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THE SACC AND THE GOVERNMENT.

1. The meeting between the SACC delegation and the Prime Minister and his associates on August 7th., 1980 raises a number of crucial issues. Whilst dialogue between leaders of Church and State is clearly desirable as a general rule, many doubted the wisdom of the SACC in meeting this intransigent Government which, behind the benign image of 'western christian civilisation' exerts a brutal and inhuman oppression upon millions of people. Does one sit down with evil?

Even if such a meeting was permissible, did the churchmen adopt a valid approach to it? Should not those who confront evil make the claims of Gods kingdom, and if they are not heard, warn of the judgment and shake the dust of that place from off their feet?

Yet it appears that the SACC met the Government on its own terms, instead of God's terms, and Bishop Tutu is reported to have been a little peeved that the Prime Minister did not invite them for lunch!

2. Prior to the meetings the Prime Minister had set out four pre-conditions. He asked the SACC to declare their stand on Communism; to reject violence; to make an unequivocal statement against the ANC; and to refrain from undermining military service. They did not like pre-conditions, but went anyway, without giving a satisfactory answer.
3. The personnel and the content of the SACC delegation was illprepared. Though they had six weeks to get ready, they never met until the week of the meeting, and staff members were given a few hours notice to prepare comprehensive memoranda when it was too late to do so. No comprehensive Statement was ever prepared or presented to the Prime Minister, in fact. This naive ill prepared group of clerics appear to have undertaken their polite grapple with evil like an apprentice preacher who hopes that a fervent prayer in the vestry will substitute for a lack of preparation at home.
4. Why did the Prime Minister agree to meet the SACC delegation?

To win Church support for his Total Strategy policy: this can have been his only objective. There has never been any intention at all of permitting any deviation from the path of apartheid and oppression. To win this support he needed:

- 4.1. To demonstrate his openness to the Churches, his approachability, his warm christian friendliness, his civilised superior western demanour, his rejection of racial prejudice, and to win the Churches recognition and acceptance of himself and his role in this role.
- 4.2. To put the Churches in a position of acquiescence with his views on communism, the ANC, violence, militarism, and the relationship of Church and State, thereby inhibiting them from attacking him on theological and moral grounds.
- 4.3. To convey to the Church leaders the awareness that on certain essential economic matters they could not afford to disagree with him, especially in the development of an obedient black middle class supportive of the present type of economic structure.
- 4.4. To prevent or inhibit Church advocacy of the underdog in the labour pressures which are developing during this decade, by winning the compliance of the Churches to his long term development and improvement programmes, thus securing the support of the Churches in the control of the workers and peasants.
- 4.5. To erode Church opposition to militarism by demonstrating that SADF operations are just and generous and have nothing to hide.

4.6. To silence Church critics of foreign investment in South Africa for as long as possible, and at least as far as the US Presidential election.

4.7. To facilitate division in Church circles, consolidating the bulk of the conservative religious establishments into a supportive position towards his enlightened policies, and isolating the remainder as a small group of emotional radicals, out of touch with the reality of building a sound and controlled economy in which a prosperous community (including Church institutions) can flourish.

4.8. Where these objectives could not be fully obtained, to establish an ongoing discussion at high level with himself, which would inhibit Church comment with others in the meantime.

If the Prime Minister's intentions are correctly estimated, the meetings appear to have been very successful from his point of view. He has them on his own ground, has them talking, and is well on the way to establish the Churches as an integral part of the Constellation of States.

5. Comment on the August meeting.

The Church delegation failed to achieve any indication of change, or to make any significant advantages for the cause of liberation at this meeting.

It said nothing new, failed to move the debate onto any realistic line, gave the Prime Minister all the credibility he could have desired. But they did establish contact.

Some will see in this yet another demonstration that the Churches are controlled by those who are essentially supportive of the System (providing it is a little less cruel and a little less racist), and use this as an argument for writing them off.

Others, whilst appreciating these sentiments, feel that the struggle for liberation has to be fought in the religious as in the other parts of society, and would see the proposed further talks between the SACC and the Government as a round in this battle, if given full attention.

Comment on the August meeting is therefore combined here with suggestions for another.

