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SECTION V : DOCUMENTATION

ADDRESS GIVEN TO THE PRETORIA PRESS CLUB BY BISHOP DESMOND TUTU, GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, ON AUGUST 4, 1980 - ENTITLED "WHERE I STAND"

Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am thankful for your kind invitation to address your celebrated Club.

I am glad of this opportunity to express my appreciation for the work that the Press does.

I have, myself, a very soft spot for the ladies and gentlemen of the Press, who are often maligned and vilified, especially by people in public office.

My attitude to the Press has been formed by their reception of me when I was appointed to a sensitive post as the first Black Dean of Johannesburg.

Perhaps I am being fanciful, but I swear that I discerned in many journalists in 1975 a veritable will to see me succeed, however you compute success in that sphere.

I soon developed a very friendly relationship with the Press including what appeared odd, journalists on Afrikaans newspapers.

Of course, there was always the danger of my being overexposed and possibly that I would play to the gallery (and tickle my weakness perhaps for the limelight!).

What I can say is that when I left Johannesburg to become the Bishop of Lesotho, some church people were sorry to see me go because they felt I had had a good ministry exercised through the Press.

I want to thank you for having been so kind to me in those days.

Nowadays the only people who are allowed to interrupt me when I am busy with others (apart, of course, from my wife) whose calls are transferred immediately to me - are yourselves.

It is a small token of my appreciation and my assessment of the crucial role you are playing and can play in South Africa today.

I think to be a journalist is a vocation, a calling filled with the joys of work well done and the frustrations of being often impeded in your search after the truth by those who do not want the truth to have too much scope because truth can often be a dangerous commodity - it can make or break men and women, as we very well know from recent history in the United States and our own country in those episodes conjured up by the words Watergate and Muldergate.

Yours is a high calling because you are searchers after truth and when you have found it, are obliged to disseminate it as far as is humanly possible without distortion or embellishment.

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It can be very costly and demanding as a vocation because the powerful are not loath to use their power to crush those who may possess truth about them which could have embarrassing or even disastrous consequences for them.

I want to commend you as a fraternity for trying to be true to the highest ideals and traditions of your profession as when you refuse to be intimidated into conformity or into breaking confidences even if to do so might land you in jail.

You are watchdogs for the nation, especially for the little men and women who can be manipulated and treated shabbily by those who have power.

You have an almost religious duty to come out on their behalf to be like the church of Jesus Christ, the voice of the voiceless speaking up against the abuse of power and standing up for those who are the victims of oppression, exploitation and injustice. You must be the eyes of a society that can be lulled into a complacency so that they will look and see how God's children are shunted from pillar to post where they are left to starve just because a racist ideology decrees that that community must be destroyed because it is a black spot on someone's white land; you must be the ears of society whose hearing has grown dull so that it can hear the anguished cries of black mothers and children left behind in some rural backwater to try and eke out a miserable existence in an unviable barren Bantustan because the economy of South Africa must prosper on the basis of the migratory labour system which was slated even by the Cape Synod of the White DRC many years ago as a cancer in our society.

You have a crucial role to play in a South Africa that is in crisis.

Whether you like it or not you are powerful people and you are formers of public opinion. Many people read nothing beyond their newspapers.

Many people, especially in South Africa have seldom exercised their critical faculty and so hardly ever question what they read. You have an awesome task. You carry a heavy responsibility. Some of the things you write may not seem to be too important and yet they go a long way to form attitudes and perceptions.

I recall many years ago how the English Press (I don't know what the Afrikaans Press did) in describing an accident who wrote: "Three persons and one Native were injured" - giving unconscious expression to and confirming Whites in their belief that 'Natives' were human but ... I am sure the fact that most newspapers nowadays as a matter of course address everybody, Black or White, as Mr or Miss or Mrs, must surely have an effect on racial attitudes even if that effect is imperceptible.

Nobody can doubt that you help to reinforce certain points of view when you describe particular groups either as terrorists or freedom fighters or insurgents. I can only pray that God will give you courage and wisdom because what you write and how you write it will have an important bearing on the future of our beloved country.

