

THE CHURCH

AND

RECONCILIATION

Three documents issued to enlighten the faithful on the need for Reconciliation in a time of tension and strive.

His Eminence Owen Cardinal McCann made the following statement after the Plenary Session SACBC, 14 February 1974:

"This year we are pledging ourselves to Reconciliation, both between God and man, and between all men. Part of this Reconciliation is to be willing to hear what others need of us, and to be able frankly to express our feelings to them. Reconciliation is impossible between men if they do not know and understand each other. In this spirit we urge everyone to study these three documents. The Conference recommends them as statements by competent and zealous people which deserve consideration from us all, and gratitude to those who drew them up. They may help us to go to our brother and find out what is troubling him before we go up to the altar for our own reconciliation through Christ with the Father."

I

BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

BISHOP P.J. BUTHELEZI, OMI

Since our Lord Jesus Christ told us that whatever we do to others he will see as done to Himself, Christians must always be asking themselves how they behave to each other in all spheres. There is the more need for this in South Africa where there is so much injustice and the rights and humanity of so many people are denied, and so little unity and peace exists among us.

A new question has arisen recently with the appearance of the Black Consciousness movement. Despairing of being accepted as equal citizens many Blacks are now withdrawing from attempts to meet Whites in discussion of their problems and sufferings. They are deciding to "go it alone", to declare their rights and take their future in their own hands. Some people are saying that this is the Colour-Bar in reverse, another form of racism and division of people not by what they truly are but by their colour. They say Christians should have no part in anything that divides the children of God.

Every social movement has those in it who exaggerate, speak wildly or even use it to stir up division and hatred. We would be wrong to look only at those who abuse movements of the spirit and not at true values, which are present in them. Even Christianity has been distorted and wrongly used at times, but this does not make us cease to be Christians.

There is an interesting parallel here with another social movement, which the Churches rightly support: the Trade Union movement. We do not say the workers are wrong in organising themselves separately from the managers in industry. In fact we encourage them to do this to demand their rights. In the last century when there were many anti-Christians in trade unions, the Church even encouraged the formation of Christian trade unions. The fact that people decide to organise themselves separately from a time does not mean that they hate others. It may only mean that they feel that they have a common need, or deprivation of their rights, or denial of their human dignity, which others have not, and that they must get together to discover themselves and demand recognition.

In the Christian community there should be a great freedom about political and social action. We agree on faith, but we can disagree about means of promoting social justice. The Christian community should not take sides here. If one man thinks he can do more for his people by working with whites, and another thinks he can do more in separate black organisations, each should be allowed his freedom. We should have the wisdom of the ancient Gamaliel who said: "If this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God you will not be able to overthrow it". I am not writing to recommend or condemn one or other way of working, but to answer the scruples some people have about the Black

Consciousness movement being Christian. Different movements may work equally for the same good end.

Black Consciousness seems to be such a movement. Blacks have begged, petitioned and demanded to be accepted as full persons and citizens. This has been refused and is being refused. Humiliating laws impose a separate, secondary and inferior position on them. The same is happening in other countries, if not by law by social conventions. It has raised a giant question for the black man and started this movement, which is now linked up in various countries.

The question is: Is there something wrong with being black? What is the divine plan, the purpose of God in making some people black and their being conquered and used by others? Is being black a curse or a gift? The Black Consciousness movement has decided that black humanity is a Gift like any other humanity that the black man's history has given him experience that others have not, and that he now has something to give.

He has decided to work with fellow blacks upon himself to discover himself and his gift. It is something he owes to the world. No form of humanity is complete, neither the white nor the black nor yellow nor mixed. No form of culture is complete or perfect, neither the European nor the eastern nor the African. All need each other's gifts. All must be given a chance to give these gifts. There are things in our culture, which are different, a different way of seeing the earth and life, forms of art or music or ways of living together, which can be a gift to others also. There are things even recently better and nearer to Christianity than in the western culture, such as a sense of powers beyond man in forces of nature, a way of sharing goods so that one did not starve while another had food, a way of making people living members of a community, which western culture in its hurry to do things and make things has missed. We see people in our own way. The whites have offered us their gifts. We must now offer ours to them.

