

"OUR CALL IS THEOLOGICAL"

Address to the National Summit of the Historic Black Churches
Howard Inn, Washington DC on 10 January 1989 by
M.Msimang. ANC Chief Representative in the UK and Ireland.

African Americans - greetings from the African National Congress!

We are truly honoured to be asked with you today. Long ago, your ancestors and mine came from the soil of the same continent. And now, here we are, you and I. You are citizens of a great country, with the wars of Independence and the emancipation of slavery and the mighty struggle for civil rights behind you. No doubt, you still have a few problems left!

At this historic conference, when you recall the epics of your past, and in this month when you recall the 69th anniversary of Dr Martin Luther King, we count it a great privilege that you should invite us to discuss with you the struggle in Southern Africa. Our revolution is not yet won, our tyrant still occupies the throne, our people have no rights at all.

This is a church conference, and I am a politician, not a preacher. But I am told that a good American sermon has an introduction, three points, and a conclusion.

You have had the introduction.

For my three points I shall speak about:

- the nature of our struggle
- the violence of our struggle
- the legitimacy of our struggle.

And in conclusion we must consider your response.

The Nature of our struggle

It has often been noted that the nature of our struggle is really a matter of faith. Apartheid Pretoria asserts that its policies and practices are to preserve Christian civilisation upon the African continent. We believe such claims are patently false: Christianity has to be liberated from this corrupt caricature that masquerades in its name.

23.4% of our population adhere to Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Bhuddhist, Confucian or traditional religion, or specify no religious adherence: they show no signs of being converted to apartheid Christianity.

20.4% belong to African Independent churches; 23% to

the main line Protestant Churches who are members of the South African Council of Churches (SACC); 9.5% are Catholic; 7.5% belong to smaller Christian groups (Orthodox, Mormon, Seventh Day Adventist, Salvation Army); and all of these specifically reject the claim of the regime that its policies represent Christian truth.

15.9% of the population belong to the Dutch Reformed Churches, but nearly half of these are members of the black "daughter churches" which maintain, with the endorsement of the world Reformed Church community, that the moral and theological justification of apartheid is heretical, a direct negation of Christianity.

Thus the apartheid policies are accepted by only 8.3%, belonging to the white Dutch Reformed Churches.

The ANC totally refutes this imposition of a fallacious theological authority for the oppressive apartheid regime. Religious people are not called to protect the white South African way of life but to reject it.

When the South African Constitution talks of an almighty God who has blessed and protected those who have killed and conquered to enforce a racist supremacy, it is promoting an idol which does not exist. When people thank God that guns have a longer range than spears, that god is a false image.

THE KAIROS DOCUMENT:

"The god of the South African State is not merely an idol or false god, it is the devil disguised as Almighty God—the anti-Christ."

In the ANC we recognise that many of us were born into a situation of religious antagonism and exclusivity, a type of spiritual apartheid, from which we have been painfully liberating ourselves. South Africa has left behind the missionary era when many equated Christianity with a form of ecclesiastical colonialism.

No one denies that devout exponents of apartheid may display charitable personal attitudes: tyrants can be charming persons. It is their practice of injustice that is wrong, their promotion of oppressive policies enacted by violence that is evil, and their claim to do it in the name of God that is blasphemous.

Pretoria has constantly attacked the ANC for being ungodly and irreligious as is seen in P W Botha's letter to

Archbishop Tutu of 16 March 1988:

"You are no doubt aware that the expressed intention of the planned revolution by the ANC/SACP alliance is to ultimately transform South Africa into an atheistic Marxist



Rev Jesse Jackson and his son laying a wreath at the Grave of Johny Makhathini.

state, where freedom of faith and worship will surely be among the first casualties". PW Botha. 16 March 1988

This is simply rubbish: ridiculous fallacious sloganism. The ANC is a Liberation Movement (not a political party) which has always recognised that the liberation struggle takes place in a religious context, and is specifically committed to religious freedom.

