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Hearing Only One Voice: The American Churches on South Africa

America's mainline churches are unanimous and vocal in their opposition to apartheid in South Africa. There are, however, significant differences of opinion in both the political and the church worlds regarding the appropriate means to be used to end this manifest evil and the best ways to assure that post-apartheid South Africa will be just and democratic.

On June 16, for example, a coalition of major U.S. denominations celebrated Soweto Day (the tenth anniversary of a police massacre of black South African students) with worship services, demonstrations, a legislative briefing and lobbying of Congress. At this event the harshest possible economic sanctions against South Africa were demanded. A featured speaker was Alfred Nzo, Secretary General of the African National Congress (ANC, see p. 7) — and an acknowledged member of the South Africa Communist Party. Rev. M. Lorenzo Shepard, co-chairman of the sponsoring church coalition, referred to the ANC official as "Brother Nzo." In introducing Nzo, Damu Smith of the NCC-affiliated Washington Office on Africa said, "In every struggle for liberation there is always an organization that is formed and supported by the people to wage the struggle." Smith identified the ANC as the organization which plays that role in South Africa.

Why these effusive displays of support for a figure whose commitment to democracy and the genuine independence of South Africa is so much in doubt? U.S. church leaders would claim, as the theme of a January meeting put it, that they are merely speaking "with one voice" with the suffering South African church. They imply that South African Christians are united behind the ANC, and that U.S. Christians are therefore obliged to follow suit.

But the South African religious scene — and the South African situation in general — is not so simple. Even those who stand firmly against apartheid's institutionalized denial of human dignity have quite divergent views of the political and social system they

would erect in its place. South Africans are also split by bitter disagreements over the proper tactics, violent or nonviolent, to use in pursuit of change. When church leaders claim to hear only "one voice" coming from South African churches, it may be that they are listening to only one voice.

There are other voices to be heard, if there is a will to hear them. The **National Initiative for Reconciliation (NIR)** last fall launched a process of communication and repentance within the divided South African churches, intended to show the way toward a peaceful reconciliation of the nation. The church Left, though, prefers to champion another South African development of last fall: the radical **Kairos Document**, which advocated a strategy of confrontation — even perhaps violence — to force the white regime to capitulate. The **Harare Consultation** of international church leaders in December followed the Kairos line, disregarding the NIR, in urging intensified pressure on the South African government and support for "liberation movements" fighting it. In January U.S. denominations formed the **Churches' Emergency Committee on Southern Africa (CECSA)** to promote the Harare agenda in this country.

The National Initiative for Reconciliation: Opening the Dialogue

American Christians eager to aid constructive change inside South Africa should take note of what



African National Congress President Oliver Tambo, right, greets Emilio Castro, general secretary of the WCC, and Gunnar Stalsett, general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, June 19 in Geneva (RNS photo)

occurred last September 10-12 in Pietermaritzburg. There 400 Christian leaders, both clergy and lay, gathered for an open-ended discussion of how the churches might lay a spiritual groundwork for solutions to the national crisis.

This National Initiative for Reconciliation was remarkable for the unprecedented breadth of perspectives represented. Delegations came from 48 denominations, ranging from the African (black) independent churches, through the multiracial English-speaking churches (such as the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches), to the Afrikaner Dutch Reformed Church. Approximately seventy members of the latter attended, despite discouragement from Dutch Reformed authorities fearful of the presence of radical blacks.

NIR sessions did not always proceed smoothly. Some black leaders lashed out against cautious white churches, charging that they did not understand the pain inflicted on black communities by apartheid. Many whites, on the other hand, felt that they had gone the extra mile in identifying apartheid as a heresy and confessing their sin of complicity in it.

The NIR did not produce a blueprint for South Africa's future, but those who attended did reach an accord on some common purposes. They agreed to support a continuing movement for reconciliation, first in the churches and then in South African society itself. This movement could, they hoped, build bridges between South African whites and blacks by various means: prayer, fasting, and preaching for spiritual renewal; joint worship services, discussion groups, and exchange visits between Christians of

different races; and other actions to "prepare people for living in a changed and totally nonracial land."