This movement may do something for the whole world, showing that those people who are most rejected are human persons, and with gifts to give to others. It may be a defence of the poor and oppressed in any part of the world. This can be a truly Christian purpose. In the eyes of God, as Jesus taught us, what is important about human beings is not that they are clever, or rich, or powerful, or gone far ahead in progress, but that they are persons made in His image, capable of loving God and others, responsible to God for their own souls and their own life.

Through demanding recognition and citizen rights the Black Consciousness movement can serve God. It is the teaching of the Church that human rights are built into man by God. In fact unless you believe these rights to be given by an authority beyond man's, and to make every human person somehow sacred, protected by a law of God, you have no sure foundation for them. These rights are given by God not only to assure a better and happier life now, but because without them it is difficult for a man to be a true man, to serve God and others, and to live up to his human dignity.

If a person is not accepted as a citizen it damages his soul, his ability to love both God and man.

If he is not paid enough for his work he will be tempted to steal, to get into debt, to borrow money and not return it. Again it not only makes him unhappy, it damages his character.

If others have the vote and he has no vote he will feel himself humiliated, and he will not respect the law. It is somebody else's law and government imposed on him, not his.

If he is not allowed to live with his wife and children he will be lonely; more, he will be tempted to infidelity, and unable to train his children.

If he is chased and arrested for passes and permits in the land where he lives his whole life, and to which he gives his life work, being treated as a dangerous foreigner he will begin to feel like a stranger and enemy.

If he is not allowed to do the work he is capable of, nor get the better work when he is better at it, he will not work well, but will be bitter against those who get it by favouritism, and not by their skill.

If he is forced to educate his children in what he thinks a second class system, and so see their future cut off also, he will be more angry than ever. God has made him the protector of his children and their rights, and he may accept discrimination against himself, but not against them and their chances in life.

If he is not allowed the natural human right to form associations with others for his betterment, but repressed and banned, he will begin to work underground and in the dark against the system and the law.

It is for this reason that we hold that the first purpose of government is not to make a country rich or powerful, but to guarantee every person his rights by which he is enabled to live in a free manner with others, and love and serve his God and them.

There are those who say that to speak like this is not like the Gospel, where Jesus taught humility and patience, not resistance to evil, but turning the other cheek. It is our own cheek we should turn, not that of our children or our fellow men dependent on our assistance. For them we should struggle for justice, fulfilling another word of Our Lord, that if you help the poor, the prisoner, the sick or the homeless, you are serving him. Jesus died for opposing an exclusive law in which his people did not want others to have the same advantages as them, and whose leaders, while professing to be religious, “ground the faces of the poor”. To this he opposed a freedom of faith making all equally children of God, and a universal brotherhood of men.

If Black Consciousness were to be excluded and deny the humanity of the white man, or if it taught hatred, then it would be wrong. But if it defends all humanity in defending the most misused of humanity, intends to allow everyone his rights, and only works in separation to re-establish those who have been most disinherited, then it may be doing a service to God and all men.

II

A CALL TO WORKERS AND EMPLOYERS

BY: YOUNG CHRISTIAN WORKERS

INTRODUCTION

God, having created man as His masterpiece, blessed him and said to him: “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it”. (Gen. 1:28). God entrusted the whole world to man so that by his work he will be able to live, and through his work he will transform and embellish creation and find fulfilment. (Mater et Magistra 82).

Work plays an important part in the life of men and women. Through the Gospels teachings of the Church, God has something to say about the rights and responsibility of the worker and the employer. This is why it is the duty of the whole Church to look at the world of work with a critical eye, to see if it fulfils the original plan of God for man.

GOD’S WILL IN THE WORLD OF WORK

Each person is a son of God, created in His image. Therefore each person has a dignity and value as a human being. But man has a further dignity. He has been saved at great cost by the sacrifice of Christ, who in His time, worked with His own hands as a Carpenter. Therefore, respect for the dignity and value of the worker and his family is more important than factors of production, costs and profits. Work is always at the service of Man, and not Man the slave of work, because each is immeasurably more important than the work in which he is engaged.

In a responsible society, this basic truth is a guarantee that work will not destroy man. Man has a duty to work. It is part of his nature. Work supplies essential personal, family and social needs.