6. The Task of the Churches in discussions with the Government.

6.1. The ~~Church~~ ~~presume~~ that a polite compromise with evil is not permissible for the Church; that seeking concessions from the Government in a reformist bid to 'defuse the situation' is to concede the right to oppress and deny the right of overthrowing oppression; and that seeking discussions with the Government presupposes that the Church will openly state its case on the fundamental demands of the Christian Gospel amongst the people of South Africa. If the delegation is too afraid, divided, or ill-prepared to take a firm stand on the issues involved it should accept its defeat and decline further meetings to save itself further humiliation. If they are effectively prepared, then, they may carry the attack upon oppression into the very heart of the oppressors' camp, and enact a defeat upon him by expressing their theological convictions with political acumen, social and economic facts, and with the personal integrity which is so vital at face to face encounters.

6.2. It is recognised that the object of the meeting is not to plead with the Government to improve the situation, but to proclaim liberation to the Government, and indicate ways in which the Government can assist this to occur, and ways in which the judgment will fall upon its head if it does not. This proclamation will go to the whole country, immediately, through the Press.

6.3. Whilst it is good to talk rather than fight it is an old strategy to keep people talking at the front door whilst the house is pillaged through the back. The Prime Minister and his colleagues have frequently used talking as a decoy, and the SACC can only avoid this trap by taking the initiative, moving the discussion onto its own ground, and being prepared to walk out if they are not heeded.

6.4. The strategy suggested below involves the preparation of a comprehensive written Statement, arising out of the August meeting and proceeding to a positive examination of the current situation in South Africa.

Such a Statement could be presented to the Prime Minister, the Press and Church members, and would effectively establish the initiative and subsequent debate on grounds chosen by the Churches.

Serious strategic consideration should be given to the question whether the Statement should be presented at the meeting, or delivered beforehand; and the timing for its presentation to the Press and Church members.

6.5. Serious consideration should also be given to matters which would not form part of the Statement itself, viz.,

- A straight theological statement of the message of the Gospel to SA in 1980.
- the needs of the people.
- the intentions of the Prime Minister.
- the psychological reaction desired from Government, Government supporters, local church leaders and communities, and different political groups.
- the reaction of conservative and liberal church members.
- the fact that Security Police and DONS activity will ensure that the Prime Minister is fully aware of the Statement before he receives it officially.

6.6. IN the preparation of the Statement, the Council would be well advised to consult not only with members of its staff and Churches, but other experts also.

7. OUTLINE NOTES FOR A STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA 1980.

Such a Statement could consider the following matters:-

1. The reality of the South African experience.
2. The nature of the Nationalist Government Policy.
3. The Church's role on various matters.
4. The role of the Christian Community Development Society.
5. The Churches' Commitment in the struggle for liberation.

Introduction. To the effect that : At our meeting in Pretoria on August 7th., 1980, it was evident that we were frequently 'talking past each other.' The Prime Minister himself suggested that we should set aside a full day for further discussion, and in preparation for this we have drawn up this Statement for consideration by the Government and our fellow citizens.

7.1. The reality of the South African Experience.

1. Behind the mask of 'western christian civilisation' to which our country aspires, the reality is a callous cruel oppressive society which is neither christian nor civilised. Whilst it may be neither the intention nor the experience of most whites, this is the experience of millions of our fellow citizens.

1.2. The great majority of our people are hungry, badly housed or homeless, unemployed or underpaid, illclad, diseased, illiterate or illeducated, and hopeless as a result of our national System, which permits a small minority to live in affluence secured by force.

1.3. It is this economic exploitation and oppression of the poor that is the crucial reality of South Africa. Arguments over racism, religion, culture, history, ethnicity, sport, education, apartheid, terrorism, minorities, comparison with other countries, or many other arguments, are attempts to divert attention from the fact that the richest country in Africa enforces a System whereby most of its population must endure the crushing weight of oppression and poverty.

1.4. If we were all poor, as they are in some countries, we would have another problem. But the reality of our experience is that our country's vast wealth is exploited by the few at the expense of the many. The curse of God rests upon those who neglect the hungry and thirsty, the stranger, the naked, sick, and imprisoned. The record of history confirms that judgment. Wealthy South Africa is condemned by her myriad poor.