The NIR has already demonstrated its influence. Last October 9 was proclaimed as a day of work stoppage, prayer, and fasting. The NIR newsletter reported the impact in Soweto: "Trains, buses and taxis were mostly empty. And we saw no intimidation. Over 60 percent participated in the day in one way or another. What's more, people were genuinely praying — many in large services and others in homes."

The NIR has also inspired regional conferences, and encouraged black and white churches in several areas to undertake cooperative projects to meet housing, nutritional, and educational needs in black townships. The hope is that blacks and whites working together can demonstrate to others that a non-racist society is workable.

Among those participating in the NIR are: Archbishop Philip Russell and Bishop Desmond Tutu (the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize winner, recently elected as the new Archbishop) of the Anglican Church; Archbishop Denis Hurley of the Catholic Church; Rev. Allan Maker, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church; and Rev. Peter Storey, former President of the Methodist Church.

The Kairos Document: Calling Churches to Combat

Last September 13, only a day after the conclusion of the NIR meeting, a different group of South African Christians issued a statement of contrasting tone. Called the "Kairos Document,"

The Kairos Document: A Manifesto to Rally the Left

It is not surprising that the Kairos Document has gained so much attention in the church world: It allows international church leaders who are aligned with the African National Congress (ANC) and similar extremist groups to defend their activities with the explanation that they are merely acting in Christian solidarity with the "one voice" from South Africa heard in the Kairos Document.

In fact, though, the Kairos Document is not an expression of consensus, but rather a bid by one faction for fellow believers to close ranks behind it. In rigorous fashion the authors dismiss all options short of their own unqualified commitment to all self-designated forces of liberation.

First the document attacks the adherents of "State Theology," which is defined as "the theological justification of the status quo with its racism, capi-

talism and totalitarianism." It rejects, for strong biblical reasons, the "blasphemous" notion of a special covenant by which God authorizes white rule over the land. But the kairos theologians go further, charging that appeals for law and order merely serve to "canonise the will of the powerful and reduce the poor to passivity." Warnings about the communist threat are categorized as a "myth," "a very convenient way of frightening some people into accepting any kind of domination and exploitation by a capitalist minority."

Next the Kairos Document takes aim at "Church Theology." This term is applied to those who seek both justice and reconciliation through nonviolent protest and negotiations. Because these other anti-apartheid Christians favor less aggressive tactics, the document accuses them of "sitting on the fence" and "playing into the hands of the oppressor." The authors would prefer to postpone all talk of peace

(Kairos, Cont'd on pg. 3)

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Please Help Irina Ratushinskaya!

We have just received word that imprisoned poet, human rights activist and devout Russian Orthodox Christian, Irina Ratushinskaya has been moved to KGB offices in Kiev for "re-education." Authorities are trying to force her to sign a plea for clemency and have promised to release her if she, her husband or her mother will sign such a statement. However, Irina has forbidden it, maintaining that she has done nothing illegal. The reasons for this recent action by Soviet authorities are not clear, but we believe that they may want to change Irina's status in response to outside pressure from the West and because of her deteriorating life-threatening condition. Although only 33, Irina suffers from angina, chronic osteomyelitis, glaucoma, damage to the back of the eyes, heart trouble, high blood pressure, kidney disease and inflammation of the ovaries. She sustained a concussion last year on her way to a punishment isolation cell, where she was beaten unconscious by prison warders. In spite of her failing health Irina has been forced to continue her hard labor detail, and has been denied medical treatment or visits from her mother and husband.

In September 1982 Irina was charged with "subverting and weakening the Soviet Regime" and her poetry, which is rich in images from her Christian faith, was the main evidence presented against her. Irina still has three and a half years of hard labor and five years of internal exile left on her sentence. Without our prayers and support, this courageous, talented, Christian woman may not survive.



My Lord, what can I say that's not been said?
I stand beneath your wind in a burlap hood.
Between your breath and pitch-dark plague-dark cloud -
Oh Lord, my God!

At my interrogation what will I say
If forced to speak, to face the country's way -
Deaf, mute, in the body's rags, bruised nearly dead -
Oh Lord, my God!



-- Irina Ratushinskaya



What We All Can Do To Help

In addition to praying, one important way to show your concern is by writing a short letter to one or more Soviet and American officials who may be able to intercede on Irina's behalf. In addition, letters from abroad provide great moral support for the prisoners and their families, so we urge you also to express your love and solidarity in a letter or card to Irina's husband. (All addresses are listed on the back.)