When the people formed the African National Congress in Bloemfontein in 1912 South Africa was a predominantly Christian country and their commitment to a united quest for a liberated society was fired by their faith.

From Rev John Dube, the first President who opened the ANC in prayer, to S M Makgatho, Rev ZR Mahabane, Rev W B Rubusane, J T Gumede... right down to Chief Albert Luthuli, Oliver Tambo, and Nelson Mandela today, our

leadership has been strengthened by religious conviction.

O.R. Tambo, 4 May 1987:

Our founders were churchmen and women. Throughout our 75 years that

link has never been broken.

Today the ANC embraces within its membership a wide variety of believers. The varying symbols and practises through which we focus our faith bring a wealth of value to our culture which enrich us all, and display a unanimity of theological, ethical and political priorities which confirm and guide our struggle to liberated society.

From the beliefs and experience within our ranks, the ANC knows that adherents of all faiths have contributions to make to the concept of justice and peace, and the practice of democracy, from which caring and competent communities are emerging to comprise our new society.

O R TAMBO

Ours is a national liberation movement which contains within it different philosophical

and religious tendencies, but all of which adhere to a common resolve to bring about a united, democratic and non-racial South Africa on the basis of the Freedom Charter As in the past, we shall resist all attempts to inject any anti-religious notions into our midst.

THE FREEDOM CHARTER, devised and accepted in 1955 after a nationwide consultation, is the main focus of ANC policy. It declares that:

The law shall guarantee to all their right to speak, to organise, to meet together, to publish, to preach, to worship and to educate their children.

All laws which discriminate on grounds of race, colour, or belief shall be repealed.

All the cultural treasures of mankind shall be open to all.

Only a democratic state, based on the will of all the people, can secure to all their birthright without distinction of colour, race, sex, or belief.

This commitment to religious pluralism in the Freedom Charter has two aspects. It is a **political** statement that democracy preserves religious freedom, and a **theological** statement that religious pluralism is essential for democracy.

CHIEF A J LUTHULI:

I also, as a Christian and patriot, could not look on while systematic attempts were made in almost every department of life to debase the God-factor in Man or to set a limit beyond which the human being in his black form might not strive to serve his Creator to the best of his ability. To remain neutral in a situation where the laws of the land virtually criticised God for having created men of colour was the sort of thing I, as a Christian could not tolerate. Oslo. Nobel Lecture 1961.

SHEIKH ABDUL HAMID GABIER.

The Freedom Charter to which the ANC is committed provides the surest guarantee of the preservation of our Din and culture in a liberated South Africa.

PROF LOURENS DU PLESSIS:

The Freedom Charter still remains the basis of the ANC programme. It gives hope. On the basis of this remarkable expression of the aspirations of the people of South Africa ... the ANC perception of the struggle provides room for me and other Afrikaners who despise apartheid to also make a particular contribution. Dakar 1987

The faith which underlines the Freedom Charter supersedes the false claims of

religious apartheid, and it ends with a declaration to struggle together until liberation is wrought: for faith grows in action.

THE FREEDOM CHARTER:

These freedoms we will fight for side by side throughout our lives until we have won our liberty.

MAULANA FARED ESSACK:

They did not ask us if we were Muslim or Christian when they declared Claremont and Constantia white. They did not ask us if we were Hindus or Muslims when they tear gassed us; nor do they enquire about our religion when they killed our children on the streets. Side by side Apartheid has sought to dehumanise us and side by side we shall work to destroy it and create a new South Africa. Cape Town. August 1984

THE KAIROS DOCUMENT:

Christians, if they are not doing so already, must quite simply participate in the struggle for liberation and for a just society.

Our struggle is a matter of faith: our faith is confirmed in our struggle.

THE VIOLENCE OF OUR STRUGGLE

Violence rules Southern Africa. It is a function of

THE SPIRIT OF LUTHULI LIVES ON!

government by coercion instead of government by consent, and the System is bound by it. It cannot establish the apartheid policy except by violence. It cannot counter the liberation struggle and the Freedom Charter except by violence. It cannot answer the moral appeal of non-violence resistance except by violence. It cannot prevent justice being done except by violence.

