

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN A REVOLUTIONARY SITUATION

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A tale of two cities

Some years ago a friend of mine and I - both of us South Africans - visited East Berlin. We had talks there with a small group of church leaders from both East and West Germany. Our friends tried to make us understand something of the difficulty of maintaining ecclesiastical co-operation in a divided city and in the face of the terrible reality of the Berlin wall. They thought that we, coming as we did, from a completely different situation, would not understand much of their problem.

As we left them, however, we said to one another: "We do understand - and only too well. Is not every city and town in South Africa, in the final analysis, a Berlin? A divided city?" Johannesburg : Soweto. Pretoria : Mamelodi. Cape Town : Crossroads. White city: Black city. The entire South African landscape is dotted with dozens of twin cities, twin villages - one White, one Black. Of course, it has been like that virtually from the beginning, as was the case also in the American South. But the advent of apartheid as official policy made all of this into a matter of principle, into something immutable and permanent. Blacks and Whites were hermetically isolated from each other, with buffer zones between the two residential areas. Each morning the Black city would spew its inhabitants into the White city, only to swallow them up again at night. From dawn to dusk they would toil in the White city, but there would often be very little real, human contact between the two races. Outside of the work situation they would pass each other like shadows, on the streets and in the shops. Even in day-time, then, the two separate cities were kept intact. The wall between Black and White would not be as tangible as the Berlin Wall, but it would hardly be less real.

The true curse of apartheid as an inflexible, ideologically-inspired policy, was that it left us with a legacy of mutual estrangement, that Blacks and Whites, after years of separation, no longer knew one another. The story of each South African city became the tale of two cities.

Which reminds me of the famous opening lines of Charles Dickens's book of that title:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way ...

Part of the legacy of forty years of apartheid is that today we find ourselves not merely in a revolutionary situation, but in an apocalyptic one. And this is the context in which the church of Christ is called to minister, to heal, to bring hope.

Before saying something about this calling and ministry of the church, let me turn - in somewhat more detail - to the metaphor of the two cities and attempt to communicate a small bit of that reality to you. It is not going to be easy to do this - not only because of the complexity and magnitude of it all, but also because of the confusion. In apocalyptic times it is no longer possible to paint complete and coherent pictures: the best one could hope to produce is a series of often unrelated and even conflicting flashes. And Charles Dickens may provide us with something of a framework for this:

The best of times, the worst of times ...
the age of wisdom, the age of foolishness ...
the spring of hope, the winter of despair ...
having everything before us, having nothing before us.

One cannot divide Dickens's metaphors neatly between Black and White. There is wisdom and foolishness in both communities, also hope and despair. Even more paradoxical: both might perhaps say: "We have everything before us, we have nothing before us ... We may all be going directly to heaven, or to hell."

Let me now first turn to the Black community.

There is hope in the Black community.

The end of the hated structures of apartheid appears to be in sight. A few more heaves and the entire apartheid edifice will come crashing down. Psychologically, Blacks are already liberated. This perception creates hope, boosts morale, and increases determination.

Of course there are casualties. Which war of liberation does not have them? But those who die now, will forever live on in the memories of those who survive: streets and parks, even towns will be named after them. And in any case: in Africa nobody ever really dies - those who have gone before us, are the living-dead with whom we live in harmony and fellowship, whom we will always remember and who will always remember us. So those who have fallen in the struggle to overthrow the existing order are the heroes who are carried to their graves on the shoulders of their chanting comrades. There is sadness, yes, but it is mixed with joy, for the struggle is almost over. A new day is dawning. The anguish was not in vain. We stand at the gates of a new South Africa, a new world. With impunity we openly declare our support for the ANC, we flaunt its colours, we chant its slogans and venerate its leaders.

There is hope in the Black community, particularly after 1986, the "year of the Black veto". Blacks now know, empirically, that they can paralyse the economy, that their labour strikes and consumer and school boycotts can be devastatingly effective. Their "veto power" derives from a variety of sources: the sheer fact of Black numbers (about 80% of the total population); the economy's dependence upon their brawn; the dramatic expansion of Black trade unions in general, and their leverage in the crucial mining industry; etc. Blacks now know that they can mobilise themselves in such ways that they can thwart, frustrate, or neutralise virtually any government initiative aimed at greater control or tighter enforcement of apartheid rules.

