

# MARGINAL CHRISTIAN GROUPS IN SOUTH AFRICA

(Speech given at the annual general meeting of the Christian Institute of South Africa in Durban, September, 1973 entitled *The Role of Marginal Christian Groups in Promoting Security Inside South Africa.*)

by Manas Buthelezi

By "marginal groups" I mean those voluntary christian organizations which have committed themselves to the prophetic carrying out of one or more aspects of the christian ministry. In so far as their aims fall within the ambit of the general ministry of the church, the attitude of the church towards them manifests itself in a relationship that ranges from moral support to financial assistance or seconding of personnel.

The marginal organizations I have in mind should be distinguished from those denominational agencies whose terms of reference are explicitly outlined in church resolutions or articles and by-laws of the church constitution e.g. youth leagues, commissions, etc. They are for the reason of this distinction marginal. They are marginal also for another reason: although they may have a broad appeal, since they cannot speak with the authority of the church, theirs may appear to be a minority voice. They are to the church marginal in the same sense as one may speak of the church as being a marginal group in relation to the rest of society which does not claim to be motivated by christian principles. They may either be in a denominational or ecumenical margin, e.g. Mission Societies, YMCA, Revival Movements, Africa Enterprise, Christian Institute, etc.

Because of the limited time I have, it is impossible for me to do justice to the wide variety of rôles all these marginal christian groups are or are not playing in promoting meaningful security in South Africa. Seeing that this occasion coincides with the tenth Anniversary of the Christian Institute, in this lecture I am going to limit myself to the example of the rôle of the Christian Institute.

In order to forestall wrong expectations of what I am going to say, I should state that I am not going to present you with a catalogue of the achievements of the Christian Institute as such. There are people who would be more qualified to do that than myself. My approach to the question of the Christian Institute in the promotion of security in South Africa will neither be historical nor

question of the contribution of the Christian Institute in the promotion of security in South Africa will neither be historical nor descriptive. On the other hand, it will be reflective, that is, I shall reflect as a simple South African christian on how the rôle such as that of the Christian Institute serves the promotion of security in South Africa. I will begin by analysing the present quest for security in South Africa in a Christian perspective. In other words I will describe the essence of the current security problem as a setting for evaluating a rôle like that of the Christian Institute. In short I am investigating the Christian Institute using the criterion of a christian concept of security in South Africa. You will have the benefit of following my reasoning step by step until I reach recommendations which I shall address to the christian conscience.

## 1. The Christian Quest for Security in South Africa.

I will begin by announcing that I am one of those who believe that for its own survival this country needs security badly. Therefore the creation of the atmosphere and reality of security is priority number one. The country, as well as all of us christians, needs to guard against all that poses a threat to security. All this is of course orthodox phraseology. The basic question centres around how we understand that which constitutes security. Security may mean many things to many people. For instance, to a robber security means feeling that his loot is firmly in his hand and beyond recapture. For the robbed man security means the experience of the repossession of what was taken from him. This crude example illustrates the need of defining our terms.

Understandably the whole of our country suffers from a security psychosis. You can hardly turn a newspaper page without reading something about or an indirect allusion to a threat to South African security. At least among those who subscribe to the tenets of Christian faith it is necessary to arrive at some form of consensus as to what constitutes security for all in our country. After all if security is to become a prized ideal and possession at all, it is all of us who should be in a position to appreciate what it guarantees to our daily life. Security is something that

is as concrete as life itself. Its appreciation can never be a monopoly of those who claim to have some esoteric insight into what constitutes the common good. It is something whose essence should be understandable to us all.

In what follows I want to argue the case for a theology of security in South Africa. I will explain why I think the church needs to outline an ethic which puts in perspective the present quest for security especially in the body politic. I will illustrate that what a marginal christian organization like the Christian Institute is trying to do is just that.