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The other day I was flying from Durban. One of the pretty Air hostesses approached me to say, "excuse me sir, a group of passengers would like you please to autograph a book for them". Well, I thought, there are some nice people about who show they have a good sense of values. They appreciate a good thing when they see it. I was trying to look suitably modest when she went on to say, "You are Bishop Muzorewa, aren't you?" Well I never.

That is an interesting episode which in some ways is a commentary on our South African situation.

Bishop Muzorewa was a great favourite of most of White South Africa. Nobody seems to have thought to use the usual bit about his bringing politics into religion.

This seems to say that as long as the politics you bring in is in favour, then you're not guilty of being a political cleric.

I suppose if I were tonight to get up and say what is really quite impossible for me to do - "Apartheid is not too bad; it is a genuine attempt to find a solution to our intractable problems" - I would become the blue-eyed boy of the establishment and not a whisper would be heard of my being a political hothead.

SABC-TV, which last interviewed me in 1978, would probably fall over themselves to get me on the box instead of parading as it does, people who are generally unacceptable to the black community to refute this or that statement I have made.

It is interesting to note also how the Bishop Muzorewa theme is cropping up in conversations in South Africa today. Among the black community there are those who are worried that I could be seduced into becoming a Bishop Muzorewa.

They say they are suspicious of the talks that Church leaders are going to have with the Prime Minister in a few days time that we could very well be attempting to hammer out a kind of internal agreement a la Ian Smith, which will leave the whites in real control whilst the blacks would have only token rule.

Perhaps nothing shows more clearly than these different perceptions the extent of racial polarisation in our country.

For many, many whites, I am regarded as an irresponsible, radical fire-eater who should long ago have been locked up, banned or had something equally horrible happen to me.

I receive some quite hair-raising letters and telephone calls. My main sadness is when my family become the target of these obscene and demented calls. Then I really get angry.

I am grateful that my family support me fully in what I believe to be God's calling to me at this time and that as a family we know that there is some cost in being involved as most blacks and some whites are in the liberation struggle to make South Africa truly free for all her children, black and white.

/But even so, it is

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But even so, it is painful to see your child trembling with rage and shock because she has answered one of those telephone calls.

I don't tell you this either to evoke your sympathy or to pretend that we are heroes. It is merely to describe one facet of life that is the reality that is contemporary South Africa.

I have to say that I was myself quite taken aback by the hostility evoked against me by the Denmark remark about Danish purchases of South African coal. It was as if I had said "Blacks go on the rampage and rape every white woman in sight".

I don't think I could have aroused greater animosity if I had in fact been guilty of that sort of incitement to racial hatred and violence.

Actually, what I said was an attempt to make a sober contribution to finding a solution to our South African problem without using violence. I was asking us to look at a viable method of bringing about real change in my native land without bloodshed and too much violence.

People are quite happy to talk about so-called peaceful means of change as long as you canvass methods that everybody knows will be ineffectual; for basically, most whites want change as long as things remain the same, as long as they can go on enjoying their privileges as before and as long as their high standard of living is unaffected.

That is why we urge the international community to exert as much political, diplomatic and economic pressure on South Africa as possible, to persuade us to get to the conference table.

I love South Africa too passionately to want to see her destroyed and international pressure may just avert the alternative too ghastly to contemplate.

And so, in the perception of most whites in South Africa, I am an ogre - something they will use to frighten children into obedience. I am, so they say, really a politician trying hard to be a Bishop and I manage with consummate skill to hide my horns under my funny Bishop's hat and my tail tucked away under my trailing cape.

That is quite painful. Indeed excruciating for someone like myself who more than most people loves to be loved. But that is being just subjective.

I have no political ambition whatsoever. In this respect I am really no Bishop Muzorewa, Archbishop Makarios or Ayatollah Khomei (indeed these gentlemen could be said to provide three reasons why religious leaders should not be politicians in the party political sense).

Indeed, our delegation to meet the Prime Minister must make it patently clear to the authorities and to everybody else that we have no political axes to grind. We represent no political party. We go as Christians to speak to fellow Christians about the serious matter of the deteriorating situation in our country as I put it in my original telegram when I urged the Prime Minister to meet with a delegation of Church leaders.