There is hope in the Black community, for at long last the entire outside world has recognised our plight: not only the Communist countries, not only our brothers and sisters in the Third World, but the West as well: the British Commonwealth, the European Economic Community, the U.S.A. Sure, sanctions will hurt us, even more than it will hurt the Whites. There will be more unemployment, starvation, even casualties. But all

this is part of the - admittedly terrible - price we have to pay for freedom. We know we'll lose every battle ... except the final one.

There is despair in the Black community

There is indeed not only hope, but also despair. The night has been so long - how much longer is it going to last? Eleven years have already passed since the "Children's War" of Soweto (1976), twenty-seven years since the Sharpeville massacre (1960), thirty-nine years since the Nationalists came to power (1948), seventy-five years since the ANC was founded (1912).

What do we have to show for all these years of opposition? Thousands of our comrades and relatives have gone into exile and many of them have died there without having again seen the shores of the Beloved Country. Thousands more languish in South African jails. Others are in hiding, and even if they are not, they never know when they'll wake up to the dreaded pounding on the door in the small hours of the morning. The state indeed appears to be omnipotent and omnipresent. Particularly the current state of emergency has proved its incredible power and its ability to nip in the bud every effort at opposition. True, G K Chesterton said: "A dying monarchy is always one that has too much power, not too little"; but is this one really a dying regime? And was Chesterton right? Does not history - also contemporary history - teach us that powerful oppressive governments may last an incredibly long time? What about the Roman Empire and the Soviet Union? Can we draw consolation from the belief that what we now experience are the pangs of death of the apartheid regime?

There is despair in the Black community, particularly at the level of the ordinary and unsophisticated man and woman who limp from White doorstep to White doorstep, pleading for employment. They often understand little about politics. They only know that they have to fend for their children and that these are starving in some drought-stricken and over-crowded "homeland" devoid of the foliage and herds of cattle of a bygone age.

There is despair in the Black community, because it is so terribly divided in the face of a formidable common enemy. There are, of course,

those Blacks who are prepared to work within the system and try to reform it from within. There are others, such as Inkatha and Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, who are waiting in the wings, as it were; they'll start to collaborate only when they're absolutely convinced that the present political order will make way for a real democracy.

Both these groups are, however, dismissed contemptuously by those who are irrevocably opposed to any form of co-operation with the White regime, now or in the future. They have set their sights on a totally new South Africa, structured along thorough-going Socialist lines. They and they alone are the ones who are really involved in the "struggle for freedom". And yet even this group is divided along ideological lines. There is, on the one hand, the United Democratic Front (UDF) and its affiliates which support the African Nationalist Congress and its non-racial stance. There is, on the other hand, the Azanian People's Organisation (Azapo) which follow the lead of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and reflects the values and convictions of the Black Consciousness movement. The one group looks to Lusaka, where the ANC has its headquarters, the other to Dar-es-Salaam, from where the PAC operates.

Even within the circles of the freedom movement there is agreement that as many as 30 per cent of all killings in the Black townships are attributable to rivalries among Blacks - not only between the liberation movement and Inkatha or the collaborators, but also between supporters of the ANC and the PAC respectively. All around the infamous "necklace" is often suggested as the foolproof method of silencing the opposition. Behind all of this lies a view not really different from late Medieval witchcraft beliefs: that the opposition is the devil incarnate and incorrigibly evil; and if that is perceived to be the case, only one "penalty" is fitting - the ultimate one: in Medieval Europe it was burning at the stake, in today's South Africa it is death by "necklace".

The Black leadership is deeply distressed because of all this. Johnson Mlambo, the PAC chairman in Dar-es-Salaam, recently said: "(The internal violence is) more than regrettable. It is misguided and we strongly condemn it - it (only) benefits the oppressive regime in occupied Azania" (Weekly Mail, Dec. 12, 1986, p.10). Azapo's publicity secretary, Muntu

Myeza, deplores the UDF's silence on the internecine violence and calls for a public condemnation of it from the UDF leadership. During early December 1986 alone, at least four people were killed in Soweto in the murderous tit-for-tat clashes between the Azanian Students Movement (Azasm) and the Soweto Youth Congress (which is affiliated to the UDF).

