SOUTH AFRICA?

In the first place the church state confrontation deals with the whole theological approach to apartheid. The SACC, its member churches and the Catholic Bishops Conference have over the years decried apartheid as unchristian, immoral and inhuman. Whereas, the state has always claimed to be a christian government representing a christian people and operating on christian norms. The conflict starts exactly at this point. The churches decries the whole basis of apartheid as wrong and that it can not be supported.

The second level of the conflict is with regard to the support rendered to the victims of apartheid. The SACC and the Catholic Bishops Conference have repeatedly stated that it is part of their christian duty to support the victims of a system of oppression by all legitimate means, while on the otherhand, the state is in fundamental disagreement with this position and has constantly taken measures to make that support as difficult as possible.

The third is in the sphere of the churches right to protest in public as recently shown by the state decree prohibiting people from campaigning for the release of detainees. Well, church leaders and in particular, Bishop Desmond Tutu have been equivocal that they shall not obey such a decree, but will

INTERVIEW WITH BEYERS NAUDE'

continue to call for the release of detainees inside and outside worship service.

Another sphere of confrontation is at the level of emergency regulations. A number of ministers and priests, including the laity have been detained without trial, and a considerable number is still in detention among them, Father Smangaliso Mkhatswa the Secretary General of the SACBC; Sister Bernard Ncube of the Catholic Church, Reverend Maja, of the Northern Transvaal Council of Churches.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE IMPACT OF THIS CONFRONTATION TO THE CHURCH?

I think it forces the churches to rethink the relevance of its message, the meaningfulness of its solidarity with the oppressed; and to ask itself, to what degree has the church neglected its duty? to what degree must the church contribute much more than it has done up to now? So, it has become a soul searching process for the churches, to ask themselves whether they are relevant, whether they are sincere and honest in their verbal pronouncements and whether they are willing to bear the cross for the sake of the liberation of the people.

HAS THIS SOUL SEARCHING TAKEN THE CHURCH A STEP FURTHER TOWARDS A TRUE RELIGIOUS WITNESS IN SOUTH AFRICA?

Only a part of the church has been taken a step further. There are many ministers, priests and congregations who have not yet taken that step. One must at the same time not forget that there many churches that have not taken a clear public stand towards apartheid. I refer here to the Epentecostal Churches, Baptist Churches some of the charismatic groups and the Apostolic Faith Mission. These churches have never expressed any public criticism of apartheid.

I do not think these churches will be challenged by these resolutions because they are not members of the SACC and not active members of any world Christian body, so they quietly keep themselves apart. In addition there are the three white DRC' churches who are also not members of the SACC. So a large segment of the christian churches in South Africa is either not involved or not supporting the liberation struggle. And this must always be taken into account.



IS IT NOT THE TASK OF THOSE WHO ARE INVOLVED TO MOBILISE THESE OTHER SECTORS OF THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY?

Naturally, one is grateful for every sign of growth, of willingness by any religious organisation to become more relevant and to sacrifice for the cause of justice. There is a small growth which we must be grateful for, but on the other hand, one must not raise false expectations. The institutional church in South Africa is simply too much divided, there are too many denominations, and *within these denominations* we have different political and ideological views. So, I think one must be careful not to expect the churches *themselves* to make a decisive contribution in the struggle for liberation.

At the same time, one must be grateful for the individual church leaders, who are speaking on behalf of the church and, on behalf of the oppressed community, like Bishop Desmond Tutu, Dr. Allan Boesak, Father Smangaliso Mkhathswa and Francois Bill who was in detention for forty weeks. There is a number of other church leaders like Arch Bishop Dennis Hurley — who have been willing to give support, who have clearly shown their conviction to the struggle for liberation. They are the signs of hope in the church and that sector of the church which is neglecting its duty.



Beyers Naude — Ex Secretary General of the SACC .

So, in all I am saying we should not place too much hope on the church as an institution that it will be able to bring about meaningful liberation on its own. They will definitely not. But, individual church leaders, and groups of Christians within these churches are absolutely deeply involved in the struggle for liberation.

IN YOUR OWN VIEW, HOW DO YOU SEE THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE CHURCH IN THE STRUGGLE?

I believe the church must become more deeply involved in the struggle of the workers for the recognition of their rights. The church must become more actively involved in supporting and guiding the youth who are in the fore front of the struggle and of the quest for liberation. The

church must be willing to take many more actions in defiance of unjust laws and if necessary breaking those laws.

With regard to the issue of violence, and the armed struggle of the people, the church as a body which is seeking peace can not support violence in principle, but in the situation of an already existing violence as is the case in South Africa, the church must clearly state where it stands. It must take up a stand in principle on the side of those who defend themselves against the violence of the government, because their cause is just. And, this is where I think the church must give a much more clearer witness than it has done up to now. Although the church can never glorify armed struggle, but in a situation of armed conflict, where it has become a bitter and painful reality, the church must take the side of the oppressed.