The theological basis for security is Christ's atoning work. It is Christ's act of bringing reconciliation between God and man and the opening of the possibility of reconciliation between God and man which accounts for security. Reconciliation is security—the opposite of disquiet and apprehension that results from an awareness of an existing belligerent state of affairs. In as far as a security problem exists only as long as there are two parties, the threat and threatened, a deliberate creation of reconciliation is the only reasonable solution short of mutual annihilation or the destruction of the imagined threat by the threatened.

As the Gloria in Excelsis of the Angels put it, the birth of Christ ushered in a new possibility of security on earth. Instead of the word "security" the bible speaks of "peace on earth"

Without reconciliation there can never be security. It is because whites have rated reconciliation as such a low priority that they are such victims of insecurity. For many decades blacks have been seen as a potential danger to whites. Whites have been accordingly impressed with this imagined reality. The programme of the segregation of blacks from whites has been a desperate attempt to invest the white man with a sense of security. Distance was imagined to be a healthy medium of security. On the other hand any physical fellowship between black and white was seen as a major threat to the security of the white man. That is why to many people security has racial overtones; that is why it is such an emotive word in the political jargon. To say that the programme of segregation has aggravated instead of decreased the white man's sense of insecurity is to state the obvious. The white man has found it necessary to build more security fences around himself without satisfying the most fundamental of his fears: imagined threat to his survival as well as that of the values and ideals he has committed himself to protect and preserve.

The security legislation and events of the last decades have proved that no amount of "physical fencing" can satisfy a basically spiritual and psychological quest: what security shall I have in order to believe that I shall continue to be? A Swedish theologian has described this spiritual phenomenon in modern man in very poignant words.

"Such is the nature of the life lived by man under wrath and death. He is continually struggling to abolish fear and build a 'world without fear', trusting in new healing media (for instance, in the power of science), and allowing his fear to take concrete form in petty fears of minor and avoidable dangers. At the same time he conceals from him-

self his deepest fear, the fear of death itself, against which he is powerless. He uses his power to 'govern' creation in order to avert the external aspects of the tyranny of death. These can be averted, since they are simply the outward 'masks' of death, and not death itself. In so averting them, man comes to put his hope and trust in the means which he has used to prevent the onslaught of death. In this confidence he begins to worship the creature, although he knows in his inmost being that nothing can ultimately help him, and that the tyrant will come against him in a different mask and destroy him. His ruling over creation does not save him from making idols. On the contrary, it forces him to do so, for he is unable to produce in himself the faith which can withstand death without idols".

This is in essence a theological analysis of the South African security psychosis. I know that it is very humiliating to go through the motions of being told what you are suffering from. As you lie on the doctor's couch stripped naked and the doctor casually handling even the ugliest and most private members of your body, you begin to realize that you are helpless: you do not have power of privacy, and it hurts; but it is a humiliating hurt that is a prelude to healing.

This is the phase we are in in South Africa; it is a phase of the fear of confrontation with the naked reality of our situation and a desperate attempt to build security walls of self-deceit, like a king who admires those who tell him that he has the mightiest army in the world and who persecutes messengers who come to tell him that his army has been routed and that he should seek shelter in another castle.

In which castle should South Africa find shelter and security? In strengthening and not threatening or destroying the forces that are designed to promote harmony and reconciliation between black and white people in South Africa. It is significant that no less a man than the State President has in his recent statement courageously come out to the side of those who believe that reconciliation between black and white is the only thing that will guarantee security in South Africa.

I have not met the State President. I have every reason to think that he understands himself like all of us to be a follower of Christ and that such a statement is a reflection of the insight he is also seeking in Christ. If that be the case I make bold to say that I have discovered something I have in common with the faith-insight of the State President namely, a commitment to bringing about a reality and atmosphere of reconciliation between black and white in South Africa. Let us rally behind the State President and fight the enemies of good will and christian fellowship between black and white while at the same time being aware of the fundamental truth that you "cannot have your cake and eat it". You cannot desire reconciliation and at the same time censure those who see to it that it happens: you cannot reconcile by dividing people and making it impossible for them to realize that they have something in common. As a black christian who is struggling to make christianity a reality in his country, in the recent statement of the State President I read a voice

of encouragement from high up in the rungs of power that what I am doing is not undesirable after all. Although the State President did not mention me by name, I feel entitled to claim it as a voice of encouragement for me. I hope that those of you who are committed to bringing about reconciliation between black and white feel encouraged that this is not the darkest hour of their strife but really the dawn of a new day which will confirm that contrary to appearances their labours have not been in vain.