Both the UDF and Azapo blame the apartheid regime as being, in the final analysis, responsible for the in-fighting between them. To say this may appear strange, at first sight. But there is more than a grain of truth in the allegation. As long ago as 1936 a Xhosa poet, J J R Jolobe, wrote a famous poem called Ukwensiwa komkhonzi: The making of a slave. It tells about a proud young ox which was broken in and yoked to another equally fine ox and taught to obey every whim of its human masters. The whole process is described in great detail in the rich and colourful language of the Xhosa. And then the poet comes to the point where he says (in translation):

Sometimes I saw him using his horn to
rake his yoke-mate;
The other ox was of the same blood, of
the same stock
But the weight of the yoke made them
scorn each other

This, Jolobe suggests, is what is happening in the Black community where the anger against the oppressor frequently turns the oppressed against each other. In Woza, Albert, a play that has been staged in many countries, the same kind of subtle satire is used to portray the way in which oppressed Blacks oppose, cheat, fight and slander each other. Indeed, there is despair in the Black community.

Despair in the White community

There is today also - perhaps for the first time in their history - despair in the White community. The country's uncertain future has become a national obsession, at least among Whites. Afrikaners, in particular, feel acutely despondent. Will everything we have built up through three centuries, everything we have acquired through sweat and blood and tears, soon be smashed to smithereens? Is our country heading for total chaos? What about our future? More seriously: what about the future of our children?

So Whites are in the grip of terror - terror not of the next step of change but of the last step. Terror of "one person, one vote", which they believe would mean the end of life as they know it. And each interim step is a step towards that final point. This is why White South Africa is so intransigent: the root of it all is fear - fear that little changes lead inexorably to bigger changes which will end in Black domination and a turning of the tables. They can't see themselves relinquishing minority rule without being trampled by its reverse. There is declining confidence in the system's capacity to endure, morale is sinking lower, there is fear that the violence will get totally out of control.

Several thousand have already voted with their feet and emigrated. Others have well-rehearsed contingency plans to get out quickly if the balloon really goes up. Still others respond to the crisis by buying guns and bolting up their windows. It is in these last-mentioned circles that a Masada complex is beginning to develop, a resoluteness to fight to the last drop of blood. The title of a book published some years ago epitomises this attitude: Segregeer of sterf (Segregate or die). In these circles the Afrikaner's separateness and his survival as a distinct group have developed into an article of faith: if this is lost, there is nothing left worth living for.

There is despair in the White community, for they see that the more they introduce changes and reforms (including significant reforms such as the abolition of the pass-laws and of influx control) the more uncompromising do Blacks become and the more vitriolic are the attacks from outside.

There is despair in the White community because of the ever tightening and ever more comprehensive sanctions and boycotts. They fear not only the lowering of their own style of life but also the gradual destruction of the continent's only powerhouse and its only granary - a process, moreover, that when far advanced could only be reversed with great difficulty. They also fear what may be called the ratchet effect of sanctions: if the outside world perceives that sanctions are a failure, it will not abandon them but rather impose even tighter and more far-reaching ones. In the end, so the Whites fear, the West will go

further than just imposing stricter sanctions; sanctions are, in effect, in the long run not a peaceful alternative to violence but a precursor to it.

There is despair among Afrikaners in particular, because they recognise in the Black struggle their own Afrikaner history of struggle against oppression and exploitation. Their gut reaction is their knowledge that a people's yearning for liberation can never be satisfied until they are liberated; they know, from experience, how the casualties of today become the martyrs and heroes of tomorrow, the symbols which galvanise a people's determination to fight until the day of victory dawns. They know, also, that Blacks see themselves as emulating the Afrikaner struggle for freedom, that the one is, almost incongruously, the mirror image of the other. So Afrikaners are beginning to fear the logic of the same history on which, for generations, they were so proud.