Accordingly man has a right to work, and society has a duty to provide or create opportunities for adequate employment (Church in the Modern World, Vat. II 67). When we compare this wonderful plan of God for Man and the conditions afforded to workers in our country, we are alarmed to find a discrepancy on the following eight points:

1. A Living Wage

One of the most urgent problems facing the country is the provision of a living wage for the mass of the population. No minimum wage is prescribed for farm labourers, domestic workers, black mine workers, and numbers of other workers by law, although for the mine workers minimum groups for whom minima are set, either by Wage Determinations or Industrial Agreements, find themselves earning wages below poverty datum lines, let alone human wages.

“Labourers mowed your fields, and you cheated them – listen to the wages that you kept back, calling out; realise that the cries of the reapers have reached the Lord of Hosts” (Jerusalem Bible, Ep. James 5 v 4). Justice demands that every worker be paid a wage, which allows him to live a truly human life and fulfil his family obligations (Mater et Magistra 69). This must be the first consideration in wage agreements. Whatever the state of the economy or particular enterprise, no employer has the right to engage labour unless the basic demand of justice can be met. Other factors will then enter in: consideration of the accepted absolute minimum for bare subsistence only; the particular needs of the worker and his dependants; a just share for all in profits; the value of work itself; the common good of all (ibid. Call to Conscience, paragraph 22). Justice demands equal pay for equal work. Wage differentials based on race or sex are totally unjust. It is because of such discrimination that the wealth, the luxury, the privilege of the few stands in violent, offensive contrast to the poverty of the majority. (Mater et Magistra 69).

There are many places in South Africa where the parable of Lazarus and the rich man is not being reproduced with frightening realism and on a collective dimension. “If any man is rich but shuts his eyes to one who stands in need, the love of God is missing from his heart.” (1 John 3:17). If the rich and well-off are not prepared to share equitably, to accept less that the poor may have more, then God’s judgement and the anger of the poor will both rise up against the rich man’s sin of avarice. A selfish civilisation is doomed to self-destruction. (Populorum Progressio 49).

2. Working Conditions

When we see the reality of the working lives of many workers in our country, we are both moved and concerned.

Workers on production lines are often without adequate, if any, safety precautions and the fear of serious injury is a daily reality.

Miners are forced to live away from their families in conditions which “vary from very old pre-First World War buildings...like sardines in double decker concrete bunks, to modern hostels...that compare not unfavourably with those of white boarding schools.” (Migrant Labour in South Africa. Sprocas and Institute of Race Relations).

In some factories the first aid box is non-existent or woefully inadequate to cope with accidents.

On the assembly line they are not required to think, but become mere extensions of the machines they are operating, rather than the greatest of God’s creations, Man.

Workers are denied elementary benefits, sometimes in contravention of the law, such as sick pay and unemployment insurance, so that when they are unable to work, they are unable to eat. Even those who have a right to claim sick pay or unemployment insurance are often ignorant of their rights. As usual, it is the poorer and less educated worker, the one with the greatest need, who is the most informed.

Nor is the situation of injustice and inhumanity confined to industry. Much publicity has been given to the conditions of thousands of Domestic, Farm Workers, Nurses, Shop-workers and Clerks where there is also need for attention, particularly in connection with hours of work and wages. Very often the facilities for one racial group are good, while for others, if provided at all, are inadequate.

3. Job Reservation

In South Africa, Workers are excluded by law from certain trades and professions, solely on grounds of colour, irrespective of qualifications or ability. For example: outside the Homelands, (i.e. in the industrial and commercial centres of the country) Africans are excluded from becoming tradesmen, yet in practise they often do much of the work of qualified artisans whilst being paid and classified as Labourers and Helpers.

Where members of all racial groups are able to find employment as professional workers (e.g. doctors, teachers, nurses) there is very often a large discrepancy in the salaries to each racial group for the same work. Many aspire to jobs or professions commensurate with their interests and abilities. Because they are not able to get jobs they seek, they become frustrated and have to serve the society less effectively in jobs they are not suited for nor interested in. Consequently society suffers. The New Testament is clear on this issue: "Do not combine faith in Jesus Christ, our glorified Lord, with the making of distinctions between classes of people." (James 2,1)

Whilst legislation has defined a tremendous number of fields where job reservation is applied, probably the biggest most effective form of reservation is by custom. Many jobs are done only by Whites, which are open to Blacks (e.g. office work, shop work, etc.) This lingering traditionalism should be destroyed as soon as possible. We reaffirm that all workers have the right to equal opportunities of entry into skilled work. This is demanded by justice and it is this, and not just economic need, that should motivate changes in the present system of job reservation and restriction. Similarly, skills and competence and not race or colour should be the criterion for promotion and managerial position. (Call to Conscience, pp. 21).