Let me illustrate the current problem of security in South Africa by saying a few words on some of the often forgotten casualties of the security confusion in South Africa. I would not be surprised if I turn out to be the first person ever to speak for the welfare and security of these people. I am speaking for the oppressed underdogs of the South African Society. I mean the members of the black Security Police popularly known as the Special Branch. It is relatively easy to summon moral arguments behind the expression of sympathy for the poor, for the oppressed, for political detainees but I have yet to hear any one who publicly argues a christian case for the morality of the work of the black Special Branch. These men, some of whom are our brothers, fathers, cousins and uncles, actually do a thankless job simply because the average black man fails to grasp the essence of the security of which the Special Branch man is an agent.

A Special Branch man is strictly speaking a banned man and somebody under house arrest. He is banned because he is cut off from the pool of black community confidence. His circle of intimate friends hardly ever stretch beyond his family and colleagues and agents in the security force. He is a branded man in that people never feel at ease in his presence. In actual fact an instrument of security should bring an atmosphere of confidence and assurance of safety. A security body guard does not inspire panic and fear but a feeling of safety. This is not the case with the Special Branch. This is confounded by the fact that among their clients are almost all significant leaders of the black community. There is a saying that if you are a black leader worthy of any salt you must prove it by the frequency of visits and surveillance by the Special Branch. That is why even bishops and ministers of the Gospel are not exempt from the visits of the Security Police. This makes many black people confused as to what is meant by talk of security.

For a security system to be of lasting value it is important that its basic underlying principles and goals must be simple enough to be understood by the average citizen; after all he should be its primary beneficiary. It is the aim of these remarks to describe the christian basis of those principles and goals.

A threatening security is no security at all, just as one reconciled with God is no longer threatened and repelled by God's wrath but cemented to him by fellowship of his love. To the innocent therefore, security should bring with it an experience of serenity and joy and not insinuations of potential criminality.

A security system based on reconciliation will liberate, for instance, the black Special Branch man from doing an inappreciable job to the black community. The community will be reconciled to him and see him as its genuine body guard instead of an instrument of harassment. Many a Special Branch man leads a miserable life of being resented and isolated by the community.

If the ministry of the church is to be relevant at all it must be related to people in all walks of life and professions, including the Special Branch men. Christ died for them too. It is the task of the church to promote good will not only between man and man, but also between government and people, leader and follower and even between the community and the Special Branch. In order to do this effectively, the church must so interpret the Gospel of reconciliation as to condemn all that makes good will impossible. It is not the duty of the church to "cover up" and white-wash wrong foundations. If a foundation is shaky, it must be replaced by a new one. In this case the shaky foundation is programmed confrontation between black and white which must be replaced by reconciliation. It is against the background of this need that we have to understand the role of marginal christian groups.

## II. The Essence Of The Role Of Marginal Christian Groups

Individuals and groups of individuals in the church have a responsibility to witness about the meaning of the Gospel to the various situations of daily life. In relation to the topic under discussion, the Christian Institute is one organization which has tried to highlight the centrality of reconciliation in bringing about Christian harmony and understanding among the various racial groups in South Africa. Bridge building is an important strategy in the security system of a country. This is true both in a literal and metaphorical sense. Good human relations is an art of establishing links of communication between individuals and groups.

If christian fellowship is to mean anything at all, it is necessary that there should be models of christian fellowship. To talk about the need of reconciliation between blacks and whites in South Africa would remain empty noise if it were not followed by the creation of concrete models of a reconciled black-white community.

Some years ago I had a very tough time trying to reconcile two families. One family was eager for reconciliation while the other was not. One member of the reluctant family explained the situation this way. "You see, if we get reconciled it will mean that they will come to our house, and then they will be potentially more dangerous to us than they are now. Let them remain where they are, and we shall keep to our place".