Hope in the White community

There is hope in the White community too, not only in the Black.

There is hope because, even if the South African state's legitimacy and effectiveness may be impaired, it remains formidable. The State of Emergency has proved that the security forces are firmly in control of the situation. Every attempt at spreading the violence is being nipped in the bud. So far, violence has not really spilled over into White suburbs, which remain as safe and tranquil as ever.

There is hope in the White community because of what one might call the mystique of Afrikanerdom. So often in the past two centuries Afrikanerdom has come to within a hair's breadth of being wiped out, but each time it has survived and - what is more - after each crisis it has emerged stronger than before. The classical example is the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). Ostensibly England totally crushed the two Boer republics (Transvaal and Orange Free State). And yet, that very war moulded Afrikanerdom into a formidable force, steeled the Afrikaner's will and also unified the Afrikaners of the two erstwhile republics with their kinsfolk in the Cape Colony and Natal. The British, in fact, gave the Afrikaner his most distinctive feature: the ability to triumph through suffering. In a famous poem J D du Toit selects a semi-desert

shrub, the hardy and resilient besembos, and makes it into a symbol of the Afrikaner people. The besembos flourishes where most other, and stronger, plants would die. It is well-nigh indestructable. Even if you burn it down, it just sprouts forth anew and flourishes as before.

This is the kind of metaphor on which the Afrikaner myth feeds. "We have always, to this day, survived against all odds; why would we succumb now? It is unthinkable, indeed impossible!" It is particularly among ultra right-wing groups that faith in this myth is sustained and the myth itself inculcated again and again at every political and cultural rally.

But even among moderate and slightly left-of-centre Afrikaners there is hope. For the first time in recent history, they argue, South Africa is really in the process of ridding itself of discriminatory legislation. Even the government now acknowledges that Blacks have to be incorporated into the decision-making process at all levels; it also accepts - in theory at any rate - that Whites can no longer rule unilaterally. Surely this message will eventually get through, to both the Blacks and the outside world; they'll see - won't they? - that we Whites genuinely want to make room for everybody.

There is hope in the White community because, in spite of ever tightening sanctions, the economy is beginning to pick up, the gold price is rising, as is the value of the South African Rand. So sanctions are not going to be so damaging after all. They may even turn out to be a blessing in disguise. They may stimulate local initiative and inventiveness. And Whites then refer to the universal arms boycott of the 1960s which led to South Africa today being one of the world's major arms producers and exporters. Surely the same may happen in the case of other commodities as well?

Shifts in White opinion

The picture is, however, still incomplete. It may have sounded as if I'm suggesting that all Blacks and Whites are entrenched in opposing camps, as though the one's hope is by definition the other's despair, the one's light the other's darkness, the one's Spring the other's Winter. This is, however, not the case. Humanly speaking, more and more Whites should

be moving over to the extreme right-wing. And many indeed do. But many don't. As a matter of fact, an increasing number of Whites are rejecting a leadership that lacks a vision and contents itself with inept crisis management, that appears to be paralysed by the supposed erosion of its constituency to the ultra-right and whose reform dynamic has run out of steam.

Opinion polls reveal a significant shift of White opinion to the left of the political spectrum: In 1985 only 39% of White voters favoured the release of Nelson Mandela; in 1986 this shot up to 50%. And 45% of all Whites were unhappy with apartheid compared to only 33% in 1985; 42% now believed Blacks should be included in Parliament; 48% said the government should negotiate with the ANC. Across the board there is today an agonising soul-searching among Whites. Many of them are appalled to learn about the brutality and indiscipline of the security forces. Many are now at least aware that the violence can no longer simply be blamed on a minority of trouble-makers.

These Whites realise that Blacks are no longer interested in simply being included into a system designed by Whites; they want, at the very least, to help design it. And this applies to all areas: political, social, educational, etc. At a meeting I attended recently, a Black pastor said: "After the Soweto riots of 1976 Black kids were demanding to be admitted to White schools. Today their agenda is different: they want a re-designed educational system". And many Whites accept this. They know and they welcome the fact that the new South Africa will be fundamentally different from the old.