We call on all employers to use every means at this disposal to work for the advancement of all workers.

We call on all Trade Unions and Workers' Organisations to make continued representations for the needed change in legislation.

We call on pastors, teachers and educators to familiarise their pupils as to the stand of the Church on this issue.

4. Migratory Labour

In our country more than 1,5 million workers are migrant workers, living in dehumanising conditions, which break up family life. What is important for us Christians to realise is that at the base of the system is the concept that man is at the service of industry. Labour, just like the raw material, which is to be transformed, must be bought as cheaply as possible. This concept is not only unchristian but is unworthy of a civilised society. The fact that workers have to accept this, because nothing better is offered to them, does not justify the system in any way. We would like to reaffirm our denouncement of this.

5. Professional Training

The majority of workers in South Africa are denied opportunities and adequate facilities for professional and technical training, which would enable them to qualify for skilled occupations. It is argued that such facilities are or will be provided in the Homelands. But the vast bulk of workers will necessarily be occupied within the republic itself for the foreseeable future. The full development of these workers and the value of the contribution they are able to make within the total economy of South Africa depends on the training they receive now.

6. Trade Unions

The principal means of securing a living wage in the normal industrial society is the Trade Union. The Industrial Conciliation Act, which sets out rights of Trade Unions and provides the official machinery for negotiation, does not recognise the African worker as an employee. The majority of workers, the Africans, are thus excluded from the negotiating machinery. Africans may not belong to registered Trade Unions, neither may African Trade Unions become registered under the Act.

While African Trade Unions can and do exist legally, they suffer from serious disabilities which hamper their growth and effective operation. They are very restricted in the right to withdrawal of labour or strike action – the chief means of real power to back up demands in negotiations. Not only, therefore, are African Workers deprived of the means to apply pressure to secure a living wage, but also of the means to really develop free and democratic Trade Union. This is a situation fraught with danger for the whole country and all its peoples.

If workers are deprived of the means of learning the responsible use of legitimate industrial action no one should be surprised if chaos results when finally the situation forces the issue.

The Church has, in many parts of the world, been the champion of the worker and his right to associate in order to achieve human wages and conditions. The whole Church in South Africa has a tremendous responsibility in this regard. We can and must be champion of the legitimate rights and aspirations of the mass of the workers in South Africa.

Not only does the Church have the duty to appeal strongly to the authorities and employers in these matters, but she has the duty to produce men and women who will play their part to the full in the building of the Trade Union movement.

Recent events in South Africa have shown more clearly the necessity of proper representative structures in industry for all workers without exception. We encourage Catholics to take greater interest in the development of the existing worker organisations (Trade Unions, Benefit Funds, etc.) and to take initiative in establishing such organisations in their own environments in order to ensure harmony and peace in the industrial sphere.

7. Investment

It is the endeavour of any person to save money, either as a security for the present, or as a safeguard for the future. Who controls the use of such money when invested? Is this money being used to promote the well-being of all men, or is it used as a powerful means to exploit other men, and this against the wishes of the people who invest? We urge all Christians, religious organisations, institutions, and parishes to query how their money is being invested and to what extent they are directly maintaining exploitation. Further we urge them to investigate the possibilities of using their influence, however limited, to hamper investments in firms maintaining exploitation.

8. The Church as an Employer

The Church is also an employer, as responsible as any other employer. We must therefore enquire into the wages and conditions of all its workers, on all levels. If we are convinced that Christ's message is one of justice and peace, then we will practise the reality in the Church itself.

However, cognisance must be taken of those men and women who are called by God to a life of poverty and sacrifice and who have made a personal commitment to full time involvement even when their material needs are not guaranteed. This spiritual reality transcends economic realities and is peculiar to the Church.

