

## Mkhatshwa ends term as SACBC secretary-general, March 1988

### SACBC: Sengalisio Mkhatshwa's Address

Three recent events have shaken the South African Church to its foundations. The first was the heavy-handed clamp-down on 18 organisations on 25th February. We are told that the government had no option but to take such draconian measures to stem the tide of revolution. Neither the arrests and detentions of thousands of South Africans nor the national state of emergency had had the desired effect of crushing all opposition.

In spite of the relative calm and the existence of a plethora of internal security legislation, Pretoria saw fit to gag all effective peaceful opposition. The predictions of the Kaituma

Document have been vindicated. In its introductory chapter, the document said: 'South Africa has been plunged into a crisis that is shaking the foundations and there is every indication that the crisis has only just begun and that it will deepen and become even more threatening in the months to come'. Since it is in the nature of an oppressive system to become more violent, peace-loving South Africans must prepare themselves for worse days.

Secondly, the peaceful protest march by senior Church leaders on 29 February in Cape Town has highlighted the crisis. It is now history that while the security forces treated gun-toting AWB demonstrators in Pretoria with respect and dignity, churchmen, whose only weapons were Bibles, hymn books and a petition were subjected to arrest and attack with a powerful water cannon. However, the clerics marching on the Houses of Parliament were angry. A strongly worded petition which never made it to State President PW Botha read:

*We regard your restrictions not only as an attack on democratic activity in South Africa, but as a blow directed at the heart of the Church's mission in South Africa.*

*The activities which have been prohibited are central to the proclamation of the Gospel in our country and we must make it clear that, no matter what the consequences, we will explore every possible avenue for continuing the activities which you have prohibited other bodies from undertaking.*

*We will not be stopped from campaigning for the release of prisoners, from calling for clemency for those under sentence of death, from calling for the unbanning of political organisations, from calling for the release of political leaders to negotiate the transfer of power to all the people of our country, from commemorating significant events in the life of our nation, from commemorating those who have died in what you call 'riots' or from calling on the international community to apply pressure to force you to the negotiating table.*

*We urge you to take the following immediate action:*

- *Lift last week's restrictions and end the State of Emergency.*
- *Unban political organisations, release and remove restrictions on our political leaders, allow exiles to return and free all detainees.*
- *Enter negotiations for a dispensation in which all of us can live together in peace, freedom and justice.*

In responding to the current crisis, the Church feels we must primarily address the oppressed people in our land, for it is they who will decide in the final analysis when apartheid is going to be abolished. We urge the oppressed to intensify the struggle for justice and peace in accordance with the Gospel and we encourage them not to lose hope — 'The victory against evil in this world is guaranteed by Our Lord.

For our part, we commit ourselves to exploring every possible avenue for continuing to carry out the activities which have been banned in so far as we believe they are man-

— and especially SA's major trading partners — will wake up to the fact that this unrepresentative government is threatening their interests as well as the lives and security of black and white South Africans. The government has shown quite clearly that it has nothing to offer but instability and bloodshed. It must be isolated to force it off the awful path it has chosen. The final recent dangerous event is the proclamation of a Bill to virtually stop all funding from overseas.

Reactionary elements and government supporters will carry on their activities as before. It is in this context that everyone wants to know what the Church ought to be doing at this point ... But the crucial question on everybody's mind right now is:

*What contribution can the church make in this hour of darkness?*

These, then, are but a few of the fundamental questions which people are asking the church, especially during these troubled times.

I wish now to suggest examples of what the church can do in this crisis. We do acknowledge with appreciation the good work already done by the church vis-a-vis apartheid.

In a situation of bitter conflict and racial animosity, the church must strive for peace and reconciliation. We must hasten to add that this striving for peace and reconciliation implies a struggle to eradicate apartheid and its structures.

There cannot be genuine peace as long as the white minority rules the black majority without their mandate or consent. We can forget about reconciliation as long as the bantustanisation programme continues and the black people are denied a common citizenship in one fatherland. Without subscribing to any specific political philosophy, the church is expected to fight for a new society based on democracy, unity, justice and freedom. It is not the task of the church to prescribe how a democracy should be organised, except to stress that democracy means: The power of the people to govern themselves.

Since economics play such a vital role in our society, the church must of necessity take a stand in this matter. Here again Christians should not be dogmatic about how the economic system should be structured. Believers are obliged to participate in the struggle for liberation and for a just society. It is both silly as well as dishonest to profess love for one's neighbours without, at the same time, removing the chains which keep them in bondage.

In a situation of violence such as exists in SA, the church cannot stand idly by or simply promise prayers. Many innocent people are dying every day. Leaders of progressive organisations are disappearing. Hundreds of South Africans are in jail or in exile for their opposition to apartheid. The government has effectively muzzled free self-expression and truth in SA. The disinformation strategy and mind control have by now been organised with scientific precision.

The Church must ceaselessly campaign against arbitrary detention and the state of emergency. In mounting such a campaign the Church should very closely co-operate with democratic organisations. There is a persecution which the Church needs to examine as critically as possible; I shall describe it as 'evangelical repression'. It touches the very essence of the church's ministry and reason for existence.

Historically, the Church has distinguished itself in the field of education. In SA today there is a battle for the minds of young people. There is a fundamental conflict between bantu education and what is popularly known as people's education. Last, but by no means least, the church must be the living example of compassion and mercy. Dare they embark on practical action to empower the majority, and so risk censure by the whites — or do they stay at the level of public statements with minimum practical or effective action? It is this contradiction and dilemma which drives many politically conscious people out of the church ... *City Press 13.3.88*