7.2. The failure of Government policy.

This section of the Statement would be prepared to meet the Government on its own ground -

- 2.1. demonstrating that the moral and economic demands of the people provide no basis for the Government's political stance.
- 2.2. which is why this stance can only be maintained forcefully, with much brutality and violence.
- 2.3. the Church find no reason to change their attitude set out in the Message to the People of South Africa in 1968.
- 2.4. factual evidence of the rejection of Government policies, and the growth of illwill towards them.
- 2.5. this illwill is not due to outside pressure, but to the oppressive policies of the Government.
- 2.6. that the rejection of a common citizenship for all in an undivided South Africa is a constant source of rejection.
- 2.7. that despite achievements in some fields, 30 years of Nationalist rule has provided disastrous evidence that the policy of separate development is a total failure.
- 2.8. that there is no evidence that recent so-called new initiatives intend to initiate anything new.
- 2.9. If the Government persists in leading South Africa on its present course, the suffering of the poor will continue to increase as unemployment grows, workers are sucked into a destructive consumer society, millions are dumped into homelands which will be increasingly restive; the affluent will drop further into corruption of spirit and outlook; fascist attitudes and actions will multiply not only amongst politicians, police and the military but amongst ordinary citizens; violence will spread as all avenues of free peaceful dissent are closed; skilled selective saboteurs will be joined by wide spread unskilled actions which will limit electricity, water and sewerage facilities, railways, road, air, and tele-communications, work stoppages and slow downs will paralyse industry as Government promises remain unfulfilled; thousands of boycotting demonstrating students will be joined by striking workers in urban areas and uprisings of starving peasants in the Homelands; despite much carnage, the desperation of millions will swamp the efforts of the SAP and SADF to control them; many whites, sick of the brutality, and conscious that Government policy can only lead to international isolation, the collapse of industry, and loss of work will join forces with the revolution as their standard of living collapses; erstwhile Government supporters will desert them in the realisation of what apartheid really means for the country, and, in the end, one presumes, the rest of the world will step in 'to bring peace to a country unable to save itself from anarchy', but actually to battle across our soil for our minerals and our coastline. The Church can find no theological, economic, social or political factors in Government

policy which will prevent this stark tragedy occurring in the near future.

7.3. COMMENTS ON VARIOUS MATTERS.

1. Church, State and Politics,

1. Many conflicts revolve around the relationship of Churchmen and Politicians in a modern State.

The State is a complex system of human relationships and organisations which is administered from the top, controlled from the top, and sends its tentacles down through every part of society. The State machinery is directed by politicians, who are in turn elected by certain citizens.

The Church is a collective name for a large number of churches and religious organisation which together comprise by far the largest organisation of people in the country. Most of them are connected with the South African Council of Churches, with the exception of the Afrikaans speaking churches.

Some see both State and Church as appointed by God to operate in different spheres, heeding one another maybe, but not meddling.

Some think the task of the Church is to influence the State by personal consultation at top level, by contact between church bodies and government bodies, and by church pronouncements and representations on relevant matters. Some say the Church should be out of politics altogether. Others feel that the Church should exert its influence in everything.

In all these views, there is a concept of human society being controlled by political leaders, and in some, church leaders also reach out to take a grip of the reins. It is an argument about spheres of influence: Which are the things of Caesar, and which are the things of God?

2. This quick answer of Christ to a trick question should not be taken out of context or it becomes misleading. Closer consideration leads to a different interpretation of the role of State and Church. Jesus clearly saw that the things of God and the things of Caesar were so close that they needed disentangling. He did not see the Church and Politics as poles apart. This disentangling begins when we realise that although pagans can go the way of Caesar, in a State which seeks to be Christian both Churchmen AND Politicians must choose the way of God.

When Jesus spoke of the things of God he did not mean religious institutions or religious activities. Long before his message was seen to have a political connotation, regards Rome, it was an outspoken and quite deliberate rejection of the religious leaders and their practices. He saw both political and religious leaders as barriers to Gods kingdom; both sacred and secular organisations were irrelevant to his purpose and he sought allegiance to neither. It was the concept of control from the top which was inimicable to his vision of human society, whether in a religious or political context.