As reasons for granting Irina a pardon, you can mention the following:

1) Irina was convicted of Anti-Soviet Agitation and propaganda. However, she has done nothing more than speak out for human rights. Freedom of expression is guaranteed in: 1) the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights; 2) International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; 3) Helsinki Final Act, all of which the Soviet Union is a party to.

2) Irina's trial was held in a closed courtroom where friends and relatives were not permitted. According to the Code of Criminal Procedure of the Ukrainian Republic, only cases involving state security, juveniles or obscenities may be heard in closed court.

3) Finally, Irina's health is failing and she probably will not survive the remainder of her harsh sentence.

Addresses

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GERASHCHENKO Igor
USSR

emerged from the reflections of a circle of more radical churchmen. The manifesto opens with a dramatic announcement: "This is the Kairos, the moment of grace and opportunity, the favourable time in which God issues a challenge to decisive action." It paints a stark picture of South African society divided between good and evil forces: "This is our situation of civil war or revolution. The one side is committed to maintaining the system at all costs and the other side is committed to changing it at all costs. There are two conflicting projects here and no compromise is possible."

The Kairos Document directs harsh words at church leaders, such as many involved in the NIR, who appeal for peaceful change. The authors of the document disdain any negotiations with the government, and they pointedly refuse to condemn violence in the anti-apartheid cause. The manifesto closes with a call for Christians to keep in step with "political organizations that truly represent the grievances and demands of the people" — a statement that can be understood as a discreet endorsement of the ANC.

Although the Kairos Document does not list its actual authors, it was signed by 151 theologians, pastors, and laypeople from dozens of denominations. The signers include the Rev. C. F. Beyers Naude, General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches, and the Rev. Smangaliso Mkatshwa, General Secretary of the South African Catholic Bishops Conference. But the names of most of the leaders prominent in the NIR are not to be found among the list of 151. Archbishops Hurley and

(Only One Voice, Cont'd on pg. 4)



A man holds up a rubber whip during a special mass for peace celebrated by Roman Catholic Archbishop Dennis Hurley, background. The January 26 service was held at a church in Mamelodi, a black township near Pretoria. Some of the 2,000 worshippers brought gasoline bombs, whips, stones, and tear gas canisters to the mass in a symbolic renunciation of violence.

(Kairos, Cont'd from pg. 2)

until such time as "the apartheid regime shows signs of genuine repentance."

According to the Kairos Document, the main defect in this "Church Theology" is "a lack of social analysis." So the authors propound their own "Prophetic Theology," saturated with a social analysis of Marxist hue. They try to fit the racial conflict in South Africa into the mold of a struggle between a capitalist elite and an exploited labor force. The document postulates that South African whites, as a class with interests bound up in the present system, will never "experience a conversion or a change of heart and abandon the policy of apartheid." Any reforms would just serve to "make the oppression more effective and more acceptable." The kairos theologians conclude only unremitting class struggle will yield "the more radical justice that comes from below and is determined by the people of South Africa."

The document does not directly advocate violence, but it does advance a lengthy argument that the classical criteria for a "just war" are fulfilled in South Africa today. The kairos theologians classify the government as an irreformable "tyrant," an enemy of the people in principle, whom the people may resist by any available means. Such acts as "throwing stones, burning cars and sometimes killing collaborators" are sympathetically explained as "desperate attempts of the people to

defend themselves."

In addition, the Kairos Document invites the churches to undertake a "ministry" of direct political involvement. It would have them preach "the moral duty of all who are oppressed to resist oppression." It insists that all church activities -- even the sacraments -- be "reappropriated," from serving "the need of the individual for comfort and security" to propagating "a prophetic faith related to the kairos that God is offering us today." The kairos theologians advise that all these activities be done in "consultation, co-ordination, and co-operation" with "those political organisations that truly represent the grievances and demands of the people."

Precisely which "political organisations" are comprehended in that phrase? Some signers of the Kairos Document might wish to embrace only democratic community groups which stage nonviolent protests. But others could apply the phrase to the ANC, and they would find no scruples in the document to deter them. Indeed its authors evince a Marxist morality, which never questions the essential righteousness of "liberation movements," but only chides them for certain "unnecessary" or "counter-productive" excesses. The Kairos Document is, in effect, another "popular front" device. It is vague enough to leave a place for some genuine democrats; however, it is also clear enough to imply that that place must be behind the vanguard of the extreme, non-democratic Left.