And the churches?

It is here that the churches may be playing a role. Too often, however, they have been part of the problem rather than the solution. And in many cases they still are. The pietism of the White churches, in particular, allows for an intellectual escape from socio-political demands which are deemed to be outside the purview of faith. Much traditional mission and evangelism offers a fervour which encourages emotional escape from any involvement with "the world". And wide-spread biblical fundamentalism teaches that governmental authority is from God and not to be opposed.

Several evangelical churches still subscribe to this ethic, as do many African Independent churches. Two years ago State President P W Botha was guest of honour and main speaker at the Easter celebrations of the Zion Christian Church, the largest of all Independent churches. More recently Bishop Isaac Mokoena, another Independent church leader, formed a political party which has as its aim co-operation with the government on the basis of its present policies.

Other Independent churches, however, are increasingly critical of government policy and practice. Similar stirrings are afoot even among some evangelicals. In late 1985 a group of evangelicals produced a truly prophetic statement on the current crisis and the church's involvement. Another evangelical group, this time predominantly Black, came out with a similar statement in 1986.

The major ecclesiastical opposition to the government is, however, still to be found in the circles affiliated to the South African Council of Churches - Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational, Lutheran (and Roman Catholic, although the RCC is not a member of the SACC).

The Dutch Reformed Church

The largest church in the country is, of course the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church). It has always been very actively involved in mission work and today its adherents total more than 3.5 million, half of whom are Black. The church is, however, divided into four racially separated "branches": for Whites, Black Africans, Cape "Coloureds" and Indians.

There has for a long time been a symbiotic relationship between the (White) DRC and the Afrikaner people. It would therefore be idle to try to establish whether the ideology of apartheid originated in the church or in the nation. The church has, by and large, adapted to the needs, fears and foibles of the Afrikaner people; it provides them with an interpretative framework for their collective experiences and aspirations; its preaching readily parallels the race and class interests and prejudices of its members. The difference between the DRC and North American denominations is striking. In the American scene

churches have to compete with one another for members. The religious institutions are, sociologically speaking, agencies which market their religious traditions as consumer commodities. New arrivals in a city tend to "shop around" for a while among neighbourhood churches before they settle for a specific one. In the Afrikaner context this marketing situation does not really obtain. DRC members moving from one locality to another in 99 per cent of cases join congregations of the same denomination. The DRC offers its members more than just a religious home: it offers them a total world-view and culture as well.

This entire "climate" is not in accordance with the origins and early history of the Dutch Reformed Church but only became official in the course of the present century, particularly since the 1930s. Gradually the apartheid ideology almost became an article of faith: it developed soteriological overtones, it became the hermeneutical key with the aid of which to interpret both Holy Scripture and the socio-political reality. Dissident voices were discredited, even muzzled and condemned as theologically unorthodox. Official document after official document reiterated and re-confirmed the conventional position. And along with that the isolation of the Afrikaans churches steadily gained ground. But the church leadership hardly appeared to be concerned about this. The mood was not one that welcomed dialogue and contact with people who differed from it. In 1979, just before 5 000 Christians from all churches and races met in the South African Christian Leadership Assembly (SACLA) in Pretoria, with a view to "examining together what it means to be faithful witnesses of Christ as Lord in South Africa today", the Northern Transvaal Moderamen (=Standing Committee) of the Dutch Reformed Church issued a directive to all local church councils dissuading them from participating in SACLA. The directive stated, *inter alia*, "We, as Church, need not discover what it means to be faithful and effective witnesses of Christ in South Africa. We daily study God's Word and know what it is". Such a statement reveals an incredible degree of complacency and of disparaging the wider Christian community.

Even so, in spite of all odds and in the face of concerted opposition, critical voices continued to be heard and gradually waxed into a veritable chorus. In 1982 no less than 123 White pastors, ordained by

the DRC, published an "Open Letter" in which the DRC policy of dividing churches along ethnic lines and the absence of a prophetic witness vis-a-vis the state were criticised in no uncertain terms. The "Open Letter" pointed out that the DRC, in its official policy statements, has for all practical purposes elevated the irreconcilability of different groups to an article of faith.

