

RECONCILED WITH EVIL?

by Cedric Mayson

Reconciliation has become a cant word amongst some Christians. Behind a false piety they hide a cowardice and complacency that reveals respectable churchgoers as servants of oppression. They are spiritual mercenaries using their faith to support evil, Christians of convenience mouthing heresies to avoid a confrontation which might upset their sleep or their prayers.

The argument can be heard from Stellenbosch to Washington, from Parys to Bonn, from Durban to London, in almost the same words:

We are against Apartheid which in God's good time will be left behind. But Jesus calls on us to love our neighbours and our enemies so we should not be involved in a struggle against the oppressive regime. Our duty is to love them. Christians should not take sides, but should stand in the middle reaching out a hand to both black and white to draw them together in love. That is the Christian way of reconciliation.

This handful of confused issues has misled many and needs taking to pieces, strand by strand, for closer examination.



SCRIPTURE. Those who cite scripture on the Christian's duty of reconciliation need to be careful. God seeks no reconciliation with evil. Jesus did not reconcile himself to the false traditions of the Pharisees, nor to the paganism or cowardice of Pilate, nor to the weakness and fear of the disciples: Jesus confronted them in word and deed.

Paul states that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself' but Christ did not do this by supporting the religious, political or military leaders who were responsible for the oppression, nor by standing in the middle and refusing to take sides. Reconciliation was accomplished by identifying himself unequivocally with the sufferers and victims, even to becoming one of them and dying their death.

Reconciliation does not mean acquiescence with injustice, failing to rebuke sin, accepting the violence of an illegitimate State, going along with devilry. Apartheid is an evil system, unjust, an illegitimate tyranny dependent upon violence. We cannot be reconciled with it: we must be rid of it: the place of reconciliation is the struggle against it.

CONFRONTATION. At a Billy Graham Rally in Durban in the late seventies Gatsha Buthelezi of Inkatha and Piet Koornhoof of the Nationalist Government publicly embraced one another as a sign of their brotherhood in Christ. Graham supporters hailed it as a demonstration of reconciling love, and critics as a cynical attempt to hide realities behind sentiment. Kisses don't solve killings.

Before it was banned in 1977 the Christian Institute

ran 'Reconciliation Courses' throughout South Africa which began by emphasising there could be 'No Reconciliation with Confrontation'. Theo Kotze, who ran many of them, was well aware that harmony did not depend upon emotional attachment, but upon a

shared commitment to discover and solve the issues that caused tension between blacks and whites, and rich and poor, so the course began with exercises to enable the members of the group to expose these realities to one another. Confrontation were not avoided, as so often happens in pseudo-civilised meetings, but deliberately courted, and people were staggered to discover their own pride and arrogance, their stereotypes, assumptions and attitudes. Then, because of the confrontation, they were able to work out their reconciliation.

Most white westerners are quite unaware of their inherited unconscious racism, and have to realise it in themselves before they can become reconciled with those who suffer it. Those who ask 'Will South Africa end in violence' or 'Will it be the end of civilisation when the blacks take over' have to self-discover the blatant racism of such attitudes. It is the height of arrogance for white Christians to believe reconciliation means that blacks must become like them.

The current Defiance Campaign is forcing South Africa and the West to confront the reality of a people committed to the establishment of a united non-racial democracy. They live for it, and are willing to die for it. The initiative for peace, justice and prosperity in South Africa does not lie in the hands of western talkers but in the masses of the democratic movement through whom God works as they demonstrate their commitment to peace and justice by refusing to accept oppressive laws. Others seeking peace must reconcile themselves to the shattering reality that they must accept leadership by the oppressed.

VICTIMS. The blind effrontery of racist imperialism appears when people from outside enter oppressed communities and tell them to be reconciled with their enemies, their torturers. The only people who can institute reconciliation are its victims, standing by the graves of their children, wiping the blood from their wounds, or the bitterness from their spirits.

