

THE CHURCH IN APARTHEID SOCIETY

And the need for Christian reconciliation

CHURCH leaders in KwaZulu and Natal have been asked to do all they can to find ways and means of establishing "fellowship" between Black political opponents in South Africa.

In a meeting at Ulundi, the Chief Minister of KwaZulu said he was not asking the churches to help him win his political battles.

"I ask the Churches, in the name of God, to reconcile divergent Black/Black interests," he said.

Addressing the clergy present Chief M G Buthelezi said it was common cause among thinking Christians that the Church should play a role in shaping society.

In South Africa the country's racist laws and administrative practices should offend all Christian consciences, he added.

And yet the country's Churches had not yet reached consensus on what role the Church should play in eradicating injustice.

"There are some Churches, such as the Dutch Reformed Churches, in which leaders still debate whether apartheid necessarily gives rise to an unjust society."

Church leaders were still groping towards a definition of Church responsibility in apartheid society.

"I believe the Church should be humbled by the recognition that it is at this point in time — at this late day and age — still grappling with the fundamental issues not because there is no theology of liberation for South Africa, but because the enunciation of that theology is impaired by conflicting secular interests in the Church itself."

Chief Buthelezi went on to say that perhaps the Church should recognise its failure to provide Christians with the kind of leadership "... which is spelt out in the life and teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

The Church had to date, not been able to curb the violence in the country.

"The employment of force by the State for political purposes has given rise to the employment of counter force by the victims of the coercive force used by the State.



Dr Alan Boesak, President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, student chaplain at the University of the Western Cape and patron of the United Democratic Front. Chief Buthelezi asked: "What is the difference between my position and that of Dr Alan Boesak? Does he not operate in a sister church of the DRC which even today depends on apartheid theologically? Does he not earn his living doing a job in the ethnic university of the Western Cape? If he can struggle for the liberation of this country from within the inner sanctums of an apartheid church and an apartheid university, why can I not struggle for the liberation of this country within a KwaZulu structure?"

"There is in South Africa force and counter force. There is violence and counter violence.

The Church in South Africa suffered from impediments cast before it by the nature of the society in the country.

This gave rise to a situation in which one Christian campaigned against another and made the Church tragically and truly divided.

The South African Council of Churches adopted stances and mounted programmes in which radical Christian action contrasted very markedly with the stances and programmes of its member Churches.

"It is as though there is a kind of dualism in the Church, said Chief Buthelezi... The SACC is a kind of showpiece of Christian fervour behind

which Church leaders hide when the accusing finger of international Christianendom is pointed at them.

"I am accused by my Christian brothers of being something most vile. I am accused of Christian and political treachery.

"Christians level such terms as "sell-out", "stooge", "Bantu star leader", "traitor", "Home and leader", and the like against me in a sustained and orchestrated campaign of denigration.

"Spokesman after spokesman in the South African Council of Churches inform my Christian brothers and sisters abroad that I bolster apartheid and operate from within the system.

"They urge them to lend me no Christian helping hand as I strive each



Bishop Desmond Tutu, Secretary-General of the South African Council of Churches, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on October 15. Chief Buthelezi said he was "deeply grateful" that the prize had been awarded to a South African churchman and added "...the recognition by the Nobel prize committee that Christians have a role to play in South Africa is encouraging indeed..." The award was a recognition of the gross injustices in South Africa and the need for peaceful change, he added.

day in my life to bring about radical change in this country and to meet the desperate needs of a starving and suffering people."

Chief Buthelezi said the Joint Screening Committee of the SACC was the primary tool used by the SACC to block Christian aid for the programmes of self-help development which KwaZulu and Inkatha were attempting to foster.

He said he was accused of "working within the system" and this was a political cliché which needed looking at.

"Does the Church not work from within society to bring about changes which Christ demands?" he asked.

Every major White denominational church in South Africa was a statutory body founded by a specific Act of a Whites-only racist Parliament.

"Is the Church therefore not within the so-called system?"

Churches were treated preferentially by the State — they paid no tax, rates and taxes and were exempt from trading licences.

The major White controlled denominational churches provided chaplains for the South African Armed Forces and participated in Government mem-

orial services, the opening of Parliament and national days of prayer.

They provided the country with marriage officers who married people within the dictates of apartheid's race classification system.

The Churches accepted the Group Areas Act in day-to-day life and although there was protest, in the end, they continued working as best they could.

Chief Buthelezi asked: "Can the Churches really say that they should also not be subjected to the same vilification by the SACC as I am when I am accused of working within the system?"

He had remained in KwaZulu to stop the Government putting in "a Matanzima or a Sebe" who would accept so-called independence and sign away the birthright of six million Zulus. He had remained because of the traditional role of his forefathers in serving a succession of Zulu Kings and their people as Prime Ministers.

There was no escape, he said, from the restrictions of apartheid for any South African, Black or White.

The distinction which the SACC attempted make between so-called homelands and so-called urban Black

residential areas was a spurious distinction. The laws of apartheid applied as much to the one as to the other.

By an act of the South African Whites-only Government, every single African in the country was a citizen of one or another homeland whether they liked it or not.

"We will one and all be buried in segregated graveyards just as we are born in segregated hospitals," he said.

He wanted to know where was the distinction between the restrictions within which the churches had to operate and the ones in which he had to.

Would it be right, he asked, for a Bishop to refuse to be elected to high office because his church was founded by an Act of a Whites-only racist Parliament?

Would it be right for the leaders of the churches to insist on paying taxes on church income in order to avoid being beneficiaries of Government aid?

Would it be right for progressive Bishops to abandon their flocks because they refuse to lead them in apartheid society?

Chief Buthelezi went on: "Why then am I asked to abandon my people so that Pretoria can succeed in making KwaZulu go through the motions of accepting so-called independence under the leadership of a "Matanzima", a "Mphephu", or a "Sebe"?"

He was accused of accepting payment by the South African Government and thereby committing an act of political treachery.

"Is every White and Black civil servant equally treacherous?"

"In my case it is not even true that I am paid by the SA Government. The KwaZulu budget consists of parliamentary grants as well as money from our own sources of funds.

"I do not see anyone accuse the White universities, which are financed by the South African Government, of operating within the system..."

He wanted to call upon the Churches to mount mechanisms of mediation and to act as the kind of reconcilers Christ would expect them to be in the circumstances.

He believed there was a living Christ in our midst and he was King. Step by step He would move the country to its divinely appointed destiny.

"I ask Churches to find ways and means of establishing the kind of fellowship between Black political opponents whose hands this living Christ of ours wants to join together in the struggle for liberation."