This type of top-controlled structure was opposed to Gods kingdom. The things of God were the things of the Kingdom and this was practical politics for all men, sacred and secular. He taught that the Kingdom was present amongst men and like yeast in flour worked from the inside out and the bottom up. It could not be imposed from the top. His concern was to establish a new small community which would lead to a radical new way of life for all mankind.

The currency of Caesar could be paid to Caesar (the currency of the Temple he hurled away for the hypocritical profiteering that it was) but the currency God commanded was not a question of Jewish religious laws demanding payment in Caesars coin but the currency of a mans life laid down for a new community, a new way of living altogether that was stamped not with Caesars image but with Gods. That kingdom is what we mean by being Christian.

3. If Church and Political leaders fight for different parts of the State over which they might exert control then both are playing caesar, both are wrong, and both can go on playing their irrelevant game whilst the forces of the Kingdom build up around them. Jesus clearly considered that such leaders and institutions, both 'sacred' and 'secular' were barriers to the Kingdom because they sat at the top playing gods and oppressing men with a maze of controls.

Thus the task of churchmen and politicians in a State which seeks to be christian is to design a form of GOvernment in which the people may freely develop their own communities, and that wider community which Jesus inaugurated. A State or a Church which inhibits the growth of human community or denies full opportunity to any living being must be challenged and set upon the path of redesigning society so that men might be liberated. The alternative is destruction.

We, the leaders of the South African churches, recognise our vulnerability to popular misconceptions and the half truths of the past, and to the misuse of our power as we sit at the top of the Churches, and of yours as you sit at the top of the State.

4. The Prime Minister is right when he says that we both have a ministry from God. Our task is to lead men out of the Caesar worship which affects most modern societies, and establish the conditions in which our people are able to develop human communities with the utmost freedom; free to put into positions of leadership those who they feel most truly can present their requirements, and free to develop those strategies and priorities which will remove oppression and release the greatness in South African spirits and South African soil for the betterment of all.

Churchmen and Politicians should not be at loggerheads: we are all under the same condemnation; we have all accepted a caricature of Christ instead of the reality; we have all sought the goals of prestige and wealth in a secularity which prevents us from establishing the conditions in which a christian community can evolve a markedly different State,

5. We are different in South Africa. Our conditions are unique. We are representative of all the problems that afflict mankind. And in particular, though we have frequently lost the vision or twisted it, a higher proportion of our people are Christian than in most other nations.

Can we design a system of State in which Christian communities are the seedbeds of development? Can Politicians and Churchmen work together to a Christian dispensation?

Or will Nationalism, like British Colonialism, have to be overcome first?

2. Minorities

It is our belief that the common humanity of all people unites them far more than their group loyalties divide them, and the experience of the Church through 2000 years has been one of reconciliation of all other differences in a common allegiance. In recent years this awareness of unity and corporateness has also been spreading between the various divisions of the Church in all continents.

The experience of the Churches in South Africa is that whilst there are very real differences between white and black, or Zulu and Swazi, or Indian and Afrikaner, these present a problem which is overcome in their experience of a shared humanity reaching towards a common goal. Whilst we should always be sensitive to the feelings of others, the promotion and protection of minorities is usually a political ploy designed by those whose policies win no universal acceptance, on their own merits, and require other artificial methods to boost their support, and divide their opponents. This is certainly the case in South Africa where minority thinking has

stunted the development of many.

We have no fear of promoting a country, government, economy, or electorate in which there are no safeguards for minority groups at all. It is in the discovery and sharing of our multi-facted and multi-cultured experience that we shall discover the riches of our shared humanity. The dangers of trusting one another are far less than the dangers of distrusting one another.

Any group may decide to keep themselves to themselves, becoming a self-excluded and secluded sect in the midst of wider humanity, but they have no right to set themselves up as gods controlling others. Whatever their apparent power, malevolent minorities have always been toppled from their thrones whether they be Caesars, Napoleons, Nazis, the British Raj, the Americans in Vietnam, the Portugese in Africa, or the Afrikaner in Pretoria.

Most minorities only need protection if they are being inhuman.