Most whites have never confronted the regime in their life. Statistics yes, but poverty and smog and police and soldiers in the townships are unknown to them. Whips, teargas, dogs' teeth, interrogation, and the press of frequent funerals are quite unknown. The powerlessness of votelessness, the necessity to defend yourself against the violence of the mightiest army in Africa with your bare hands ... this is the context of reconciliation. How dare Christians tell blacks to reconcile themselves to those who

perpetuate this? Blacks throughout Africa have dealt with oppressors in a way that western Europeans find simply incredible: by forgiveness. After the confrontation is over and a liberated society established, reconciliation begins. At great risk to themselves newly liberated states, in the face of continuous covert and overt onslaught from US and South African forces, held out the hand of forgiveness to former colonialists who genuinely wished to make their homes in Africa and participate in the process of reconstruction.

TALK. Margaret Thatcher has voiced the plaint of many that the ANC should 'give up violence and start to talk'. The British Prime Minister is well aware that both the violence and the refusal to talk have been the policies of the Pretoria regime, not the ANC. The ANC is clearly on record as being willing to talk throughout its history. The ANC has stated that if Pretoria wants to talk, they must first

remove the crushing boot of oppression. Talks can only take place between equals. As such the ANC and the people of South Africa, in their various formations, have set out what steps must be taken to create the necessary climate before any talks can begin. If Thatcher and Pretoria want peace and justice, they are aware of what is required. The OAU Harare Declaration, adopted by the Non-Aligned Movement and supported by 48 of the 49 Commonwealth countries, clearly establishes the framework.

Talk can be an offensive weapon. The mines of Namibia have been a source of immense profit to the West, and when the World Court and the United Nations ruled that South Africa had no right to control that country some thought it meant the wealth would accrue to the Namibians. But talks about independence were skilfully maintained and delayed for nearly two decades, not to bring reconciliation to Namibia but to bring profit to the west, and weaken SWAPO.

No one in the ANC, the FLS, or the OAU, is going to be caught like that again. Before the present western suggestions about SA negotiations come to fruition there must be a clear commitment by Pretoria to a position which permits the emergence of a new society. To talk for years about perpetuating apartheid oppression under another name, with our people continuing to suffer exploitation whilst we talk, would not be the godly path to reconciliation but irresponsible devilry.

RECONCILED TO GOD. Reconciliation does not mean finding a central point of agreement by give and take with oppressors: too many of our people have died, for us to play those bargaining games. Reconciliation means accepting God's view of the world, overcoming an evil system and replacing it with a good one, setting out on a new course in harmony with the principles of the Freedom Charter which reflect the priorities of justice and love to which people of faith adhere. A society cannot be half-nonracist, half-united, or half-democratic: reconciliation is all, or it is nothing.

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Western racist imperialism has so thoroughly confused Christians that we need to spell out some of the gospel priorities anew.

Christianity is concerned with human society, not merely individuals. Christians have been indoctrinated to believe that the Gospel is about individualistic achievement and destiny and it comes as a shock to realise that the Bible is about the salvation or liberation of humanity on Earth. The scriptures spend no more than half a dozen pages on life after death. The major focus is on life here and now, and not upon God's purpose for individual souls, but on God's kingdom for society.

Diverting the attention of the faithful to the salvation of souls has given religious and political leaders unfettered en-



joyment of their power over social structures, power and wealth, but it has not been faithful to the Gospel.

Nothing is more true than the African gibe that the Europeans gave them the Bible and took the land. But in recent years the worldwide liberation struggle has discovered that Christianity is deeply concerned about the world and its resources, and about justice, peace and prosperity in human society.

Loving our enemies, and being good to those that despitefully use us, is interpreted by individualists to mean we must be reconciled to people but leave the system alone: 'Leave the rest to God. If we call people to Jesus everything else will turn out right.' Nothing could be further from the truth.

Evil systems have to be overthrown. They do not melt away: tyrants must be toppled off their thrones, wrong systems must be removed. Our problem in South Africa is not to encourage the people in power to be kinder, but to scrap the apartheid system, and replace it. Some of those in power will be converted and help us, but the object of the struggle is to scrap apartheid. The regime is illegitimate and must be chased out of power as thief and murderer. The constitution, the law, the ownership of wealth and land, and the basis of government must all be changed if the Kingdom of God means anything on Earth.

