

STATEMENTS ON BISHOP D. LAMONT, O Carm

4 October 1976

The President of the South African Catholic Bishops' Conference, Archbishop J.P. Fitzgerald, OMI, has made the following statement in sympathy with Bishop Donald Lamont of Umtali:

The sentencing of Bishop Lamont to prison in Rhodesia for the offence for harbouring those designated by the law as "terrorists" reminds us of the painful privilege of the Church as peacemaker. It must often face misunderstanding or even persecution for this and such a situation might arise here.

There is no finally clear theology about the wrong or right of all revolution in either Catholic or protestant tradition. Christianity continually has to live with what was yesterday a revolution and today a government. In an intermediary period when it is not clear if the last resort of revolution is justified or not the Church may have to remain neutral since it cannot arbitrarily favour one group of the children of God against another or burden the conscience of Christians beyond what is clearly necessary. It may well find itself in a situation where it has to provide Christian Ministry to all those in need of pastoral care on both sides.

At this point it may have to suffer some persecution from both sides. Such things have happened in history and will no doubt happen again. But The promise of blessing to those who suffer persecution in the course of right is a part of that blessing which is promised the peacemaker in the Gospel (Matthew 5:9 and 10)

In this gospel spirit we rejoice but we are saddened by the lack of humanity shown in the sentence passed on Bishop Lamont.

24 February 1977

The Brother Bishops of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference reiterate their fraternal and prayerful message of admiration and solidarity to your unwavering stand against violence of every kind and your constant refusal to identify yourself with those responsible for it either immediately or remotely.

We stand by your heroic witness to confidentiality, compassion and reconciliation so basic to our pastoral ministry and which remain open to all without distinction or discrimination

You were very much in our thoughts throughout our Plenary Session recently, and this was sharpened by the tragedy of Musami. At the funeral of those missionary heroes the plenary Session wished to be present through its president.

Countless numbers take hope and courage from your witness. We give you hope, Dear Donald, the everlasting hope that only Christ our Saviour can give. He will be most surely with you in every circumstance as we all will be in him. It is in this hope that we commend you to the sure hands of our Lady of Mount Carmel.