3. Communism.

Whilst the Churches reject the atheistic aspect of Marxism, and practices of Communists which are oppressive, there are clearly elements in the economic and political theories of Marxist-Leninism which are of value. Marxism - or 'Communism' - should be considered with the same open criticism given to all philosophical or political studies. The comparative study of Christianity and Marxism is a vital consideration in all parts of the Western and Eastern world.

The Churches have full confidence in the ability of the South African people to reject anything which has no value for them; and, specifically, to withstand any attempt to replace one oppressor with another.

The Churches also deplore the propagandist tactic of making 'Communism' a mindless sobriquet for anything the Government does not like, and investing it with an evil aura that precludes rational response. Like the inventions of the Inquisition and the Middle Ages concepts of the Devil and Hell, such methods are selfdefeating.

Most South Africans are Christian, and most Christians are not Marxist. But prohibitions against 'Communism' by a Government which is seen as a capitalist oppressor is the best recruiting agent that 'Communism' could devise.

4. Violence.

The Churches attitude to violence is well known. They deplore the use of violence in all circumstances, and either to support or undermine a Government.

But no member bodies of the SACC are 'pacifist' churches. They recognise that action must sometimes be taken to overthrow or undermine evil.

IN a war or civil war situation, their principle task would be to expose the fundamental causes and objectives of the conflict, and whilst ministering to any individual in need, to identify with those who seek the goal of righteousness.

In the South African situation therefore, the Churches find it necessary to support anyone who has a conscientious objection to militarism in general, or to involvement in the SADF in particular; to minister to men on both sides of the conflict, and to their families whether in Wonderboom or Soweto; but finds itself unable to give support to those who fight to maintain the ideologies of the apartheid regime, or

to its propagation by violent means.

5. THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS.

Whilst it is illegal to promote the African National Congress or any other banned organisation, and therefore to pursue an open debate upon the subject, the Churches have never aligned themselves with the Government upon this matter.

Since its inception in 1912, the ANC has been led by Presidents who were Christians, and its policies have arisen from principles of liberation which it learnt in the Gospels. It was one of the four organisations which assisted in the Congress of the People which formulated the Freedom Charter in 1955, and this highly acclaimed document has remained its fundamental policy ever since.

Its programme consistently emphasised a non-violent approach to liberation, and when its non-violent efforts were banned in 1960 it decided it had no choice but to go underground to establish a military wing, and a headquarters abroad. To this day the Peoples Army remains a subordinate element in its liberatory thrust, and is directed against the pillars of apartheid oppression, and not against civilian targets.

The claim that the ANC is a tool of Russian Imperialism or a world wide Communist conspiracy is simply untrue propaganda. When the ANC was banned it only went East for support because most of the supporters of liberal democracies in the west refused assistance. It accepted Communists into its ranks on the same ground as anyone else but is not communist. (The Freedom Charter, as Mandela himself said, is not a particularly socialist document.)

Whilst it can have no formal membership inside South Africa, we are aware that it has great popular support, and having weathered the vicissitudes of 20 years in exile and underground is now by far the major liberation organisation, growing greatly from those who were formerly in the PAC or Black Consciousness Organisations, and formally accredited by foreign states in east and west.

Like the majority of our citizens the Churches simply do not see the African Nationalist Congress in the same light as the Government, but as brothers in the struggle for liberation towards whom we have a great responsibility, and for whom we have a high regard.

This does not mean that the Churches regard the ANC as above reproach. (They do not regard the Government as above reproach.) But we certainly recognise the ANC as principal participants in any Convention called to discuss the country's future, and without whom no peaceful future is possible.

6. DISINVESTMENT.

The policy of disinvestment is designed to remove the major barrier to the full economic development of our country, namely, the policies of the present Government.

It is considered that any temporary sacrifice involved in the policy of disinvestment is preferable to the bloody sacrifice of a long drawn civil war.

7.4. The Alternative Society.

When Christians seek to visualise a way of life in South Africa which is in harmony with scriptural principles, they do so in terms of both material and psychological factors. Christianity is not confined to personal goodness and life after death: its main concern is with human society on Earth, a kingdom, in which the attitudes of people towards one another and the sharing of the benefits of Earth are both concerned.