In the light of all this we urge parishes and Church organisations to examine very carefully their commitments to their employees.

WORKERS' RESPONSIBILITY TO EMPLOYERS

The worker has a responsibility to his employer. He is hired to do a job of work, and he must endeavour to do this to the best of his ability. Work is a participation in co-creation with God. (Genesis 1:28). A bad workman who wastes materials and misuses his tools to produce shoddy goods is misusing the gifts of the earth given to us by God. (Rerum Novarum 16. Populorum Progressio 27 and 28).

RESPONSIBLE ACTION

How is the dignity of the worker to be respected and his development assured? How can bad working conditions be changed? What are the means and the agencies of change and what is the responsibility of each of us in our respective spheres?

First we must discover, deepen and communicate to others a real sense of the dignity of the worker. It is hypocritical to pray for justice and pay lip service to it unless we are prepared to work for it and promote it in our own daily work lives. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after justice for they shall have their fill." (Matt. 5:6).

Existing legislation on working conditions is often ignored by employers and unknown to workers. Individuals and groups of workers can provide a useful service to fellow workers through the knowledge and application of this legislation to particular situations. Employers are bound in conscience to fulfil legal requirements and this, not simply because it is law and not expediency, but in spirit of justice and regard for their workers' welfare.

We commend those employers who, not simply for reasons of economic expediency, but for motives of justice, are giving a lead in the following fields:

- ❖ Extending training facilities and opportunities for full professional advancement to those who so far have been unjustly denied them;
- ❖ Increasing wages to morally fair levels;
- ❖ Improving working conditions;
- ❖ Supporting and encouraging the formation of workers' organisations in their factories.

At the same time we encourage others to take initiatives in these fields.

There should be concern also, not simply for the just enforcement of existing legislation, but for its improvement and extension to all the main categories of workers, so that all enjoy legal protection.

Brotherly love and the Christian sense of community must inspire workers in the much needed sense and realisation of solidarity in their struggle for justice. Christian leadership and dedication is as much, perhaps more, needed in the field of industry and work, as in the closer confines of the parish.

It is impossible to lay down or suggest lines of action for situations so varied in needs of scope. We can only call on both workers and employers to take a fresh look, both personally and in groups, at their own real work situations, to appraise them in the light of the Gospel and the social teaching of the Church and to work out lines of both short and long term action. Our religion – our Christianity – is not to be confined to Church attendance or even to home life. The test of authentic Christian living and faith is in daily life and in the sphere of work life which makes up a third of our time. Are we prepared to change ourselves, to challenge others to play our part in making places of work real communities of respect, justice and love?

CONCLUSION

Jesus told His disciples: "You cannot serve two masters: God and money." (Matt. 6:24). We, as disciples of the Master, have to ask ourselves which we do serve. It is our duty in conscience to point out that it is a grave sin to make money, by the exploitation of the poor. Profit made by a policy of low wages, bad working conditions, and the like, is money obtained by theft. This sin can only be forgiven in the eyes of God when the money is restored to those to whom it belongs by right. Christ, who has given us His command of love, could not bless any system, which enforced the exploitation of man by man:

"Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers, that you do unto me" (Matt. 25:45).

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III DISCRIMINATION: QUESTIONS WE ARE ASKING

By: 4 BLACK PRIESTS AND LAYMEN

We wish to examine a dilemma in which the Church seems to be caught in South Africa. The Church does not exist entirely separate from its social environment, and can be affected by it involuntarily, particularly by not seeing change and moments for decision.

The views here expressed will be “coloured” by the black experience of the authors. We do not need to apologise for this, and would not deny the white man the right to state his case as it comes from his experience. Our aim is to share with others, particularly our fellow Christians, a point of view that challenges them.

In South Africa black people can be roughly classed into three categories: a significant number of simple and resigned people; a large number of socially conscious men and women; and a growing number of the highly educated, articulate and socially aware who are now thinking independently. It is especially the latter section that realises the disturbing gap between the Church’s doctrine about social justice on the one hand, and much in its internal structures on the other. Our questions revolve around many imbalances and injustices in society as a whole, which have penetrated into the Christian Church. The questioners realise the painful complexity of the situation. Nobody suggests that the Church can be seen in total isolation from the larger society of which it is a part. Nevertheless the socially conscious blacks cannot be blamed for bringing certain expectations to the Church. We have been persuaded to believe that God speaks His saving Word through it. By implication the Church has the power to transcend human structures which are often initiated by greed, exploitation and self interest. As a community of saints, under God’s grace, the Church can be expected to rise to the majestic heights of prophetic witness, in spite of the falseness of human situations.

