

## NEGOTIATIONS: THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

Father Albert Nolan, (OP) Institute for Contextual Theology, lays stress on the need for the Church to be impartial in its efforts to make justice prevail as regards different groups, each with an admixture of justice and injustice in its proposals. The concepts of compassion and mercy need to be added to that of justice so that negotiations can help everyone in South Africa make a new start.

The church has a special interest in negotiations because the church has a special responsibility for promoting peace. The gospel we preach is a gospel of peace and the Saviour we believe in is the Prince of Peace. However the peace that the church preaches is God's peace, the peace that God wants on earth for all people of goodwill: "Glory to God in the highest and peace to His people on earth". As St John tells us, the peace that Jesus brings is "a peace the world cannot give" (14:27). God's peace is a gift that can be found in the world amongst people and nations, but it must be carefully distinguished from the false peace of the world that is selfish, loveless and unjust.

### **True and false peace**

The church knows about the difference between true and false peace. This distinction has been revealed to us in the Scriptures and it has been confirmed again and again in the Church's experience down through the ages. Thomas Aquinas speaks about the difference between peace, in the true sense of the word, and concord, that is to say, an agreement that is not based upon love, morality and justice.

The prophets so not only reveal the difference between true peace and false peace. When they hear lying voices shouting: "Peace, peace", they stand up and speak the truth, "There is no peace". (Jer 6:14; 8:11; Ez 13:10). An illusion of peace which hides the reality of conflict, hatred and justice is one of the greatest enemies of true peace. That involves taking sides against the purveyors of false peace and insincere negotiations. Jesus was even more emphatic and decisive about this than any of the prophets. He, the Prince of Peace, had to dissociate himself completely from the kind of peace and false unity that the scribes and Pharisees were propounding at that time, and expose the deep divisions that still existed and that would at first be intensified by His preaching:

"Do you suppose that I have come to bring peace to the world? No, not peace but division. From now on a family of five will be divided, three against two and two against three". (Luke 12:51-52; Matthew 10:34).

Justice and truth can divide before they eventually bring unity, reconciliation and peace.

The social teaching of the Church has always been very clear on this point. Peace is one of the great themes of the social encyclicals. But in *Pacem in Terris*, the encyclical that was devoted entirely to the subject of peace, we are told that "peace will be an empty-sounding word unless it is...founded on truth, built according to justice, vivified and integrated by charity, and put into practise in freedom" (167). According to Vatican Council II: "Peace is not merely the absence of war. Nor can it

be reduced solely to a maintenance of a balance of power between enemies. Nor is it brought about by dictatorship. Instead, it is rightly and appropriately called, an enterprise of justice” (Is 32:7, *Gaudium et Spes* 78).

Pope Paul VI had no illusions about the false sense of peace that we can be lulled into. “The world”, he says, “is progressing towards its unity. Nevertheless we cannot delude ourselves, and while peaceful concord among men is spreading new forms of jealous nationalism are being affirmed, enclosed in manifestations of touchy rivalries based on race, language and traditions, and there remain sad situations of poverty and hunger” (Reconciliation – the Way to Peace 1975, 9).

### **Church vigilance**

The role of the Church in South Africa today is therefore abundantly clear. In this new era of talk about negotiations and peace, the Church will have to play the prophetic role of exposing any attempts that might be made to create a false or illusionary peace based upon insincere negotiations and unjust arrangements.

The Church will have to become extremely vigilant if it is going to detect the political posturing, propagandizing and hypocracies that will inevitably accompany the process of negotiation.

We shall have to become “as cunning as serpents” in order to avoid having the wool pulled over our eyes, especially by those who are now in power and who can use the media, the police, the prisons and their claim of legitimacy in order to disadvantage their opponents at the negotiating table.

We can expect the present government to assist that it is the legitimate authority and that there must be minority group rights. Both of these points would give the white group an unfair advantage and a veto over anything that the rest of the population has agreed to. Peace can never be founded upon such arrangements.

Many people will expect the Church to play a neutral role and even to be the mediator between opposing sides. Here in particular the leadership of the Church and every committed Christian will have to be vigilant and attentive. There are occasions when the Church might well play a mediating role **but** if one side is right and the other wrong, if the demands of one side are just while the others are being unfair, the Church cannot be placed in the middle as a mediator, it must take a stand for justice and truth. The role of the Church is to be the voice of God who demands justice for all the people. The will of God cannot be defined as neutrality in all situations of division and dissention.

### **Peace with justice**

This may well mean that the Church will find itself accused of taking sides and of jeopardising the process of negotiations and peace. The stand of the Church will have to be made abundantly clear. Every Christian should be totally dedicated to peace in South Africa. The Church encourages every effort that anyone makes to create a climate for negotiations, but it also warns all who are involved that there can be no true and lasting peace without justice and love. This is not unrealistic.

Perhaps the most important role of the Church in the present circumstances is to preach a message of hope – the hope that, with the grace of God, free and fair negotiations can take place and a just peace can be achieved.

Much of the burden of this prophetic role will fall upon the shoulders of the bishops and pastors of the Church. But all Christians at this stage should feel obliged to work relentlessly for peace with justice.

All the organisations, movements and departments of the Church should seek ways and means of bringing about reconciliation and hope, and to banish forever the injustices and fears of the past. Above all it will be incumbent upon Justice and Peace Commissions and groups to monitor the process, analyse the forces at play and encourage the Christian virtue of hope.