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I must reiterate that what I do and say are not determined by my political beliefs. No, it is my Christian faith which constrains me to behave in the way that I do. It is my understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ which makes me concerned about the forced removals of black people because I believe that this policy is diabolical and treats the Children of God for whom His son died on the cross, as ciphers. It denigrates their dignity and freedom as if they were not created in the image of God.

For me, through my fallible understanding of the Scriptures, this policy can only be described as blasphemous and therefore I cannot but oppose it with every fibre of my being and try to do all I can nationally and internationally to have it changed.

My understanding of Jesus Christ is of the God-man who, when He encountered human suffering said it was part of the Gospel of the Kingdom to alleviate it because He had come into the world so that we might have life and that we might have it in abundance.

This God-man could spend whole nights in prayer as the Gospel accounts give us glimpses into His devotional life. And then go about preaching the Gospel, healing the sick, raising the dead, forgiving sins and that this was to show that the Kingdom of God had arrived with Him - when He cast out demons it was because the Kingdom of His father had dawned and the conflict between good and evil was now engaged.

He could see no dichotomy between serving the physical and spiritual needs of human beings and serving and glorifying God. The horizontal and the vertical dimensions of human existence had to be held together, the secular and the sacred. Thus, to love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, totally and without remainder, was authenticated and expressed in loving your neighbour as yourself - "for how" as the Bible asks elsewhere, "can you love God whom you have not seen if you hate the brother whom you have?" Jesus himself showed His identification with the poor and the oppressed, those whom he called the least of His brethren, in St Matthew Chapter 25, in the Parable of the Last Judgement, of the Sheep and Goats - when he was hungry the righteous had fed him etc. When they asked "but when did we see you hungry and feed you?" he said, "inasmuch as you did it to the least of these, My brethren, you did it unto me".

A God who does not care about the suffering of the poor, the oppressed, the exploited ones, the victims of injustice, is a God I will not worship.

Praise be to God that our God does care and demonstrated it conclusively by taking upon Himself to become man. And look at the parents He chose. He chose a village girl and her fiancé, the village carpenter. The all-powerful God surely could have done better. He could have had a better pedigree for His Son. Should God not have come in glory, lightning and thunder so that all would know He had come?

Should He not have been born in better style? - look, God goes and gets born in a stable. What a let down and then when He moved about on earth, look at his companions.

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He did not hobnob with the high and mighty. He did not attend garden parties and endless inane cocktail parties. He kept the company of sinners, of prostitutes, of the scum of society, of the down and outs, the drug addicts, the ones who must have abortions, those who collaborate with the system.

The religious leaders, the Bishops were outraged and got angry with Him because He said that these despicable people would precede them into Heaven.

What a disreputable God, keeping such disgraceful company!

We, the Church of God, betray our Lord and Master when we dont speak up for the voiceless ones, those without power, when we curry favour with the powerful in the land and remain silent in the face of injustice, of exploitation, of oppression, when we cry 'Peace, where there is no peace' we compromise the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that the poor and the hungry and the downtrodden turn away from the Church of God which has abandoned God there in the gutter, there in the resettlement camp, when it lets its voice be drowned by the bulldozer demolishing homes so that people must now live in tents.

Some say I want to promote a confrontation with the State. Nothing could be further from the truth. I believe fervently that when the State does the things that are proper to it, then indeed it commands obedience because it carries out the mandate of God from whom its authority and all authority stems. But when the State exceeds its bounds, when it wants to claim what belongs to God for itself, then it is a religious duty to condemn this arrogation of illegitimate power, for Jesus has said: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's".

When the laws have been passed by the people or through their democratical elected representatives, and when the laws are just, then they must be obeyed. But South Africa's laws fail to pass that stringent test. None of them has been passed by the peoples democratically elected representatives when 80% of the people are excluded from the democratic process of law-making and many of the laws are patently unjust, e.g. the whole system of apartheid.

This is a system which is not only unjust but it is totally immoral and totally unChristian. It claims that God created us human beings for separation, for apartness, for division, whereas the Bible and the whole tradition of undivided Christendom aver that God has created us for fellowship, for community, for friendship with God, with one another and so that we may live in harmony with the rest of creation as well.

For my part, there will never come the day when apartheid or whatever else it gets called in our South African semantic pasttime, will ever be acceptable. It is an evil system and is at variance with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That is why I oppose it and will always oppose it and can never compromise with it - not for political reasons but because I am a Christian (a poor and feeble Christian but a Christian all the same).