— AFW

South African Views on Kairos

Although the Kairos Document has won uncritical acceptance among U.S. church leaders, it has aroused considerable debate within South Africa. Radicals have hailed it without reservation; the far Right has demanded that it be suppressed; others, who desire majority rule, democracy, and reconciliation, have given a mixed assessment.

Rev. M. Stanley Mogoba, General Secretary of the Methodist Church, signed both the Kairos Document and the National Initiative for Reconciliation statement. Explaining the apparent contradiction in an NIR newsletter interview, he interpreted the Kairos Document as conditioning the NIR's call for reconciliation on an insistence that whites must dismantle apartheid. He condemned any compromise that would "ask the blacks to accept reconciliation without apartheid moving." Nevertheless, Mogoba dissented from the document's demand that reconciliation efforts be abandoned in the present polarized situation. He affirmed that forgiveness and the offer of reconciliation are "the ministry that Christ gave to us, and if we are Christians we've got to continue to work at it."

Bishop Desmond Tutu could not endorse several aspects of the Kairos Document. Writing in Christian Century, H. Paul Santmire summarized Tutu's reasons for withholding his signature: "First, he said that the document tends to caricature the work of precisely those church leaders who have, in fact, been most effective in the fight against apartheid during the past decade or more. Second, he said that the document seems to criticize the church for speaking to the head of state at all. Tutu said that he, like Moses, must speak to Pharaoh. He has a responsibility for Pharaoh (as does everyone else) even though Pharaoh will probably not listen to him. Third — in the same vein, but much more to the point — Tutu thinks that the document's theology of reconciliation is less than biblical because it seems to give up on Pharaoh altogether. The scandal of the gospel, Tutu said, is that the church must continue to witness to reconciliation for all, at all costs, even death."

Klaus Nurnberger, a Professor of Ethics at the University of South Africa, qualified his "broad agreement with the general trend of this document" with several further criticisms. He objected to the authors' excessive trust in "liberation movements." Warning against the assumption that such movements "will automatically and without positive guidance arrive at the right alternative and do so with rightful means," he urged that the document specify "the type of political and economic system which Christians should strive for." Moreover, Nurnberger worried that pressing the whole church to undertake the "prophetic task" of taking political sides could produce a narrowing of the church's pastoral ministry.

Making a similar argument, Lutheran Bishop Manas Buthelezi, President of the South African Council of Churches, recently warned the churches not to "step into this trap" of endorsing partisan interests. He said: "We are living in circumstances where we are asked to play a leading role to teach people the concept of inclusion. South Africa belongs to all. There will come a time when all viewpoints will have to be reconciled with each other." — AFW

(Only One Voice, Cont'd from pg. 3)

Russell and the Rev. Storey were not even invited to sign the radical manifesto, while Bishop Tutu declined to subscribe (see left). Those few churchmen who did participate in both the Kairos Document and the NIR undoubtedly also felt a real tension between the former's pledge of allegiance to so-called liberation movements and the latter's pursuit of reconciliation.

The Harare Consultation: Nourishing a Selective "Spirit of Solidarity"

The World Council of Churches has moved aggressively to promote the Kairos Document. The WCC has a long history of partisan engagement with extremist forces in South Africa. Over the past 11 years the WCC Special Fund to Combat Racism has channeled \$642,000 to the ANC. Not even extensive bad publicity has shaken the ecumenical council from this commitment. WCC General Secretary Emilio Castro, hosting ANC President Oliver Tambo in Geneva this June, reassured the guerrilla leader: "The prayers and hope of many millions of Christians all over the world are with you." It is not surprising, then, that the WCC would rush to republish the Kairos Document abroad. The officials who administer the Special Fund obviously found it an apt tool for radicalizing international opinion on behalf of their friends in the ANC.

