



This theological rationale for prayer to end unjust rule was reached on a basis of consensus by an ecumenical group whose members come from different Christian communities throughout the country. At an Executive meeting of the SACC held on 18-19th February 1986, the theological rationale was adopted as a background document to the call for prayer on June 16. This document is published by the SACC.

# June 16 Memorial Service

*A theological rationale and a  
call to prayer for the end to  
unjust rule*

Soweto June 16 has become South Africa's  
most potent symbol of black resistance.  
On the tenth anniversary of the  
killings we recommit ourselves to the  
struggle for freedom.

**1976-1986**

*We have prayed for the government to change its  
policies. Now we pray for a change of government.  
In this prayer we commit ourselves to work towards  
the justice of God's Kingdom. Then God's people  
will be liberated to live in peace.*



**S**oweto, 16 June 1976, is South Africa's most potent symbol of black resistance. Approximately 700 people were killed and hundreds more wounded in unrest which soon extended beyond that day and place to encompass the entire country. These events have come to constitute a fundamental crisis in South African society which the authorities are apparently incapable of resolving. They represent a phase of resistance which began on 21 March 1960 when the police killed 69 people and wounded a further 180 people in the notorious Sharpeville shootings. In the short term black unrest was quelled and white dominance firmly re-affirmed. It is, however, clear that Sharpeville was a turning point in the history of African self-determination. Protest hardened into resistance, and blacks were forced to think more sharply and clearly of the need for fundamental change. The reality of the Sharpeville atrocity was recognized throughout the world, in the wake of which South African and world church leaders met at Cottesloe in December 1960 to reject the apartheid system as unChristian. The Soweto unrest again compelled the Christian Church to address itself to the crisis within the country — a crisis that continues to this day, as is evidenced in the killing of people for the past ten years. In response to this reality, those churches who enjoy fraternity through the SACC and other ecumenical forms of contact, have consistently condemned the structures of racial and economic oppression in this land as being contrary to the declared will of God, made known in the Scriptures and the traditions of the Church.

Now, on 16 June, ten years after the Soweto resistance, it is right to remember those whose blood has been shed in resistance and protest against an unjust system. It is also right that we as Christians reassess our response to a system that all right-thinking people identify as unjust. We have prayed for our rulers, as is demanded of us in the Scriptures. We have entered into consultation with them as is required by our faith. We have taken the reluctant and drastic step of declaring apartheid to be contrary to the declared will of God, and some churches have declared its theological justification to be a heresy. We now pray that God will replace the present structures of oppression with ones that are just, and remove from power those who persist in defying his laws, installing in their place leaders who will govern with justice and mercy.

#### **A firm theological tradition**

We do this conscious of a broad and compelling tradition of faith that unites us in a common loyalty to the sole lordship of Jesus Christ. The Scriptural record is clear. Civil authority is instituted of God, in order to rule with justice, goodness and love (Romans 13). This same record is equally clear that civil authority can be a source of blasphemy against God (Revelation

*Lord, in your mercy bless Africa,  
Lift up the horn of her power and strength.  
In your love and kindness hear our prayer,  
Father, look on us, and bless your family.*

*Come, Spirit, come — come and bless us  
Come, Spirit, come — come and bless us  
Father, look down, and bless Africa,  
Father, look on us, and bless your family.*

*Lord save our people (nation)  
End wars and suffering*

*Save it  
Our people.  
People of Africa.*

*May it be so always,  
for ever and ever.*

**Dismissal**

## **The Lord's Prayer**

*Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed by thy Name;  
thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done;  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.*

## **Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika**

*Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika  
Maluphakamiso phondo lwayo  
Yiva nemithandazo yethu  
Nkosi sikelela, thina lusaphatwayo. (x2)*

*Yisa moya sikelela nkosi sikelela  
Yisa moya sikelela nkosi sikelela  
Yisa moya oyingcwele  
Nkosi sikelela, thina lusaphatwayo.*

*Morena boluka sechaba saHesu  
Ofedise dintwa lematswenyeho. (x2)*

*Osiboluke osiboluke  
Osiboluke morena 'siboluke  
Sechaba saHesu  
Sechaba saAfrika.*

*Makube njalo, makube njalo,  
Kude kube ngonaphakade  
Kude kube ngonaphakade. (x2)*

13). In this awareness Christians have through the ages prayed that they may be godly and quietly governed.