This story is a parable of our situation. Some people see reconciliation as in itself an abandonment of a position of security: it is placing oneself in a vulnerable position of openness to the other. As long as we talk theoretically about the need for reconciliation in this country, there is no problem; but as soon as you bring in the question of building concrete models of a reconciled community then you run into all kinds of difficulties.

By a concrete model of a reconciled community I mean a social situation in which people are made to experience what it means to go through the process of reconciliation and also appreciate the fruits of fellowship. The present segregated structure of the church in South Africa has meant that the church has failed to be such a model of a reconciled community. The church has virtually become a microcosm of the racially balkanized society we find in South Africa. It is considered axiomatic by some people that the church should fashion itself after the image of society. Any form of deviation from the pattern of traditional apartheid in South African society is considered an act of undermining the security of the country. The church is no longer a salt to the world but is instead salted by the world. I say this in full awareness and appreciation of the growing concern in many churches for redeeming the situation.

It cannot be denied that groups like the Christian Institute have in the past devoted all their attention to the

problem of reconciliation as a basis for real and lasting security in South Africa. We should thank God for this.

In my opinion it is because many white people have not accepted reconciliation between the races in South Africa as the only basis of the future security that they call in question the christian integrity of those who have tried to create models of reconciliation. Yet there is an urgent need for such models. It is to the credit of bodies like the Christian Institute that concerned christians have been given the opportunity of witnessing to reconciliation as an alternative basis for security in South Africa. The credit also goes to those churches and christian groups which have given the Christian Institute moral and material support in its contribution towards the search for security in this country.

Against the background of all these facts I recommend that we thank God for one of his gifts to South Africa, the Christian Institute. □

# DON'T PLAY WITH APARTHEID — ISOLATE IT

by Roger Roman

1970 saw the cancellation of the proposed tour of Britain by a 'whites only' Springbok cricket team. This was the result of what was perhaps the most successful protest campaign ever witnessed, namely the "Stop the Seventy Tour" (S.T.S.T.) campaign. Now a new action-group has been formed along the same lines, and with several of the same leaders. "Stop the Apartheid Rugby Tour" (S.A.R.T.), is going to be in the front lines of a battle to bring about the cancellation of the proposed British Lions rugby tour of South Africa, next year. This article will give some of the background information needed to assess S.A.R.T., and to understand its motives.

The whole sports system is controlled by whites, for the enjoyment of whites, and to the practical exclusion of all others. Racial discrimination rules every facet of it at all levels, and in all its forms. White South Africans have more leisure, economic resources and opportunities to play sport; whereas the blacks have to contend with apartheid as well as having less leisure, economic resources, and opportunities.

The greatest discrimination lies in the facilities available to the whites and blacks; It starts at grass-root level with the virtual absence of public parks and play-grounds in black areas, severely retarding the growth of sporting in-

terests and skills in the black youth. A statement by the Director of Housing and Coloured Affairs for Port Elizabeth was made in 1969: "There are 4,000 registered adult members of Coloured rugby and soccer associations in Port Elizabeth. This means that there are 364 individual teams for which we need 61 fields for weekend league fixtures. We have 13 fields available. "This illustrates the position at club level. Where in South Africa do we find such a lack of facilities for whites? At first class level we find no Ellis Parks, Kings Parks, or Loftus Versvelds for the black athlete. Thus even if he has the opportunity to play sport regularly the black man is severely handicapped by lack of facilities.

Racial discrimination means that the Government decides who can play whom, not the sportsmen themselves. It means that the spectators at matches are fenced off from one another into racial groups. It means that there is a complete lack of reports of black sporting events, in the sports pages of white newspapers. It means that the different races cannot share the enjoyment of sport together in the way they want to. It means that the black sportsman is also denied the right officially to represent his country overseas.

Small wonder, then, that the Basil D'Olivieras, the Precious McKenzies, the Steve Makones and the Albert Johannesons, to name but a few, have had to leave their