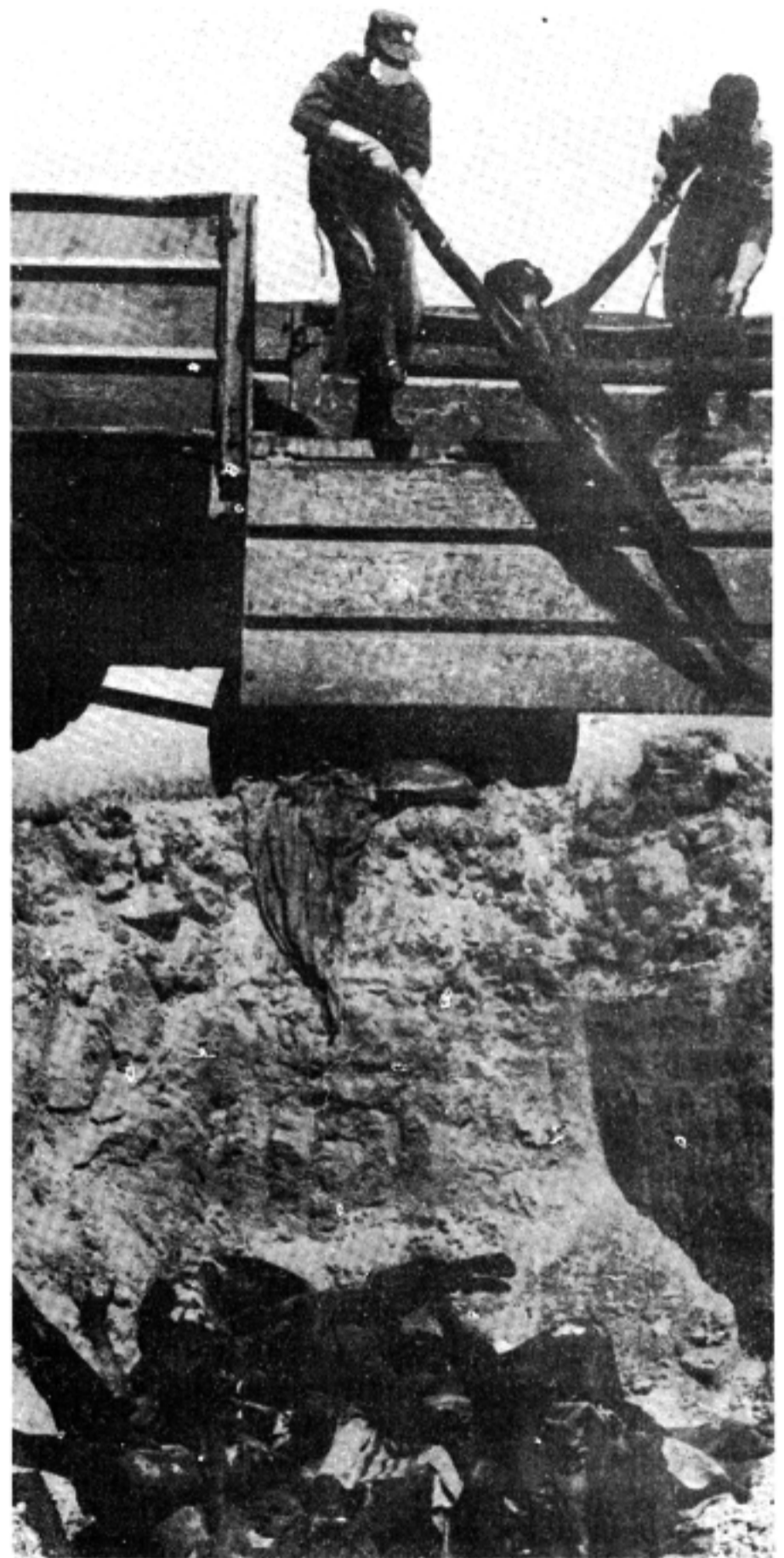
History has shown that people will not accept tyrants, for ever, whether in terms of feudalism, totalitarianism, capitalism, Stalinism or apartheid. Self-respecting human beings, responding to the image of God in which they are made, rise up and overthrow those systems, and a page of history turns.