Millions have suffered under the racist rule from structural, social, judicial, or military violence. The infant mortality, preventable disease, starvation, poverty, deliberate homelessness, industrial and agricultural neglect, detention, imprisonment, and the calculated killing of thousands throughout the subcontinent verges on genocide. The blood lies warm across Africa today because apartheid is a killing culture.

The liberation struggle is not an academic debate in gracious surroundings, but gas and guns and bloody guts, dog's teeth in your children's legs and electrodes on their testicles. Apartheid is violence unto death in the name of Jesus Christ.

And it goes on. Do not be misled by the talk of reform: repression is as strong as ever today. The SA Catholic Bishops meeting with the ANC in Lusaka recognised "that apartheid cannot be reformed but must be ended in its entirety".

Talk of releasing Mandela from prison conceals the hundreds now being consigned to prison. The Sharpeville Six

were saved from the gallows because of the threat of sanctions, but the judgement in the Delmas trial makes any quest for peaceful political change into treason. 'If these four men have committed treason' says Archbishop Tutu, 'then I have committed treason as well'. Pik Botha shook hands with Chester Crocker in Brazzaville on the day his colleagues were banning four more organisations at home. The brutality never stops.

Those who denounce the ANC for "practising violence" or being "a terrorist organisation" forget that for nearly 80 years our struggle has used non violent direct action against the apartheid regime. It did not stop when the Passive Resistance Campaigns were crushed after the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, but continues today at a higher level than ever. Boycotts of schools, shops and buses abound. Last month the regime's Soweto City Council wrote off R167million lost by the rent boycotts; despite fearsome repression, 1988 saw the greatest three day national strike in South Africa's history; sit ins and stay-aways continue; bans on peaceful funerals, meetings and marches are defied; there is persistent non-cooperation with officials appointed by the regime, rejection of the SADF and SAP, and continuous defiance of the Special Branch and its tactics of intimidation and destruction. Church leaders, jailed whilst marching in peace to protest to the State President, are committed to making non-violent action work.

The ANC has deep

sympathy with those who find the use of force difficult: it causes us much anguish too. The addition of the strategy of armed struggle to liberation tactics came after 46 years of non-violent endeavours. All peaceful means had been exhausted, the appeal for a National Convention rejected, and the existence of the ANC as a passive resistance organisation summarily banned, before military methods were used.

When the ANC speaks of turning to armed struggle "as a last resort", it means we have tried every sort of non-violent resistance and found it blocked by violence. The pursuit of peace means that warmongers who cannot be won by conversion must be restrained by compulsion. (Many of those who criticise the ANC for taking up arms have not tried anything).

After World War II, Christians in many colonial countries found that because violence was a structural function of oppressive societies the removal of such regimes was the only way to secure justice and peace. Political and economic systems which established the rich and exploited the poor had to be changed to remove both the injustice and the violence which ensured it, and this was brutally apparent in South Africa which defined and defended oppression on racist grounds.

Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and agnostics in the ANC were in the forefront of those who debated this

question, and when the ANC was banned in 1960 they could no longer escape a decision.

NELSON MANDELA. 1963:

At the beginning of June 1961, after a long and anxious assessment of the South African situation, I, and some of my colleagues, came to the conclusion that as violence in this country was inevitable, it would be unrealistic and wrong for African leaders to continue preaching peace and non-violence when the Government had met our peaceful demands with force. This conclusion was not easily arrived at. It was only when all else had failed, when all channels of peaceful protest had been barred to us, that the decision was made to embark on violent forms of political struggle, and to form Umkhonto we Sizwe. We did so, not because we desired such a course, but solely because the Government had left us with no other choice

Criminals and fascists and tyrants have to be restrained, and when persuasion fails to reform them force is necessary to remove them. Oppressors who exterminated those who sought justice and peace had to be removed from power, and like the struggle to remove the Nazis, this necessitated the use of arms.

