

southern africa

BRIEFING #1

A LETTER TO PRETORIA

Today in South Africa, the religious community is under attack. The church is one of the last public bodies that can still speak out against apartheid and white minority rule. Others have long since been brutally silenced and muzzled by the Pretoria regime. But the church is not immune.

Ministers have been detained, grassroots religious leaders jailed, and even Khotso House, the headquarters of the South African Council of Churches was destroyed by a bomb. Khanya House, the home of the South African Catholic Bishops' Conference, was also firebombed in the dead of night. The apartheid government has accused the religious community of trying to challenge the power of the government. State President P.W. Botha has charged the churches with "meddling" in politics.

Last year, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Primate of the Anglican Province of Southern Africa and Nobel Laureate was forced to respond. He wrote a long and detailed letter to President Botha that is a resounding condemnation of the racist apartheid system followed by a reaffirmation of the right and faith of those in the religious community in South Africa who are refusing to be silenced in the face of naked violent and brutal oppression. His letter is reminiscent of the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s letter from the Birmingham jail.

The Religious Action Network believes that Archbishop Tutu's words have to be heard not only in Pretoria, but around the world. Following is a portion of Bishop Tutu's letter. The entire letter is available upon request.



**Archbishop
Desmond Tutu**

Religious Action Network

American Committee on Africa, 198 Broadway, New York, NY 10038

I want to state quite categorically that I stand by all that I have done and said concerning the application of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the situation of injustice and oppression and exploitation which are the very essence of apartheid, a policy which your government has carried out with ruthless efficiency. My position in this matter is not one of which I am ashamed or for which I would ever want to apologize . . . My theological position derives from the Bible and from the teaching of the Church.

The Bible teaches that what invests each person with infinite value is not this or that arbitrarily chosen biological attribute, but the fact that each person is created in the image of God (Gen 1:26). Apartheid, the policy of your government, claims that what makes a person qualify for privilege and political power is that biological irrelevance, the color of a person's skin and his ethnic antecedents. Apartheid says those are what makes a person matter. That is clearly at variance with the teaching of the Bible and the teaching of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Hence the Church's criticism that your apartheid policies are not only unjust and oppressive. They are positively unbiblical, unchristian, immoral and evil.

Apartheid has said that ultimately people are intended for separation. You have carried out policies enshrined in the Population Control Act, the Group Areas Act, segregated education, health etc. The Bible teaches quite unequivocally

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that people are created for fellowship, for togetherness, not for alienation, apartness, enmity and division (Gen 2:18; Gen 11:1-9; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ro 12:3-5; Gal 3:28; Acts 17:26).

The experience of the United States and the findings of its highest court were that it is in fact impossible to carry out a policy of "separate but equal." The policies of apartheid do not even pretend to embody "separate but equal." Quite unabashedly they are intended to be separate and unequal. Just note the grossly unfair distribution of land between black and white or the unequal government expenditure on black and white education. I could multiply the examples. Apartheid, the policy of your government, is thus shown yet again to be unbiblical, unchristian, immoral and evil in its very nature.

I could show that apartheid teaches the fundamental irreconcilability of people because they belong to different races. This is at variance with the central teaching of the Christian faith about the reconciling work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself," declares Saint Paul (2 Cor 5:9), summing up teachings contained in other parts of the New Testament, (John 12:32; Eph 1:10; Eph 2:14, etc.). I could show that in dealing with human beings as if they were less than those who are created in the image of God and by inflicting untold and unnecessary suffering on them, as through your vicious policies of forced population removals, you have contravened basic ethical tenets. I could provide further evidence that your apartheid policies are unbiblical, unchristian, immoral

and evil. It is for these and other reasons that our church and other churches have declared apartheid a heresy.

"I work for God's kingdom. For whose Kingdom with your apartheid policies do you work?"

What we are doing is no innovation when we bring the Word of God as we understand it to bear on the situation in which we are involved. The prophets of old when they declared "Thus saith the Lord . . ." to the rulers and the powerful of their day were our forerunners. They spoke about the need for religion to show its authenticity by how it affected the everyday life of the people and especially by how the rich, the powerful, the privileged and the rulers dealt with the less privileged; the poor, the hungry, the oppressed, the widow, the orphan and the alien.

This kind of involvement of religion with politics and the habit of religious leaders to speak into the socio-political and economic situation can be attested to as standard practice in the Bible which provides our mandate and paradigm.

Our marching orders come from Christ himself and not from any human being. Our mandate is provided by the Bible and the teaching of the Church, not by any political group or ideology, Marxist or otherwise.

Our Lord Himself adopted as a description of his program that which was outlined by Isaiah.

"The spirit of the Lord God is upon me
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the
humble, to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to captives
and release to those in prison;
to proclaim a year of the Lord's favor
and a day of the vengeance of our God.
(Isaiah 61:1-2)

It is a hallowed tradition of direct non-violent action such as we engaged in when we tried to process to Parliament. We were mindful too of what the apostles said to the Jewish Sanhedrin, that obedience to God takes precedence over obedience to human beings (Acts 4:19, 5:29).

We accept wholeheartedly Paul's teaching in Romans 13 that we should submit ourselves to earthly rulers. Their authority, however, is not absolute. They themselves also stand under God's judgement as His servants.

I am committed to work for a non-racial, just and democratic South Africa . . . The latest apartheid constitution cannot by any stretch of the imagination be described as democratic when it excludes 73 percent of the people of South Africa from any meaningful participation in the political decision-making process. I long for and have dedicated myself to work for a South Africa where all South Africans are South Africans, citizens in a undivided South Africa — not one that is balkanized into unviable Bantustan homelands.

When you are a citizen you share through the exercise of your vote in the political decision making process either directly or through duly elected representatives. Since 1976 I have appealed to the government to heed our *cri de coeur*. I have said nobody in their right senses expected these real changes to come overnight.

You yourself can bear me out that when an SACC leaders' delegation met you and your Cabinet colleagues in 1980 [the South African Council of Churches represents over 15 million black and white Christians]. I again said that if you did something dramatic then I would be among the first to say, "Hold it. Give them a chance, now they are talking real change." Then I said "Declare your commitment to a common citizenship for all South Africans in an undivided South Africa, abolish the pass laws; stop immediately all forced population removals and establish a uniform education policy."

That was eight years ago. How much time has been wasted and how many lives have been lost trying to beautify apartheid through cosmetic improvements when the pillars of a vicious system still remain firmly in place.

I would say if you were to lift the State of Emergency, unban all our political organizations, release all detainees and political prisoners and permit exiles to return and then say

you would be ready to sit down with the authentic representatives and leaders of every section of our society to negotiate the dismantling of apartheid and drawing up of a new Constitution, I would say to our people, "Please give him a chance. He is talking real change." Your apartheid policies are leading our beautiful land to disaster . . . We long for the day when black and white will live amicably and harmoniously together in the new South Africa . . .

I want to state the obvious - that I am a Christian religious leader - by definition that surely means I reject communism and Marxism as atheistic and materialistic.

I work for God's kingdom. For whose Kingdom with your apartheid policies do you work? I pray for you, as I do for your Ministerial colleagues, every day by name.

God Bless You
Yours sincerely
(signed) Desmond Tutu



Taken from "A Woman's Place is in the Struggle: Not Behind Bars."
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