Christians must be involved in the struggle to overthrow evil and replace it with good. This is not an argument about calling individual sinners to repentance, but about establishing God's laws of justice and peace. Right wing Christians, intent on maintaining their control of right wing societies, scoff at the futility of trying to change society whilst people are sinners. Will they accept a car of bad design because some people are bad drivers?

We can make a good society in South Africa! Christians concerned to love their neighbours as themselves must be in politics up to the eyebrows, thrusting into the world struggle for justice in law and economics, making the church a site of struggle in which western oppression is confronted, analysed and overcome.

South African and Western churches have always spoken of bringing peace and justice to our troubled people, but only now are accepting that reconciliation means joining the liberation struggle to turn out the oppressors and make a new system.

Frank Chikane of the SA Council of Churches has written: *If the church stops short at the 'traditional' line where religion is said to end and politics to begin, if it does not cross this imaginary line in order to test its non-violent*



● **MASS GRAVES:** Members of Pretoria's paramilitary Koevoet toss bodies of SWAPO guerrillas into one of three mass graves.

methods in the field, it will forfeit any legitimate right to condemn those who go further into the arena of life and death for the sake of justice. Once one recognises the illegitimacy of the regime one cannot hesitate in order to create the 'space' for a lengthy debate on violence and non-violence. One can only go forward with whatever methods are judged best to remove the tyrant... In South Africa today there is no time or space left for discussion. At this critical point the debate ends and action begins.

The way to reconciliation is through active service in the liberation struggle.

profound religious experience to join hands with other women in the rain and sing and dance around a wooden cross, celebrating the transforming power of community in the township. There is a communion, too deep for words, sitting

scarred, maimed, broken, dead. Bodies which should have been throbbing with life and blood are now lifeless. We know what it means when to die is not an option, but answering the call of the gospel, for 'greater love has no one but

in real communion with others. It means enough food to eat, homes, and living together as families — not as 'single bachelors' or 'superfluous appendages'. To be 'body' means to fight until those basic needs of life are fulfilled for all.



in a cell with other women and praying: 'Be present at our table, Lord' with mice scurrying across the floor and cockroaches crawling on your legs. Words go away, you are choked up, you are profoundly aware of a happening deeper than what you see, of a different presence amongst you.

'This is my body. This is my blood. Do this in remembrance of me'.

Bodies and blood, blood and life: in South Africa we cannot forget the scarred body on the cross, when we are surrounded by so many other bodies,

that she gives her life for others'.

The Son of God left us a great commandment in the New Testament when he said: 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. I realised that I had to love God through people I can see, and live with, work with, eat with. To love people is to be in solidarity with them in their struggle for liberation.

Christians say they are members of one body, which means we are part of one life, the full life Christ offers us here and now, not one day in heaven. To be 'body' means to struggle for that full life

I am continually aware that I have grown so much more in faith since I became conscious of our struggle. To participate in suffering and struggle is to be creating with God a new people with eyes to see, ears to hear and a new perception and understanding of the world and the issues involved. This new understanding allows us a vision of a new, nonracial democratic South Africa.

To be a co-worker with God means we are building new people for the kingdom of God that is coming into being in our country. We do not acquire this 'newness of person' by talking of God all the time, but by positive actions in the liberation struggle. Too many have died, too many are in prison, too many are crippled in heart and body, too many merely exist without having real life.

But many more have hope, endurance, determination and faith. With faith nothing is ever lost. Faith assures us that 'the poor shall inherit the Earth and the mighty shall be brought low'. Faith says our struggle is legitimate and asserts we shall be free of apartheid oppression.

That opportunity to be a co-worker with Christ in the struggle for peace and freedom is what I find in our national liberation movement, the African National Congress.