The bland statement that the "Church does not agree with violence" requires closer examination.

The ANC has great respect for those who hold deeply 'pacifist' beliefs yet commit themselves to the liberation

struggle by taking non-violent action against the regime. But those who use an appeal to pacifism to cloak their racism, imperialism or cowardice, or use their rejection of armed struggle as an excuse to avoid the struggle altogether, are supporting the regime. In the judgement of Mahatma Gandhi, if cowardice is the only alternative to violence, it is better to choose violence "I would rather have blood on my hands than the water of Pontius Pilate" said Bishop Trevor Huddleston.

History reveals several traditions about violence.

HERBERT McCABE OP;

There is probably no sound on earth so bizarre as the noise of clergymen bleating about terrorism and revolutionary violence whilst their cathedrals are stuffed with regimental flags and monuments to colonial wars. The Christian Church, with minor exceptions, has been solidly on the side of violence for centuries, but normally it has been the violence of soldiers and policemen. It is only when the poor catch on to violence that it suddenly turns out to be against the gospel.

But there is another tradition which has accepted the use of armed struggle for righteousness sake. Those who protect the poor and oppressed, stand up against tyranny, fight to preserve justice and seek peace, have been praised. The ANC hates violence, but is proud that thousands of men and women and boys and girls

are willing to give their lives to defend our people against aggression.

There is a fundamental difference between force and violence, and the words should be used correctly. Force is used by legitimate rulers to restrain wickedness and vice and protect their citizens, and is quite acceptable. Violence describes the aggressive acts of illegitimate oppressors and criminals, and is repulsive.

Most churches accept that force is sometimes necessary to defend justice and withstand the violence of oppressors: the ANC has practised it for decades. Side by side with such strategies the Church supports the use of military action where necessary; so does the ANC

Neither the South African regime nor western governments have moral or theological objections to the use of force; they enrol thousands of people to the 'Defence Force' every year. The issue is not the use of force but the legitimacy of the user, not their militancy but their morality.

The National Executive Committee of the ANC is extremely concerned at the recent spate of attacks on civilian targets, and whilst the great majority of these have been mounted by the regime, it notes that:

Some of these attacks have been carried out by cadres of the people's army, Umkhonto we Siswe... and in certain instances operational circumstances resulted in unintended casualties. It has

also come to their notice that agents of the Pretoria regime have been detailed to carry out a number of bomb attacks deliberately to sow confusion among the people of South Africa and the international community, and to discredit the African National Congress. The ANC hereby underscores that it is contrary to our policy to select targets whose sole objective is to strike at civilians. NEC Statement. 17 August 1988.

In an interview with the Afrikaans Newspaper Beeld in December 1988, Margaret Thatcher spoke of the ANC and said

The question is how to get it to give up the politics of violence. The best approach is by offering the possibility of negotiations.

The ANC has always sought to talk rather than fight, and the regime has always responded by violence. When Luthuli and Mandela sought a round table conference in the 1950's, when the Sharpeville residents sought to talk in the 1960's, when the children of Soweto sought to talk to the Bantu Education Authorities in the 1970s, and when the mourners of Uitenhage and the clergy in Cape Town sought to talk in the mid eighties, the response was brutal armed

rejection. Thousands are dead today because they have sought to talk to the racist regime.

No one has died by seeking to talk with the ANC. Students, politicians, businessmen, Pope and Archbishops, women and men, Black and white, Afrikaner and English, sotho and Zulu, rich and poor, the world's leaders and oppressed children ... they all talk to the

Puppet Bishop Mokoena, left.



ANC. What is this politics of violence we must give up before they will talk to us?

