

Gilde vermy besluit oor kultuurboikot

Deur Welma Odendaal

SOWAT 120 skrywers, letterkundiges en belangstellendes het van 30 November tot 2 Desember by Broederstroom buite Johannesburg vir die Afrikaanse Skrywersgilde se algemene vergadering byeengekom. Die beraad, wat sedert die Gilde in 1975 gestig is 'n jaarlikse instelling geword het, het dié jaar besondere belangstelling uitgelok nadat Idasa in Julie vanjaar 46 Afrikaanse skrywers geneem het om met ANC-lede in Zimbabwe samesprekings te voer. Die 46 het onder meer die ANC se nuwe beleidsdokument oor die kultuurboikot in 'n verklaring "verwelkom" en sodoende die woede van ander binnelandse skrywers op die hals gehaal.

Voor vanjaar se Broederstroom-vergadering waar die kultuurboikot sterk op die agenda verskyn het, was daar heelwat bespiegeling oor die toekoms van die Gilde. Buitestaanders sowel as skrywers het gevoel dat indien daar besluit moet word oor waar Afrikaanse skrywers staan ten opsigte daarvan, dit die Gilde sou laat skeur.

Op 'n warm Saterdagoggend het die kultuurboikot toe eindelijk ter sprake gekom met 'n mosie van die Kaapse skrywer Abraham de Vries (wat nie by vanjaar se beraad teenwoordig was nie) dat die Gilde "duidelik standpunt inneem tov die kulturele boikot". Dit was trouens 'n groot probleem in hierdie debat dat die skrywers wat hul tot dusver die sterkste teen die saak uitgespreek het nie op Broederstroom was nie.

Na hewige bespreking van die vloer af is De Vries se mosie geamendeer om te lui: "Die Gilde moet by die volgende jaarvergadering duidelik standpunt inneem tov die kultuurboikot nadat 'n behoorlike studiestuk opgestel en aan lede gestuur is en streeksbyeenkomste gehou is." Daar is besluit om die jaarvergadering so gou as moontlik te hou - April is as 'n voorlopige datum gestel - sodat die saak spoedig afgehandel kan word.

Hoewel sommige mense gevoel het dat die Gilde maar net weer die saak uitstel as vermyingstaktiek, het die voorstanders van die mosie aangevoer dat lede nog te min inligting oor die volle implikasies van die boikot het, en dat dit polities nie wys is om 'n skeuring onder skrywers teweeg te bring nie. Die Gilde het hom ook nou duidelik in sy nuwe grondwet verbind tot die nastrewe van 'n nie-rassige, nie-seksistiese, demokratiese en verenigde Suid-Afrika, en die kultuurboikot as strategie van die bevrydingsbeweging sal in dié verband aangespreek moet word.

Die mosie is met 'n oorgrote meerderheid aanvaar - en vir 'n kort tydperk het Afrikaanse skrywers beweegruimte om hul politieke selfbegrip te ondersoek - voordat elkeen in April 1990 besluit waar sy of hy staan tov die rol wat skrywers kan speel in die bevrydingstryd in die land.

Welma Odendaal is op die redaksie van *Die Suid-Afrikaan*.

BOOK REVIEW

Church as site of struggle

By Bobby Nel

THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS. KAIROS AND CONVERSION, Skotaville Publishers, P O Box 32483, Braamfontein.

THE Road to Damascus is more a document than a book. It is unique in the sense that it has been signed by Christians in seven Third World countries - South Africa, Namibia, South Korea, Philippines, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala. It is noted in the preamble that the churches in these countries have much in common, namely a situation of violent political conflict, Christians on both sides of the conflict and the emergence of Christian theologies that sides with the poor and the oppressed.

The 36-page document starts with an analysis of the roots of the conflict in these countries. Colonialism and imperialism are described as the main features of the oppressors. Imperial powers make use of economic control, the technology, the educational system, mass media, cultural institutions and religion to create a subservient colonial mentality.

In many countries ordinary people have started to take responsibility for proposing an alternative to the present systems. The different systems reacted to the resistance of the people by devising counter-insurgency programmes with the support of the colonial and imperial powers. The economic powers supported these governments in the establishment of national security states.

Many Christians are involved in the struggle against the system of domination with the result that both the oppressor and the oppressed use religion as part of their legitimation for their ideas. The church itself has thus become a site of struggle.

The second chapter looks at the content of the faith of the poor. It notes that the oppressed began to read the Bible from their position and were no longer dependent on the oppressors' interpretation of the Bible.

The document continues by discussing the prophetic mission of Christians who believe in the theology of the poor. There are specific sins the document wants to expose. This must be seen in the light of the next chapter (and the title), which call for a conversion.

The great sin of the powerful world according to *The Road to Damascus* is the sin of idolatry. Some of the features of idolatry mentioned in the document are that it is fanatical, denies all hope for the future, demands absolute submission and blind obedience, demands a scapegoat, and demands human sacrifices - it is thus anti-

people. Power, money and property become more important than people. Other sins mentioned by *The Road to Damascus* are heresy, apostasy, hypocrisy and blasphemy.

The conversion of Paul is taken as an example of the possibility for people to change their frame of mind completely. The challenge is directed at those Christians who make use of Christianity to defend and support the imperialists, the oppressors and the exploiters. They are urged to turn around and support the true meaning of the Christian faith. It is also a challenge to all who profess to be followers of Jesus to examine them-

selves for remnants of above-mentioned sins and to see if there are no signs of triumphalism, self-righteousness, dogmatism, rigidity, intolerance and sectarianism in their hearts.

The reader should bear in mind that

the document was written against the background of conflict situations in seven countries. The point of departure is that there are Christians on both sides of the conflict, not only on the side of the oppressed but also on the side of the oppressor. The authors of *The Road to Damascus* emphasise their own belief that there is a line of division in the church in these countries and invite Christians on the other side of the conflict to cross the line.

Perspective

The document attempts to identify the reasons for the conflict and the point of division. The reasons for the conflict have an international character, according to *The Road to Damascus*. This puts the South African conflict in a broader perspective.

At the beginning of this century the Afrikaner was caught up in a struggle against the colonists (the Boer War); after 1910 the Afrikaner joined the colonists and became part of the colonists' regime in South Africa. With the help of imperialist power, money, technology and religion, the South African minority government stays in power. State security, the co-option of certain groups and the religious support of many churches help the rulers to hold their position.

The Road to Damascus will form a good basis for discussion in groups and in churches. But for people who are not familiar with the theories of the influence of colonialism, new-colonialism and imperialism in Third World countries, additional reading material might be necessary to fully grasp all the arguments in this document.

Bobby Nel is a theologian attached to the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in Cape Town.

Both the oppressor and the oppressed use religion as part of their legitimation for their ideas.