With Tertullian, in the spirit of the early church, we recognize that if civil law is not the source of social justice it is tyranny, and that such authority has no right to exist.<sup>1</sup> In the same spirit Augustine defined the objective of "government" to be human peace, and "the republic" as the welfare of the people.<sup>2</sup> St. Thomas, taught that "human law has the true nature of law only in so far as it corresponds to right reason, and therefore is derived from the eternal law. In so far as it falls short of right reason, a law is said to be a wicked law; and so lacking the true nature of law, it is rather a kind of violence."<sup>3</sup>

In this tradition the Reformers addressed themselves to the nature of legitimate government. Luther counselled people themselves to be willing to accept injustices, but warned of the obligation to oppose injustice shown towards one's neighbour. He also warned the tyrant that people would not accept their presumption indefinitely, and allowed that it was not their duty to obey such authority which contradicted the rule of God. In calling the people to turn in prayer to God in their need, he believed that God would not tolerate such rule for long.<sup>4</sup> Calvin recognized the obligation of citizens to be subject even to the wicked ruler, while at the same time rejecting unjust laws as no laws at all. He stressed that obedience to civil authority should never be allowed to contradict obedience to God, who is the Lord of all and the King of Kings.<sup>5</sup> He understood the hunger for justice to be implanted in the human soul by God himself. "And this feeling, is it not implanted in us by the Lord?" he asked. "It is then the same as though God hears himself, when he hears the cries and groanings of those who cannot bear injustice."<sup>6</sup>

In more recent times Karl Barth spoke of the obligation of the Church to pray for the state, never as an object of worship, but on its behalf, that it might be legitimate, governing according to the rule of God. In so doing he recognized that such prayer cannot be offered without a corresponding commitment to work for good and legitimate government.<sup>7</sup> He left us with no doubt in this regard that the Church is obliged to be unconditionally and passionately for the lowly and against the exalted.<sup>8</sup> The Dutch Calvinist, Abraham Kuyper, has also spoken of the obligation of government: "In order that it may be able to rule people, the government must respect this deepest ethical power of our human existence. A nation consisting of citizens whose consciences are bruised, is itself broken in its national strength." For this reason, he continued, "we must ever watch against the danger which lurks, for our personal liberty, in the power of the state." Indeed, "the struggle for liberty is not only declared permissible, but is made a duty for each individual in his own sphere."<sup>9</sup>

It is this affirmation that stands central to the contemporary emphasis of the Roman Catholic Church, which proclaims a preferential option for the poor. It is this option which requires the theologian to analyze the process of authority from the perspective of the poor, the marginalized and the oppressed – an option reaffirmed by Pope John Paul II in his recent commentary on Latin American theology.<sup>10</sup> Pope John XXIII, has stated that “if civil authorities legislate for or allow anything that is contrary to that order and therefore contrary to the will of God, neither the laws nor the authorizations granted can be binding on the consciences of the citizens, since God has more right to be obeyed than men.”<sup>11</sup> Paul VI, in turn, recognising that governments can become tyrannical, declared: “There are certainly situations whose injustice cries to heaven ... whole populations destitute of necessities live in a state of dependence barring them from initiative and responsibility, and all opportunity to advance culturally and share in social and political life.” “We want to be clearly understood,” he concluded, “the situation must be faced with courage and the injustices linked with it must be fought against and overcome.”<sup>12</sup> It is this affirmation which forms the basis of Vatican II theology which states: “Where citizens are oppressed by a public authority which exceeds its competence, they should not on that account refuse what is objectively required of them for the common good, but it must be allowable for them, within the limits of the law of nature and the Gospel, to defend their rights and those of their fellow citizens against this abuse of authority.”<sup>13</sup>

### **The Church in South Africa**

The considered judgement of every synod, assembly and conference of the Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant Churches (with the exception of the Afrikaans Reformed Churches), has been that the present regime, together with its structures of domination, stands in contradiction to the Christian Gospel to which the churches of the land seek to remain faithful.<sup>14</sup> We have continually prayed for the authorities, that they may govern wisely and justly. Now, in solidarity with those who suffer most, in this hour of crisis we pray that God in His grace may remove from His people the tyrannical structures of oppression and the present rulers in our country who persistently refuse to heed the cry for justice, as reflected in the Word of God as proclaimed through His Church both within this land and beyond. In constant and solemn awareness of the responsibility we take on ourselves in this regard, we pray that God's rule may be established in this land. We pledge ourselves to work for that day, knowing that this rule is good news to the poor, because the captives will be released, the blind healed, the oppressed set at liberty, and the acceptable year of the Lord proclaimed (Luke 4: 18-19).

## The Response

### Prayer for the End to Unjust rule:

- L: As we pray our minds are filled with pain:  
Of the thousands who have died in the struggle for true freedom,  
Of the lives that have been disrupted by detention,  
Of the mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters whose tears mourn the dead,  
Of the many who have been forced into unwilling exile,  
Of our leaders who have been incarcerated for more than twenty years,  
Of the disrupted and inferior education of our children,  
Of the dehumanised victims of forced removals,  
Of the hunger and thirst of the poor.
- P: *Out of the depths we cry*  
*Remove the root of our pain — the oppression of apartheid*
- L: We are also angered:  
At the continued repression of our people,  
At the intransigence of those who presume to be our rulers,  
At the apathy of those who continue to live in comfort,  
At the consistent and continued abuse of power  
and the denial of justice and freedom.
- P: *Out of the depths we cry*  
*Remove from power the abusers of authority.*
- L: You alone are God,  
You alone are worthy of our obedience and loyalty.  
You have seen the suffering of your people.  
Close the gates of Apartheid.  
Support us in resisting the structures of injustice.  
Give us strength in liberating both the oppressors and the oppressed.  
Liberate the oppressors from their fear.  
Enable them to turn away from violence.  
Teach them to respect the human dignity of all people.  
Empower the oppressed in their quest for liberation.  
Open the doors of Justice and Freedom.  
Renew the life of your afflicted people.
- P: *Out of the depths we cry:*  
*End this unjust rule and replace it with a rule of Justice.*