THE LEGITIMACY OF OUR STRUGGLE

The South African regime contends that they alone may make decisions for our country. All must obey without question because government is instituted of God to be the authority in matters of state. Minister J C Heunis wrote to the church leaders of Thaba'nchu who requested the reconsideration of a compulsory removal:

I have no doubt that you, being men of the cloth, will not object to the Government expressing its view on non-governmental institutions meddling in affairs of state. I earnestly and with reverence must request the signatories not to become involved in the matter ... which is a decision of the highest government authority in the country, but rather to confine themselves to the matter for which they have been called, namely service to the Lord. 4 April 1988.

There is international unanimity that people have the right to determine their own governments and their own future, which is enshrined in the Charter of the United

Nations, and because apartheid violates this it constitutes a crime against humanity.

HUMAN RIGHTS COVENANTS:

All people have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural developments. 1966.

INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE

To establish ... and to

enforce, distinctions, exclusions, restrictions and limitations exclusively based on grounds of race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which constitute a basic denial of fundamental human rights is a flagrant violation of the purposes and principles of the Charter. 1971.

By its violent subjugation of its own citizens the SA regime violates international law and would be subject to international exclusion and sanctions were it not for the protection of the UK or US veto in the Security Council

DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of the government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and general elections.

The only legitimate basis for the authority of any government is the consent of the people, and thus the regime has no right in international law to speak in the name of South Africa and no right to assure its own survival.

The rulers of South Africa deliberately manipulate the Statute Book, Army and Police to ensure that the will of the people is never expressed, and thus lack any authority to rule.

This judgement is endorsed by WCC and the SACC.

THE WCC LUSAKA STATEMENT 1987:

It is our belief that civil authority is instituted of God

to do good, and that under the biblical imperative all people are obliged to do justice and show special care for the oppressed and the poor. It is this understanding that leaves us with no alternative but to conclude that the South African regime and its colonial domination of Namibia is illegitimate.

We affirm the unquestionable right of the people of Namibia and South Africa to secure justice and peace through the liberation movements. While remaining committed to peaceful change we recognise that the nature of the South African regime which wages war against its own inhabitants and neighbours compels the movements to the use of force along with other means to end oppression. We call upon the Churches in the international community to seek ways to give this affirmation practical effect in the struggle for liberation in the region and to strengthen their contacts with the liberation movements.

The words of South African church leaders to their own white members should be heeded by the whole western world:

To the white voters of South Africa we must say ... that you are being deceived by the government. Your fellow South Africans want nothing more than to live in a just and peaceful country. Your position is becoming untenable and we believe you must dissociate yourselves from this government. Apartheid a heresy. You cannot reform a heresy. If you are to assure

your future you must pull out of 'white politics' and join the real struggle for democracy. SACC. February 1988.

Another question on the legitimacy of our struggle which is frequently raised in the west, concerns our relations with the South African Communist Party and the Socialist countries, especially the Soviet Union. It can be answered directly by our President, Oliver Tambo:

We must state clearly that we consider all these forces as firm and reliable allies in the common struggle for the liberation of our country and our people. Instead of being criticised and denounced for involving themselves in the struggle against apartheid, they should rather be congratulated as should people of other political persuasions, such as social democrats and liberals who have also joined the fight against white majority domination....

The African National Congress... is not in the least interested that elements of the East-West conflict should be introduced into our situation. It would therefore help a great deal if the same spirit that inspired both East and West in the struggle against Hitler's Germany should once more prevail, enabling the great powers to act in concert, with the common objective of seeing South Africa transformed into a non-racial, non-aligned and peaceful entity. WCC 1987

No one can validate

apartheid by criticising communism. Our problems in South Africa are not caused by commissars who claim to be atheists, but by capitalists who claim to believe in God. The challenge is not how to evangelise eastern communists but how to liberate western Christians.

Those who afford the SA regime recognition and claim they are 'seeking positive change' must realise this is not the way to deal with international criminals. Humanity does not ask those condemned for committing mass murder and wholesale robbery to be a little kinder: it deposes them and appoints legitimate rulers instead.

