

CATHOLICS IN POLITICS

(SACBC press release on behalf of the Southern African Council of Catholic Laity – 11/10/86)

Catholics should become involved in politics, Archbishop George Daniel of Pretoria told the South African Council of Catholic Laity. The Laity should also get involved in economics, education, culture, and on the labour front.

However, Archbishop Daniel pointed to racialism within the Church that first needed to be overcome. The Group Areas Act kept races apart. "But let's be honest. Before the Group Areas Act came into effect Catholics were living apart, and not only geographically. "If the Act were lifted tomorrow, would we mix freely?"

The Catholic Church reorganised its seminaries so that black and white students lived and studied together. It opened its so-called white schools. Its churches were open to whoever wished to enter. "But in fact, apart from perhaps cathedrals, very few parishes are multi-racial," Archbishop Daniel said.

Two co-existing Churches

"One wonders whether culture, language, nationality – even for many Catholics – are not more important than the unity brought about by baptism into the one Body of Christ".

There was a reason to believe that there were two co-existing Churches – a white, affluent Church and a black, unprivileged Church. How much effort was made towards upholding human rights, combating injustices, breaking down walls of divisions?

One delegate said that Catholics feel ambiguous; on the one hand they are told to go into the political world, on the other the Church kept a distance from political groups.

When the Church hierarchy spoke officially, Archbishop Daniel said, it had to be independent. However, lay Catholics could decide for themselves with which organisation(s) they wanted to get involved.

"The important thing is to be someone engaged in bringing about a renewal in society according to the principles of the Gospel.

Another delegate said if young people did get involved in politics the Church could not keep silent about it.

"Either it says they are doing wrong or it should give them some form of encouragement. Especially when young people are detained, the Church should say something about it; that they are doing the work of the Church and that the Church is prepared to come to their defence."