The most recent General Synod of the DRC (October 1986) produced the first signs of the voices of protest at long last being heeded. Many of us believe that the Synod did not go far enough; yet at least it did take some potentially far-reaching decisions. In future, membership of local churches will be open to all, irrespective of race and colour. Apartheid "as a political and social system which is injurious to people and improperly benefits one group at the expense of another" is declared to be "unacceptable on Christian-ethical grounds because it is in conflict with the principles of charity and justice, and it unavoidably injures the human dignity of all involved". The Synod also acknowledged that apartheid is responsible for human suffering (although it qualifies this statement by saying that other factors also contribute to suffering) and adds: "Inasmuch as the (DR) Church and its members have been a party to this suffering we confess it with humility and penitence".

Perhaps the 1986 Synod heralds - albeit hesitantly - the first move of the DRC back to the mainstream of South African Christianity and to a prophetic role vis-a-vis the powers that be. To date that prophetic role has been played almost exclusively by the SA Council of Churches and its affiliates, as well as the Roman Catholic Church.

The N.I.R. and the Kairos Document

Also outside the official structures of the churches there are signs of prophetic witness. Two such initiatives, both launched in September 1985, merit special attention: the National Initiative for Reconciliation (N.I.R) and the Kairos Document.

The first of these, the N.I.R., succeeded in bringing together and mustering the support of an incredibly broad spectrum of church leadership: from the White DRC and evangelical and charismatic groups at

the one end of the spectrum to proponents of Black liberation theology and a socialist South Africa at the other. The secret of the N.I.R. lies precisely in this broad spectrum: in fact, it stands or falls by its efforts to foster dialogue and co-operation between incredibly diverse and even opposing groups of Christians.

Since September 1985 the N.I.R. has mostly been operating at the regional level where small-scale reconciliation programmes have been promoted and mixed teamlets sent into a great variety of local churches. This is not a spectacular thing; it is, rather, a matter of working slowly and piecemeal, attempting to inform people, expose them to other groups and to further dialogue between them. In Pretoria, the N.I.R. constituency holds a monthly "Eucharist of Reconciliation", to which all are invited, in the Anglican cathedral.

The profile of the Kairos Document and its signatories is much more pronounced. The Document almost contemptuously rejects what it terms "State Theology" and "Church Theology", and opts unequivocally for "Prophetic Theology". The South African regime is described as irreformable, the enemy of the people, having lost all legitimacy, and ruling through terror. Because of this, the conflict and the struggle will have to intensify - there is no other way to remove the injustice and oppression. Since God "is always on the side of the oppressed", the church must avoid becoming a "third force", a force between the oppressor and the oppressed. These two are utterly irreconcilable. True Christians should therefore "quite simply participate in the struggle for liberation and for a just society". In the Bible and the Christian tradition the concept "violence" only applies to the actions of a wicked oppressor, not to the efforts of those who attempt to liberate themselves or to resist aggression. There are, therefore "circumstances when physical force may be used".

Many Christians who are implacably opposed to the Government were nevertheless deeply disturbed by some of the Kairos Document statements, particularly by its barely concealed support of revolutionary violence. I admit that I was one of those who felt uneasy. I did not sign the Document.

Since it was first published I have, however, begun to have second thoughts about the matter. I still have not signed it but I am today closer to it than I've been before. I agree with the way a colleague of mine put it. He said: "I took it far too seriously as a document and far too little seriously as a symbol". I also believe that we have to accept that we cannot have reconciliation without justice, and that reconciliation has often been abused by the church to keep people subdued. Also: we can listen to the challenge of Kairos without subscribing to the hermeneutic behind it. We need each other in order to sort out differences between us. And we have to do that without rejecting each other or standing aloof from each other. From this perspective it is to be welcomed that there are many people who - from the beginning - were involved in both the N.I.R. and the Kairos Document.

Having said that, I must admit that I do have problems with the Kairos Document. I'll mention only two of these, the one strategic, the other theological.