DR ALLAN BOESAK
February 1988:

Let us no longer pussy foot around this issue. This is an illegitimate government that deserves no authority and does not have it ... that deserves no obedience and must not get it.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, you did not ask the ANC to come here to tell you that apartheid is wrong: we won that battle years ago. You want to know how you can help to pull the tyrant from the throne, how you can stand in solidarity and support with these people who seek to build a new society on the other side of Earth.

You will not expect me to ask you to take the matter lightly. You are too nurtured in the words of Scripture and too reminiscent of your own

struggles, to imagine that 'taking up your cross' is an undemanding matter, or that 'laying down your life for your friends' will not hurt. We share together in the struggle of all God's people on Earth for their inheritance.

Our first call upon you is theological. North America is largely Christian, and the fallacies and heresies which infect the religious perception of many South Africans affect you too. Because apartheid is theologically false its removal is a duty upon Christian people everywhere.

The US church, the US people, and the US government, must be brought to realise that apartheid cannot be reformed but must be removed and replaced. The right wing sects which seek to justify right wing policies, the evil arguments which excuse racist genocide, and the heretical voices which worship the idols of anti-communism and the apostasy of affluence, must be confronted and silenced.

We need you to make clear to every US citizen that the liberation struggle is theologically sound: that the quest for a new united nation, with a mandate to establish a free, non-racial non-sexist democratic society can be embraced wholeheartedly by the people of faith. Let the climate of conviction become so strong that no one can claim to belong to Christ in the United States without supporting the liberation struggle in South Africa! Who will take on that theological task for us?

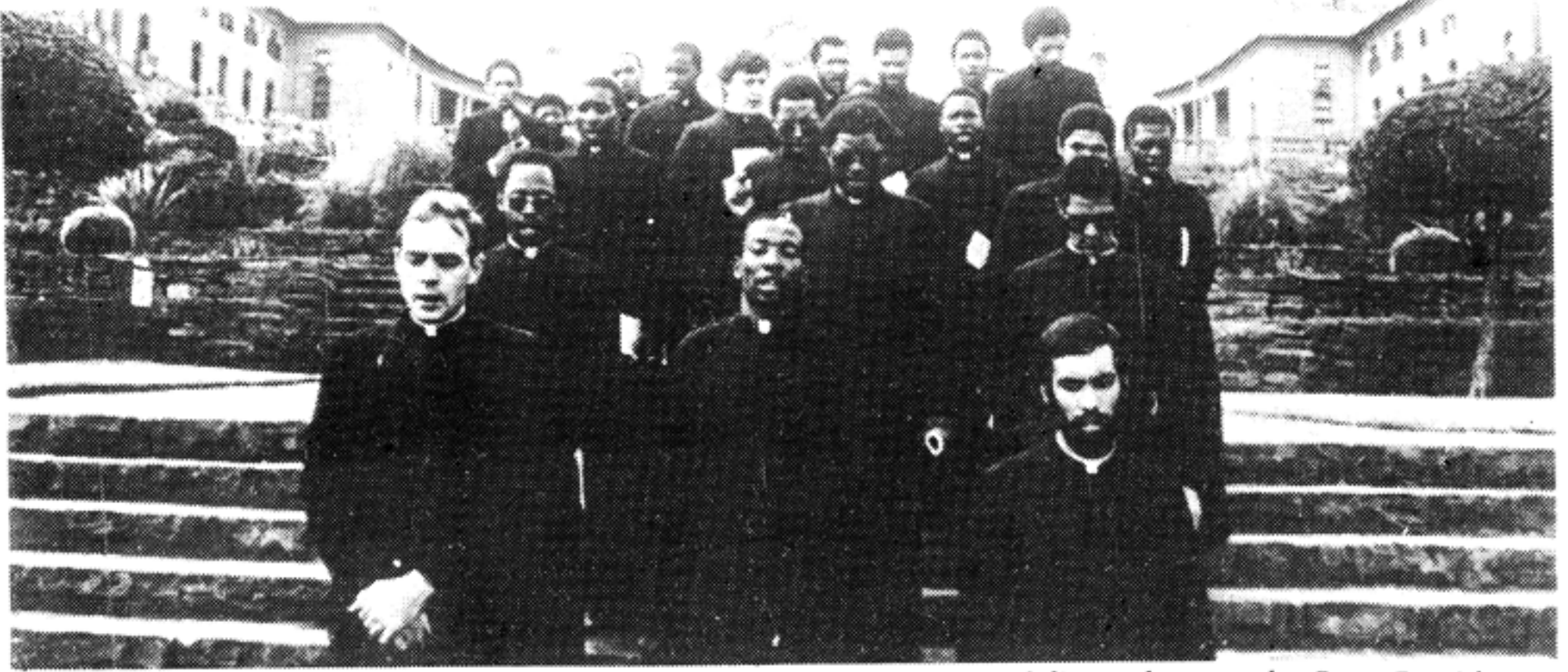
Secondly, there is a political task. The tyranny of

