

REVIEW SINCE LAST CONFERENCE

Tutu to SA CC

After your last Conference the event which sent shock waves throughout the Republic and was later to have international repercussions was undoubtedly the death in detention of Steve Biko. I don't think South Africa will easily recover the reputation that was torn to shreds by this ghastly occurrence and its aftermath in the extraordinary statements of Mr Kruger, Minister of Justice, who said that the death of a fellow human being left him cold - and whether you said this in Chinese or Russian, it certainly made people wonder what could have happened to the humanity of anybody who could make such heartless statements. An aftermath which included the astonishing finding of the Chief Magistrate who presided at the inquest and the even more astonishing statement of Mr Kruger that the police had been guilty of only an error of judgement and that no further action was contemplated against them - this bland statement in the face of what staid world renowned jurists had virtually said - and they are very careful how they chose their words - that the police had killed Steve Biko. Even at this late hour we appeal to the authorities to institute a judicial inquiry into Steve's death and other deaths in detention. I give only a qualified approval to Mr Kruger's latest steps to ensure the safety of those in police custody by his recent appointment of those who can carry out snap visits, etc. My approval is only very partial because I think Section 6 of the Terrorism Act must be scrapped if we are to revert to any degree of normality and abide by criteria acceptable in civilised society.

We had thought the Government would use the post June 16 1976 mood among Whites of readiness to support positive steps towards a more open and more just society in South Africa, precisely to initiate such steps. There have been calls for a demonstration on the part of Whites of commitment to fundamental and not cosmetic change. Fundamental change ultimately means blacks having a significant share in political decision making, so that a society would evolve in which people counted as persons made in the image of God and not because of biological accidents over which they had no control. And so calls have been made for the abolition of the Pass Laws (albeit gradually) since they are the most hateful parts of a thoroughly hateful system; for the recognition at least initially of urban blacks as a permanent part of what is erroneously called white South Africa and granting to them freehold title rights to land and not this 99 year lease which really is neither fish nor fowl, because people who have a stake in the land are unlikely to join a violent revolution; for a national convention of all the acknowledged leaders of every section of our community so that they could map out together the blueprint of this new South Africa. It must not be imposed leaders. My Vorster told Mr Smith to negotiate with those whom he had called terrorists only a little while before if he wanted a lasting peace in Zimbabwe. Mr Vorster told the Namibians they must parley together for a just settlement in Namibia. Why should this way of doing things be only for export and not for home consumption? We are aware and understand the fear of whites, that they will be overwhelmed by sheer weight of numbers, that what happened in Zaire, in Uganda etc. could very well happen here. But responsible black leaders have time and without number given our white fellow South Africans the assurance that we want a nonracial society in South Africa and that whites won't be driven into the sea, come black liberation. But if we go on as at present then there can be no doubt we are hell-bent for destruction, for the alternative too ghastly to contemplate. If the present ordering of society continues, then all the fears of the whites will become self-fulfilling prophecies. And we have as a Council and a church worked and continue to work to avert this holocaust. We have worked and continue to work for real reconciliation.

/Well, instead of the .....

Well, instead of the positive steps delineated above what have we had? We have had the traumatic October 19 which said more eloquently than anything else that the Government had opted for kragdadigheid, that those who spoke of reconciliation and peace were being naive in the extreme. The authorities would brook no dissent and would reply with teargas, dogs, bullets and prison; seriously eroding the credibility of those blacks who still advocated change with a minimum of violence. The November elections result demonstrated that white South Africa on the whole had decided that their security lay in military and police power. How sadly wrong they are. There will be no real security for anyone in South Africa whilst the majority are dissatisfied and are nursing grievances. Here is the fertile seed plot for communism.

There will be no security for anyone whilst the majority believe themselves to be oppressed and exploited because the whites will never be free until the blacks are free. Freedom, my dear friends, is indivisible. Thus we have had a growing intransigence on the part of the authorities, on escalating intolerance of any organ, agency or individual acknowledged as an authentic expression of black opinion and grievances, if this expression happens outside the confines of Government established structures. So the man who in Soweto has by acclaim been designated their leader, Dr Motlana, is silenced by a ban in all but name, so that those who were elected on a derisory 6' poll can be called Soweto's spokesman. You might be forgiven for thinking this was either a Gilbertian or Alice in Wonderland situation except that Mr Mulder, the fairly enlightened Minister of what are wonderfully called Plural Relations and Development, can stand up in Parliament and articulate Government policy as being the attainment of a goal such that in the end there will be no black South Africans. You find it mindboggling, especially because you realise he is serious. And then you wonder what hope there can be for our beloved motherland.