Concerned black Christians should not be dismissed as moral critics of the ecclesiastical establishment or ungrateful dissidents. If they have written off the Church, they would be foolish to waste their energies on something that had no value in their life, and no role in their liberation struggle. They are aware that religion can be a mystification, or an agent of growth and salvation. The questioning blacks are not self-righteously apportioning blame, but genuinely challenging the Church to be true to her mission.

By way of illustration we take some example situations that scandalise people, and jeopardise the credibility of Christ’s witnessing Church and appear to compromise her integrity.

In stating these we recognise that they have grown up through no lack of goodwill, but by unconscious acceptance of the social patterns of the country.

We use the terminology “black” and “white” not because we wish to divide members of the Church into racial categories, but because of the de facto situation, which must be recognised, and to bring out how it appears to so many blacks.

1. The low and sometimes excessively low wages paid by some clergy and Church institutions.
2. The paying of different wages to white and black for the same work and competence. Equal pay for equal work has now become an axiom not only with black leaders but in many white trade unions and industries.
3. The channelling of so much money into ecclesiastical institutions when so many people are starving or struggling for existence.

4. The enormous difference in standards of Church buildings for black and white schools, prestige halls, extremely expensive churches for whites, while some people do not even have a decent place in which to worship.
5. The bad working conditions and standards of quarters offered to blacks by many clergy and religious.
6. The large farms owned by the Church, while the land issue in this country has become so controversial a matter.
7. The way Church institutions use and accommodate themselves to the migratory labour system.
8. The differential reception offered to black and white at some presbyteries and convents, and the continued use by clergy and religious of the disrespectful terms "Boy" and "Girl" adults.
9. The disproportionate numbers of Church personnel at the service of the whites.
10. Failure to consider and consult more independent black opinion in the Church in the machinery of decision making and in higher Church appointments, especially where these involve blacks.
11. The manner in which black priests and nuns appear to be regulated to a secondary position in the Church, with little opportunity of playing a meaningful role in its general policy, and the disparity in the standard of living in many cases.
12. The poverty of parishes and institutions taken over by blacks from whites when the latter move out and funds from overseas cease to come in.

So much for a few instances of injustice. One could go on almost indefinitely, but these should be sufficient to demonstrate our point. We have started the case in general terms. It is the duty of the people of God, of the Church considering how Christ may be seen through its customs and structures, to undertake research into specific areas to see whether what we say is corroborated or disproved. Statistics and concrete facts have already been compiled by certain organisations and interested persons, and are there for those who want them.

When all is said and done we must nonetheless admit that there are no slick answers for all these difficulties. But the questions being asked, plus consciousness of our integrity, should make us willing to have them aired in consultation and in a spirit of mutual trust. Without this examination in the Church it is doubtful if statements about human rights are going to help many independent-minded and influential blacks.

One means of getting over the urgency of the matters we speaking about is to get white Church groups to invite blacks to speak to them. Even white clergy, religious or lay people working most closely with blacks cannot be in entirely the same position, nor feel the impact of the situation in the same way. This is becoming a recognised pattern in South Africa now, and white political gatherings and Verligte Aksie and other groups have already heard a number of black speakers, and obtained a realisation that they did not previously have when getting the matter second-hand from sympathetic whites. We should be able to do as much in the Church.

Finally, if the Church wishes to retain the loyalty of many blacks, she must welcome and inspire the phenomenon of Black Consciousness. This quest of the Black people for their humanity appears to be here to stay, and the Church cannot afford to appear to be against it or ignore it. The whole witness of the Church in the field of human rights will only be credible when the black people see the Church rising above the present socio-political situation and providing some models of alternative life styles. The dilemma seems to be part of the continual choice between Jesus Christ and Mammon, the accepted social standards of the world around us; or the new ones of the Cross and Resurrection.

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