I do not oppose

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I do not oppose the Government and everything it does. I try to give credit where it is due. I have praised Mr P W Botha as a courageous man, as saying things we had not expected to hear from a Nationalist Prime Minister. I have said he has a better grasp of the realities of South Africa than any of his predecessors. I have said this in the unlikely setting of a racism Consultation in Nairobi where a paper I had prepared was read for me because Mr Schlebusch thought I should not attend it by confiscating my passport.

In that setting, I have even said I liked Dr Koornhof, despite the fact that perhaps more forced population removals have happened under him than under the late and unlamented Dr Mulder.

That is odd, for someone who it is alleged seeks to foment trouble.

I usually send Government Ministers telegrams when they have done things that called for commendation. The last such telegram was sent to Mr le Grange when he decreed that political prisoners could carry on post matric studies.

Why do this, if all one wants is to denigrate the authorities?

We helped to settle the Fattis & Monis dispute by our mediation; we have been asked to intervene in the Motor Industry dispute; we offered to mediate in the Meat Industry dispute as well as in the recent strike by Municipal Workers in Johannesburg.

Could this be the concerns of people intent on causing unrest or seeking confrontation?

I want you to know that for me evil is evil whoever perpetrates it.

When I was Bishop of Lesotho, I made it quite clear there that I would denounce evil when I saw it whether it was blacks who were guilty or not. And I hope God will give me the courage and strength to do so, when freedom has ultimately come to South Africa.

There will be no real peace in South Africa until we have real change. We are not to be fobbed off with so-called international hotels and restaurants, with multiracial sport, with the removal of a few signs from public buildings and park benches.

Of course, change does generate change and can have a momentum which is ultimately irreversible and raised expectations are important ingredients to bring about change.

We will not be seduced by concessions however massive through being co-opted into a middle class that must serve as a buffer between affluent and privileged whites and a horde of dispossessed and poor blacks - concessions which would enable those lucky blacks benefit from the core economy and thus be supporters of the status quo whilst the vast majority of their brothers and sisters are consigned to the outer darkness of unviable Bantustans where there is poverty and starvation, so that they are reservoirs of cheap labour.

/No, we will

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No, we will not have peace from concessions which ameliorate an oppressive system, making it slightly more comfortable, imporving instead of changing it.

No, the name of the game is political powersharing. Political power gives access to other kinds of power. Concessions are vulnerable. They depend on the whim of those who have political power for they can give or withhold these concessions as they wish. Our efforts must be turned to the business of dismantling apartheid. That is going to happen whatever whites decide to do.

We want a new South Africa - a non-racial South Africa which will be more open, more just, where the Constitution will be truly democratic based on adult suffrage, with a Bill of Rights which entrenches individual not group rights.

We pray that whites will be exorcised of their obsession with ethnicity and colour and race.

Afrikaners can survive if they want to survive. Many cultures have survived, e.g. in the USA without using draconian laws to do so. They have survived not at the expense of the freedom, dignity and humanity of others as Afrikaners seem determined to survive but because of the intrinsic qualities they possess. Does Afrikanerdom lack these attributes?

We blacks shall be free, with a freedom that is not sectional. It will be a freedom for all. The logic of history, even of Afrikaner history, leads to this as inescapable.

Whites can still decide whether this free South Africa will come about through negotiation or through bloodshed and violence.

We are those who are working so that this change will happen reasonably peacefully. That is why we want a National Convention where the acknowledged leaders, not the imposed leaders, of all sections of our community will work out our common future together.

We shall be free, then will all be free, for whilst we blacks are unfree then nobody can be free. We shall be free because the God whom we worship is a God of liberation, of justice, of peace, of love, of reconciliation.

What a tremendous country we will be. We have already, you know, produced a Nobel Prize Winner.

We will lead the world in the matter of how people of different races, cultures and backgrounds can live together - for we will stride into this glorious future, black and white together with our heads held high, hand in hand, black and white together, into this new South Africa, where everyone will count, (Black and White) because they are each (black and white) created in the image of God, to whom be praise, and glory and worship and adoration and honour forever and ever.

AMEN.