Recently the authorities banned The Voice because it was an authentic Voice. Some of the reasons for banning previous issues would be laughable had they not been so serious. One was banned because there was fulsome praise of Robert Sobukwe and an exhortation for people to follow his example not as a person (whatever that might mean) but as the leader of the banned PAC. Anybody who had ever met Mr Sobukwe came away knowing he had been in the presence of a good man. Superlatives to describe him are almost obscene. Oh South Africa, you need a course on human ecology - how wantonly wasteful you are of your human resources. South Africa is infinitely impoverished by the passing of this great son of the soil. I ask you to rise as a mark of respect to this good man.

The authorities have acted against AZAPO, the Young Christian Workers and have detained one of our workers - Rommel Roberts.

That is the South African context, except that I have omitted an important element and that is the new breed of blacks. They cannot, like us older blacks, be intimidated by the threat of imprisonment. Many of them at a tender age know detention and even solitary confinement. They cannot like us be frightened by teargas or police dogs or bullets. They have seen their brothers and sisters, friends and relatives killed and they are determined with a new kind of determination that we shall be free.

/Yes, the picture .....

Yes, the picture looks sombre enough. And we, the church, are placed in this situation to worship and adore God. That is our priority. Spiritual things must come first, And so we in the Council know that prayer, bible reading, meditation and the sacraments are not peripheral to our lives. Our daily staff prayers are an integral part of our timetable. We now have a substantial bible study to start our Executive Committee meetings and we have also introduced a Eucharist in that context, as we have done in the Conference meeting. And we have what we hope will be a monthly Eucharist in Diakonia House.

We begin by loving and serving God and this love and service are then tested and expressed in our love and service of neighbour. The two are held always together. We could not love God whom we have not seen if we hated the brother whom we have. It is not a case of either pietism or activism. We have a sanctified worldliness such as our Lord and Master had, which made Him spend whole nights in prayer and yet also be attendant on the needs of such as the woman with a haemorrhage so that he would feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the sick. These aspects of his life mutually interpenetrated one another and so it must be for his church which is His Body. Your General Secretary does not seek any confrontation with the Government, but once he believes that the Gospel of Jesus Christ commands thus and thus, then he will not constantly look over his shoulder to discover whether he had the approbation of the authorities. "Here I stand and I can no other".

The Council and I are unequivocally committed to reasonably peaceful change in South Africa (it is only reasonable because there has already been so much violence and the situation within South Africa is already a violent one). We see ourselves as God's instruments of justice, peace and reconciliation. We wish to avert the holocaust and so we say that change in South Africa is inevitable. The only questions are how and when it will come. We want it to come now and we want it to come reasonably peacefully and to this end we have dedicated our energies.

We are lawabiding citizens. And we consider all our work in the Council as religious because we do not recognise false dichotomies as between the sacred and the secular. So we will continue business as usual despite the unfortunate trinity of Welfare Bills. The onus must lie with the authorities to prove that our work is not religious. But we still want to issue a word of warning. The Churches do not want a confrontation with the authorities, but if the authorities insist on telling the church how to be church then they should not be surprised if the church says they are not a competent authority so to do and if the authorities still insist, then they will have only themselves to blame if the churches do as they have said they would, disobey the provisions of these Bills insofar as they affect the churches. This would be a serious situation and we believe that wise counsels will prevail.

The God whom we worship is a God who cares about justice, about peace, about righteousness, about oppression and injustice. Many whites are aware that in supporting the present system they are supporting something that is un-supportable. It is un-supportable because it is unjust, it is immoral and oppressive. No white would be willing to exchange places with a black even for a few days because the black condition is intolerable. The cause of justice and peace and human dignity will prevail, just as the other is doomed to failure because God finds it hateful. And God is on our side, not because blacks are better morally than whites, He is on our side because he is that kind of God, who always sides with the oppressed.

/Yes, we have a crisis.....