**Suggested Scripture Readings:**

Is 3: 9 — 15; Micah 2: 1 — 5; Rev 15: 1 — 14

**Hymn**

**Suggested Scripture Readings:**

Luke 1: 46 — 55; Luke 4: 1 — 21; Matt. 25: 31 — 46;  
Matt. 10: 32 — 49 (Suggested Readings)

L & P: *May your Word become Flesh in the  
struggle of your people for justice and peace.*

**The Sermon**

**The Apostles' Creed**

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
Creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.  
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit  
and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

**Hymn**

### **A Call to Prayer**

We invite Christians, and all people of goodwill, to join consistently in prayer for a new and just order in this land. In so doing we share in a community of those who believe throughout this world, who will pray on June 16, in commemoration of those who died at Soweto and other places throughout our land, in commitment to a new South Africa for all its people. ☐

### **Notes**

1. Tertullian, *Apology, Ante Nicene Fathers*, Volume III (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p.21.
2. St Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XIX, chapter 21 (New York: Doubleday, 1958), p.470.
3. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II/II, question 93, article 3 (London: Paternoster, 1915), p.32.
4. Martin Luther, *On Secular Authority, Works of Martin Luther*, Volume III (Philadelphia: Holman and Castle, 1930) pp. 374 and 397.
5. John Calvin, *Institute of the Christian Religion*, Volume IV, ed. by J.T. Mc Neill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), Book IV, pp. 1503 and 1520.
6. John Calvin, *Commentary on Habakkuk, Minor Prophets*, Volume IV (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950) pp. 93-94.
7. Karl Barth, "Church and State", in *Community, State and Church*, ed. by Will Herberg (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1960), pp. 135 and 145.
8. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Volume III (Edinburgh: T and T Clarke, 1964), p.386.
9. Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), pp. 107, 108, 81, 98-99.
10. Pope John Paul II. "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation," *Pastoral Action*, Number 38, South African Catholic Bishops' Conference, Pretoria, nn. 5 and 10.
11. Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 1963.
12. Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progression*, 1967.
13. Vatican II Ecumenical Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965.
14. See documentation in *Apartheid is a Heresy*, edited by J. de Gruchy and C. Villa-Vicencio (Cape Town: David Philip, 1983), pp. 144-84.

# **June 16 Memorial Service**

## **Prayer Service for the end to unjust rule**

### **The Preparation**

#### **Opening Prayer**

Lord of history

You share our joys and our crushing sorrows

You hear the cries of the afflicted.

You fill the hungry

and you set free the oppressed.

On this solemn occasion we come to offer you our worship  
and prayer for the end to unjust rule.

Inspire us with the parental love of God,

Challenge us with the sacrificial love of Jesus,

Empower us with the transforming love of the Spirit,

That we may live and be free!

Amen

#### **Hymn**

#### **Act of Confession**

**L:** Lord, our hearts are heavy with the sufferings of the ages,  
From the crusades and holocausts of the past  
to the agonies of the people in our townships.

The blood of the victims is still warm,

The cries of anguish still fill the night.

To you we lift our outspread hands.

**P:** *We thirst for you in a thirsty land*

In your presence:

We confess our failure to live before you as your children.

We mourn our divisions,

We acknowledge our fearfulness,

We admit our arrogance and self-exaltation

We are ashamed of our pursuit of self-interest.

P: *We long for hope in the midst of despair*

L. & P: *Break us where we are proud  
Make us where we are weak  
Shame us wherein we exalt ourselves  
Affirm us when we need confidence and trust.  
That we may be humble, yet bold  
In proclaiming the Gospel of Truth.*

### Hymn

## The Ministry of the Word

### Scriptural Affirmation\*

L. & P: **Listen to our words, Oh Lord, and hear our sighs.**

Listen to our protest.

For you are not a God who is friendly with oppressors,  
neither do you support their devious ways,  
nor are you influenced by their propaganda.

For you despise their arrogance;

**You cannot stand the sight of these proud people;**  
and you hate their systematic repression.

One cannot believe all they say.

Their official pronouncements **are full of deadly deceit;**  
and they cannot be trusted.

They talk of peace while increasing their production of arm  
They openly rumour of negotiation and reform, whilst  
secretly planning ever more violent oppression.

**Condemn and punish them, O God;**  
**may their own plots cause their ruin.**

**Drive them out of our presence**  
**because of their many sins**  
**and their rebellion against you.**

**Because of your great love**

**We can come into your house . . .**

**Make your way plain for us to follow.**

**Protect those who love you and your justice.**

(\* Bold print indicates direct quotation from Psalm 5 —TEV—)