Pretoria cannot continue to exist without the support of the western world, and the imposition of total mandatory sanctions in every sphere is the crucial political objective. Some of you have made magnificent efforts over the years to promote this policy but we need to confirm that call. Sanctions are working.

Sanctions are designed to hit full pockets, and hit them first, and they do. Those who are squealing about sanctions are whites not the blacks, the wealthy not the impoverished, those with work not those without work. Sanctions are designed to make those who consort with the apartheid regime to tremble, and as the democratic movement grows those who are not aligned with that movement fear sanctions more and more.

The arms embargo was a vital factor in the military defeat of the South African forces in Angola. Sporting and cultural boycotts have been major elements in undermining white South Africa's ability to live with itself. Financial sanctions are proving a crucial influence in making apartheid too expensive to sustain. That is politics.

No one doubts the influence the United States exerts in the world, but it needs directing. Margaret Thatcher was persuaded to provide bases for US aircraft to bomb Libya, and she can be persuaded not to provide bases to support apartheid. Swiss francs will stop supporting apartheid rands, and western banks refuse to roll over apartheid loans, if the mighty dollar growls at them. That is politics.



Student Catholic Priests march on the Union Buildings in Pretoria to deliver a letter to the State President.

But if the political will of America is to be aroused by her politicians, it will be because the conscience of America has been aroused by her people. Who will take on that political task for us!

....Thirdly, there is the task of financing the liberation struggle. Despite divestment, US business is making millions through the exploitation of the human and natural resources of our country. Despite the public protestations of peaceful intent, US dollars feed the political and military disturbances which plague our subcontinent.

Is it not time for you to come in on our side, by direct financial support for the work of the African National Congress? We do not ask you for equipment to assault the the military might of the racist regime: we believe that is the work of God, but it is not the role of churches.

Most of our work falls in direct response to the word of the Prophet Isaiah which Jesus

of Nazareth took to himself:

*to bring the good news to the poor,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
to give the blind new sight,
to set the downtrodden free,
and announce that the day has come when the Lord will save his people.*

To the African National Congress this vision means not only evangelical zeal, but conscientising the world to win commitment to the political objectives of liberation; it means structuring and directing the quest for a new community; it means ministering to thousands of exiles with the essentials of healthy living and an education in which struggle can emerge in true democracy; it means our schools and hospitals and settlements; it means research and training to prepare to constitute a democratic South Africa; it means enabling our people to turn the hopes of the

Freedom Charter into the experience of liberated living. And that means money.

This is what we need from you, Christian comrades: theological partnership, political collegueship, and financial solidarity.

We have always had support from Christian individuals within our ranks, but it is only in recent times that church bodies such as you have begun to reach out their hands to us. African Americans, you will understand the particular poignancy, the deep sense of gratitude and greeting, which enables me, today, to reach my hands to you in the name of and on behalf of my leadership and the entire membership of the African National Congress and the oppressed and fighting people of South Africa.

LONG LIVE THE AFRICAN AMERICANS