

## **THE BISHOPS SPEAK: VOLUME V**

Volume 5 of **The Bishops Speak** presents the Pastoral Letters, Declarations and Statements made by the Bishops' Conference in Plenary Session, the Administrative Board, the President as well as individual Bishops, during the years 1988-1990.

This period saw the remarkable transition from the repressive policies of President P.W. Botha to the hope inspiring opening up of the political debate and process by his successor, F.W. de Klerk.

The Church too, found itself in transition, from the predominantly reactive to the pro-active mode; from condemnation, protest and reaction, to analysis, planning and action to promote change towards a more just and peaceful society.

The vehicle of transition used by F.W. de Klerk was the repealing of apartheid laws, the unbanning of popular organisations and the release of political prisoners, notably Nelson Mandela. For the Church the vehicle was the Pastoral Plan. Its principal aims and objectives are admirably summed up in the slogan:

### **COMMUNITY SERVING HUMANITY.**

The plan which had been in preparation for close on ten years was officially launched on Pentecost Sunday 1989. Since then the local churches have set about trying to achieve the twin objectives of community building and action for justice, using a variety of approaches and methods.

The practical attempt to implement the second aim of the Plan drew the Church leadership into discussion with various components of the liberation movement. It led them to intervene in situations of violence and conflict; to participate in programmes aimed at ending apartheid, in particular the Defiance Campaign, the Standing for the Truth Campaign, as well as the programme for the Repatriation of the Exiles.

For the family of Christians in Southern Africa the high point of this period was the watershed experience of the National Conference of Churches at Rustenburg. This historic meeting, which in a very real sense brought into sharp focus the two concerns of the Pastoral Plan, not only brought together Churches from every point of the spectrum, but also afforded them the unique opportunity of discovering community in Christ, of becoming aware of the vast areas of common ground they shared as well as their common concern for our country. These led them to express unanimously their condemnation of apartheid as sin, and their commitment to confess their guilt not only in words, but in actions which seek to put right the wrongs of the past.

As with the Rustenburg Conference, so with the entire period, the Holy Spirit was slowly but surely leading the Church to accept the Gospel in its entirety, including its imperative that all Christ's followers are to work to bring integral salvation, that is healing and upliftment to every human person and indeed to all creation.

This same imperative led the Conference to concern itself seriously with the pressing social problems of the times, lack of housing, under-development, poverty and AIDS.

In the two years under review the dreaded disease spread deep into our country. The implications of the threatening epidemic are such that analysis and information need to be matched by actions, and quickly.

The **AIDS Consultation** in March 1990 set in motion programmes aimed at doing this, in particular programmes to raise awareness of AIDS, to inspire understanding and compassion and especially to prepare for the care of people with AIDS in the home.

We continue to hope and pray that inspired and guided by the vision of the Pastoral Plan and committed to implementing it, we will have not only the courage and strength but also the vision and the means to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

+ WILFRED NAPIER, OFM.

Bishop of Kokstad.

President of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference.

**Brother Jude Pieterse, Secretary General of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference comments:**

The three years covered by Volume 5 of **The Bishops Speak** were dramatic; both for the region served by the Conference and for the Secretariat of the Conference.

When the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference expressed its concern about the destruction of COSATU House and Khotso House during the course of 1988, little did the bishops realise that Khanya House would suffer the same fate. It was extensively damaged on October 12. To date no culprits have been found for any of the three episodes. The disclosures about the Civil Cooperation Bureau cannot but make one wonder if these buildings were not sacrificed to the ideology of state security.

It took nearly thirty months before the Secretariat was able to occupy a revamped Khanya House. During that time the Secretariat functioned out of the Pretoria Cathedral Hall, and we deeply indebted to Monsignor J Magennis and the Cathedral parishioners for their gracious hospitality. There can be no doubt however that the work of the Secretariat was badly disrupted during this whole period, though the staff did its best to continue to be of service under what were very difficult conditions.

The statements of the bishops in this volume reflect the sad history of repression and injustice that were the daily reality of the majority of South Africa's people. The statements also record joyful events, such as the start of the normalisation process within South African society with the release of key political prisoners, the unbanning of organisations and the initial talks between the Government and the African National Congress. A particularly joyful event for the Church during this period, was the long awaited independence of Namibia. After decades of oppression and struggle, the people of Namibia could look forward to a life without war. In many ways the

celebrations vindicated the role the churches has played over the years in defending the rights of the Namibian people.

Two issues that assumed ever more alarming proportions during the time covered by this volume were undoubtedly those of **violence** and the **education crisis**.

Violence associated with the situation in Natal for several years suddenly spilled over into the Transvaal during the course of 1990, leaving hundreds dead and thousands injured. Any attempt to understand what was (and is) going on, has to be seen against the backdrop of apartheid with its legacy of deprivation: Three-and-a-half million people forcibly removed from their land, millions denied education and training and hence employment, and some seven million people living in squatter shacks.

Differing political opinions and power struggles certainly contribute to the violence and deaths but, intermeshed with the political struggle, is the struggle over scarce essential resources. Not surprising were accusations that elements within the security forces allowed, if not instigated, violence and loss of life. For decades their training had as its objective the destruction of all opposition to apartheid. However simple or complex the causes, the instability is sadly likely to continue until the economic and social problems caused by apartheid are addressed with the same vigour as the political negotiations.

If violence has reached crisis proportions, then education has moved beyond crisis into catastrophe.

The apartheid education system has led to the present situation where within four years of starting primary schooling, close on 50 percent of those who start, drop out of school. Of those who finally get to Standard 10, more than half fail. Less than four percent of teachers in the black community have a university degree. Educational expenditure remains grossly unfair. The fact that the political struggle is now in the hands of the leadership and students are being encouraged to go back to school has actually exacerbated the problems of overcrowding in classrooms, of lack of textbooks and stationary, of under qualified teachers and totally inferior education. The Church continues to play a role, however small, in the provision of education but has also had to continue to fight for the right of schools to exist. This has been reflected in the ongoing struggle to obtain adequate financial assistance from the state and in the continuing threats to the existence of 'open' schools.

Here recorded are the concerns expressed by the bishops and the commitment of the Conference to justice and liberation between 1988-1990.