Basic to Christian understanding of society is the principle of sharing, service, or love in the human community. The pursuit of affluence and prestige; perpetuating the divisions of humanity into conflicting ethnic, cultural, religious, national, or economic groups; the equation of a high quality of life with a high standard of living; the promotion of subservience and fear; the strict enforcement of divisive and self-righteous religion; and the setting up of a 'christian' State by force: all these are explicitly rejected by the New Testament.

The expectation is of a new dispensation in which the priorities are liberation from oppression; the defeat of poverty, disease and ignorance; the structuring of an all embracing community in which comradeship, humility, sharing, generosity, and the enjoyment of full humanity by every person would be preeminent.

The search for such a society by a nation which is essentially Christian demands much from the leaders of Church and State. The psychological, intellectual and spiritual development of our peoples in learning from one another is essential. The social and economic requirements have been translated into Bills of Rights and similar documents throughout the world, and in our country are highlighted in the Freedom Charter:

People shall govern.
All groups will have equal rights.
All shall share in the country's wealth.
The land shall be shared among those who work it.
All shall be equal before the law.
All shall enjoy human rights.
There shall be work and security.
The doors of learning and culture shall be opened.
There shall be houses, security, comfort.
There shall be peace and friendship.

No Christian can deny the basic validity of these objectives, and it is the task of politician, churchman, academic, worker and all citizens to translate them into the reality of the South African experience, to plan and work together to redirect our present Society towards a new South Africa as swiftly and peacefully as possible. It may not be an easy road, but it is the only road, and we can tread it with our heads held high in hope and determination.

Most white rulers in Africa have set a course which has led through catastrophe to

eventual reconstruction. Although some different dynamics operate here, we believe that the South African Government is set on the same catastrophic course of oppression and revolution.

An Alternative Society is available, and undoubtedly will come into being in due time. On the one hand it can be reached through orderly change designed by a National Convention where our common future can be mapped out by the acknowledged leaders of all our people. On the other hand, it will be reached when the oppressed people, both black and white, revolt.

You hold the powers of Government today.

The choice is yours today.

We would assist you.

7.5. The Church's commitment in the struggle for liberation.

5.1. The Christian Church is totally committed to the liberation of the oppressed peoples of the world. It is called to be identified with the poor and suffering and dispossessed. In South Africa, the vast majority of church members are the oppressed, and the fact that many Church leaders do not experience the worst pangs of suffering personally does not permit them to avoid solidarity with those who do.

5.2. It is our earnest desire to be able to work with the Government to facilitate discussions with the acknowledged leaders of our people that the road to a new South Africa be peaceful and dignified. But our commitment is to that alternative liberated society, and if the Government chooses to make an enemy of those seeking release from economic, ideological, political, social and personal oppression, then the Government must also make an enemy of the Church.

5.3. At our meeting in Pretoria on August 7th 1980 the Prime Minister saw fit to warn the SACC delegation of a confrontation if they made statements which he found negative and provocative. This remark smacked of a paternalism and intimidation which the delegation found unfortunate.

If the Government forces a confrontation with the Churches we are well aware that under the pressures of indoctrination, intimidation, and ignorance, there will be a conflict of loyalties in many church members. The battle for liberation takes place within the religious parts of society also.

For 2000 years the Church has withstood pressures from without and within its ranks, and through arduous toils has survived, knowing what to do.

5.4. Our loyalty and obedience is first to the Gospel, and to the oppressed. All the resources which the Church can muster will be used to support those who seek that new society. Whatever it costs the Churches as institutions will be a small price to pay if it hastens the dawning of a new dispensation arising out of Christian principles. You may withdraw our passports, restrict our funds, ban our member organisations, detain our members and ministers, control many of our activities, seek to intimidate some of our members, or denigrate our attempts to find peace. You cannot destroy our commitment to Jesus Christ, Lord and Liberator.

5.5. Our final word is thus to reiterate our call for a National Convention at which the acknowledged leaders of all our people can seek the way of peace to a new Society. We realise this is difficult for you, and are willing to work through any problem with you if you will commit yourself to this course. But if you will not make such a commitment, we shall know that you have chosen the way of confrontation and there will be no point in us talking to you again.