First then, I believe that the Kairos Document is too optimistic. There is a quiver of excitement running through it, almost as though full-scale liberation is just around the next corner, almost as though a few more trumpets would cause the walls of Jericho to collapse. The Kairos Document appears to contemplate no alternative to almost immediate victory for the oppressed. But what if the situation just continues to deteriorate? What if the heavy hand of oppression just gets heavier - as has been happening since Kairos was released? Does the church not hold out anything for people who do not experience physical and political liberation, who languish away in jails and camps or in other inhuman situations without any hope of being freed? I am not suggesting that the church should preach acquiescence, but surely there is an alternative to both resignation and prophesying liberation.

Secondly - and related to the first point - I experience difficulty with what one might call Kairos's laying a psychological basis for hatred and its tacit support for revolutionary violence, or at least its suggesting that responding with violence to violence is inevitable. If the church advocates or condones this course, how does it safeguard itself from

becoming contaminated with the same evil that characterises the oppressor? This is a theological question. Not unrelated to it is a very practical issue, recently formulated in the following manner by the Justice and Reconciliation Division of the S A Council of Churches:

Violence can be handled by police and army, but how does one stop the growth of the belief that one does not have to obey an immoral law? And how do you stop your enemy from loving you, doing good to you and being open towards you? These are the real forces that dissolve dictatorial power without having to replace it with another tyranny.
(Non-violence News, 4th Quarter 1986)

I recently saw a comparison of the liberation struggle in India with that in Algeria. In the first case, where Ghandi persistently pursued a strategy of non-violent non-co-operation, a total of 10 000 people out of a population of 400 million were killed, one out of every 40 000. In Algeria where the freedom fighters deliberately chose the way of violent revolution, 1.2 million people out of a total population of twelve million were killed – one out of every ten. I was horrified when I recently read that both the South African Security Police and the A.N.C. estimate that between three and four million people may die in the South African liberation struggle (cf. R J Neuhaus, Dispensations, 1986, p.286) – in other words, about 10 per cent of the total population, the same as Algeria. This is the kind of thing that becomes inevitable once one demonises one's opponent. This is what happens when the proverbial irresistible force hits the proverbial immovable object.

Is this, however, the only option? Is this the way the churches should point, or even advocate? Should they not rather be the institutional bearers of transcendent symbols of an alternative way? Sure, the church is often disobedient and irrelevant, yet it is at the same time the incorruptible Body of Christ, disreputable and shabby, and yet a mystery, an inseparable union of the dusty and the divine. This means, inter alia, that the church will always be tempted to follow the ways of the world but also that it is called to resist this temptation. Unless the church in South Africa does this, it will just, with the rest, sink deeper into the quagmire and find it even more difficult to be a symbol

of better values. It is called to find a way of resolutely showing solidarity with the poor and the oppressed while at the same time preaching and practising a transcendent love. Unless it follows this course, the spectre of violence and ruin and hatred will always be with us, both now and after liberation. I find myself being continually haunted by the words of Martin Luther King, Jr:

My friends, we have followed the so-called practical way for too long a time now, and it has led inexorably to deeper confusion and chaos. Time is cluttered with the wreckage of communities which surrendered to hatred and violence. For the salvation of our nation and the salvation of humankind, we must follow another way ... To our most bitter opponents we say: 'We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering ... Do to us what you will, and we shall continue to love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws, because non-co-operation with evil is just as much a moral obligation as is co-operation with good. Throw us in jail, and we shall still love you. Bomb our houses and threaten our children, and we shall still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our community at the midnight hour and beat us and leave us half dead, and we shall still love you. But be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall win freedom, but not only for ourselves. We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory'.
(Strength in love, 1964, pp.48-49).

You may respond to this by saying that it is cheap for me to quote King, since I belong to the privileged White class in South Africa, that it simply won't wash if a White person in South Africa propounds non-violence.

In a sense you would be right if you said that. The plea for consistent and unequivocal non-violence should come from somebody who represents the underdogs, not the upperdogs, as happened in the case of Ghandi and King. Only then will it come over as authentic. But also: only then will there be the possibility of the entire South African tragedy being lifted to another plane and the way being opened to true freedom.