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It means, in other words, getting involved in God's mission in the world, and calling people to faith in Christ not only so that they may come to sing hymns in church, but also that they - the community of people who have entered a covenant of perfection - should get involved in God's mission of transforming the world.

EXTRACTS FROM AN ADDRESS BY DR HANAS BUTHELEZI AT THE SOUTH AFRICAN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE, JULY 11, 1979 - Violence and the Cross in South Africa Today

From the 11th Century when Pope Urban II launched with a papal blessing the first war of the Cross (Crusade) until our time, when young white men are exhorted to defend the values of Christianity and western culture at the border against "terrorists", who are incidentally black fellow South Africans, the church has yet to take an unequivocal stand of either cursing or blessing the violence of the battle field.

One may therefore be forgiven for asking the question whether South African Christians are as much against violence as we are made to believe.

The Cross as an instrument of violence

For many of us the cross has ceased to be a symbol of the execution of violence. For good theological reasons, it is seen to be an antithesis of violence.

The cross of popular Christianity is a romantic one, a liturgical artifact that adds a touch of Christian fineness to architecture and devotional environment. We even proudly adorn our persons with golden, silver, plastic and wooden crosses.

The cosmetic cross has eclipsed the brutal and murderous cross of Calvary.

Crucifixion as a method of capital punishment probably originated among the Phoenicians. Because of its cruelty the Romans reserved it for the execution of slaves and of criminals of the worst description.

The criminal died under the most frightful suffering so that even for the most notorious sometimes pity was felt. For a healthy adult person death ensued after some thirty-six hours. This form of punishment continued in the Roman empire until it was abolished by Constantine.

There is nothing cosmetic about the cross of Calvary. It is a matter of coming face to face with violence. The New Testament is, however, not interested in the cross merely as an instrument of violence, but in its cosmic significance to the destiny of the followers of Christ who died on the cross in a new way.

The violence of the cross is important only in as far as it measures the extent to which God's love went through the test of the infliction of violence.

Resurrection was the vindication of the tenacity of God's love. The violence of the cross thus became the fall of God's love. The brilliance of God's love shone through the violent, dark cloud of death.

The Cross as the suffering of violence

On the cross God transformed the experience of suffering at the instance of unprovoked violence into a medium of redemption. Not all suffering is redemptive. Most of the suffering in the world is oppressive.

When people suffer as a result of the harm they do to themselves and to their neighbours such suffering is oppressive.

It is oppressive suffering because it entangles the victim in the chain of his actions without a break. What is true of the individual is also true of society. If a society is fundamentally unjust and there is rebellion and destruction of the symbols of injustice, suffering will result, but such suffering will be part of the treadmill of perpetrating injustice; a vicious circle.

Sometimes people suffer as a consequence of the sin of others. Those who are on the receiving end of injustice and oppression suffer, but their suffering is oppressive and not necessarily redemptive.

Suffering becomes oppressive when the victims accept it as a destiny. When the oppressed, knowing no better life chose to accept their lot as normal life and even experience moments of happiness and satisfaction within it, oppression does not cease to be a form of suffering.

Oppressive suffering does not belong to the category of the suffering of Christ on the cross. Christ's suffering on the cross was redemptive, it was for the sake of others beyond the self. It was suffering which was occasioned by love and the circumstance of the other.

Through and on the cross God transformed the instrument of violence, vengeance and death into a vehicle of divine love and restoration to new life.

Sometimes when the ministry of words has lost its efficacy prophets may be called upon to communicate the saving message through the substance of their lives, that is, through the ministry of suffering.

The Violent Cross in South Africa

\* Violence is inconsonant with the spirit of the gospel of Christ. All Christian churches in South Africa would without hesitation say "Amen" to this statement.

Yet I make bold to say that only pacifist churches can affirm this statement without having a guilty conscience. Most of our churches are in one way or another involved in the military machinery of the country.

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Although many theologians today would question the traditional concept of "a just war", the latter still belongs to the creed of popular religion. War is still universally accepted as a legitimate "last resort".

Under the programme of national defence, governments accumulate the resources of violence and train young men in the latest effective methods of killing those who have been officially branded as enemies of the state.

In our own country we have a situation of civil war at the border. I would not be surprised if in this conference there is a parent or two whose children live in exile outside the borders of our country.

When you speak of fighting "terrorists" at the border you may be referring to the son of your brother in Christ. The question is, who is fighting the just war? we or they?

It is high time that we become sensitive to the feelings and assumptions of one another. The church of Christ cannot afford to continue aligning itself with the political sensitivities of only one section of the South African population.

The obvious stand the church should take is that of calling both parties to the conference table for the purpose of negotiating a lasting political settlement. Otherwise the church will be accused of condoning white resort to violence while condemning blacks if they resort to exactly the same methods. The church should be a peacemaker and not a party in the business of violence.

We need to take seriously the implications of the theology of the cross in our country. The gospel should be defined and preached in such a way that it makes sense to the reality of suffering and unaccomplished aspirations, which is the lot of so many people in our churches.

A triumphalistic preaching that ignores the ambiguities of religious experience may fall short of its target. We have to realise that during the last years so many of our young people have experienced what is to them white hate. They have even left the country of their birth.

To them treasured words like reconciliation and love have lost the sharp edge in terms of their experience. We have to find a new way of communicating the old message of the gospel. I believe that the message of the cross communicated in deeds and not words can go a long way.

Preachers of the word need to lead vicarious lives. They should be prepared to suffer with those who suffer as Christ did when he died for us on the cross. You cannot give joy to those who are sad without sharing a bit of their sadness.

of liberation from all forms of oppression. It is a movement deeply imbued with the belief that The gospel of Jesus Christ proclaims the total liberation of all peoples, and that the God and Father of Jesus Christ is the God of the oppressed.

There is another point I wish to make. We must remember that in situations such as ours blackness (a state of oppression) is not only a color; it is a *condition*. And it is within this perspective that the role of white Christians should be seen. Certainly I do not refer to those whites who for so long have been leaders in the black churches. Nor do I refer to those who happen to be in control of churches where blacks are the majority. I speak of those white Christians who have understood their own guilt in the oppression of blacks in terms of corporate responsibility, who have genuinely repented and have been genuinely converted; those whites who have clearly committed themselves to the struggle for liberation and who, through their commitment, have taken upon themselves the *condition* of blackness in South Africa. In a real sense, they "bear the marks of Christ." They are part of the black church, not as lords and masters but as servants, not as "liberals" but as brothers and sisters, for they have learned not so much to do *for* blacks, but to identify with what blacks are doing to secure their liberation.

This is the black church, and it is about this church that I shall be concerned here. Before I can begin to talk about the black church and the future, however, I shall have to look at our present situation.

### **The Struggle of the Black Church**

What is the position of the black church in South Africa today? It is a church that has been uncertain of its identity. The black church in South Africa has not yet succeeded in attaining for itself an authentic identity. In many cases, white control is still a reality and that makes it difficult for blacks to identify with the church. By "white control" I do not mean only administrative control—although it is important who decides and really speaks for the church—I am also thinking of the predominantly white image of the black church: in style, in witness, in commitment.

The structures that blacks have inherited are geared to the