General Secretary Castro carried the effort a step further in December, summoning 85 top church officials — from South Africa, Europe, North America, and Australia — to Harare, Zimbabwe, for an "emergency meeting" on South Africa. The resulting Harare Declaration began with a conscious echo of the Kairos Document: "We affirm that the moment of truth (Kairos) is now." It called for an immediate end to apartheid, through the resignation of the government and "the transfer of power to the majority of the people, based on universal suffrage." The declaration did not specify the tactics, violent or nonviolent, that South Africans might use to effect change, but it did enjoin international church support for "South African movements working for the liberation of their country."

The Harare Declaration also prescribed measures that foreign governments should be urged to take against the South African regime. Among the steps favored were a moratorium on loans to any South African bank, corporation, or government-affiliated organization, and institution of "immediate and comprehensive" economic sanctions against that nation. Some of the Harare participants advocated these international pressures as an alternative to massive violence inside South Africa. Dr. Mance Jackson of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, for instance, cited approvingly a prediction that the white regime would collapse within thirty days of the imposition of sanctions. But other observers, who do not expect the minority government to yield power so readily, perceived the Harare approach as an external complement to a strategy for violent internal revolution. If western sanctions could sap the South African economy, the reasoning went, then the political situation would grow more polarized, and

the ANC would gain support among blacks despairing of more moderate options.

It was no coincidence that the Harare Declaration adopted the confrontational thrust of the Kairos Document rather than the reconciling aim of the NIR. The WCC had distributed the Kairos Document as background reading for Harare attendees, while neglecting to place the NIR on the agenda. It had also accorded observer status to Alfred Nzo of the ANC, allowing him to speak publicly and to meet privately with groups of churchpeople. The World Council even pressed the South Africans to show a greater "spirit of solidarity" with "liberation movements" in their own country. A "Memorandum from Harare" requested that South African churches "clarify their position" on Special Fund grants. The intention was evidently to persuade the South Africa Council of Churches to retract its previous criticism of WCC support for the ANC and other leftist guerrilla movements.

The Churches' Emergency Committee on Southern Africa: Mustering for "Action" in the U.S.

American church representatives at Harare did not require any such prodding. At a press conference upon their return, they dedicated themselves unreservedly to the WCC's agenda, which they sanctified as the fruit of the "solidarity of disciplined listening." Their rhetoric revealed what they had listened to: the Kairos Document, not the NIR. Delegation members recited a litany of slogans borrowed from South African radicals: "Enough is enough." "Time's up for South Africa." "It is the KAIROS." "The

moment has come for liberation rather than reformation."

In their report U.S. church leaders acknowledged the "wide range of perspectives" among South African Christians; however, they failed to take seriously the more moderate views. Rev. Joan Campbell of the WCC's U.S. Office cast doubt upon the NIR approach, calling "the theology of love and reconciliation ... difficult" to apply to South Africa. Rev. J. Oscar McCloud, then head of the Program Agency of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), implied that black "voices of caution" had been intimidated by white financial supporters. Rev. M. Lorenzo Shepard, President of the Progressive National Baptist Church, curtly dismissed South African blacks who oppose economic sanctions: "There always will be quislings in any liberation movement."

In order to carry the radicalizing momentum of Harare into their own churches, the returning American delegates summoned over 120 prominent officials of NCC-related denominations to a January 13 meeting in Washington, DC. That meeting delivered a quick, emphatic affirmation of the Harare Declaration. A resolution was passed designating 1986 as "the year of action by U.S. churches against apartheid."

More practically, the 120 church leaders announced plans for a new entry among church political action groups, the "Churches' Emergency Committee on Southern Africa" (CECSA). The committee, composed of national heads of communions, was conceived as a nucleus for a wider and more radical anti-apartheid campaign. It was hoped that the

(Only One Voice, Cont'd on pg. 6)

South Africa Cracks Down on Church and Religious Leaders

Religious leaders and groups have not been exempted from the massive suppression of civil and political rights during the State of Emergency declared by the South African government last June 12. Comprehensive censorship of news from South Africa has limited severely the flow of information about such developments. While it is not possible to confirm each report, a pattern of violence and repression is clearly discernable:

- * The South African government raided offices of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) early June 12. SACC General Secretary C.F. Beyers Naude reported that government forces cordoned off the building, searched all staff, confiscated donor files, and cut telex and telephone facilities. As of July 8, the SACC offices had been raided an additional five times.
- * Estimates of church leaders who have been detained range up to 250. According to Mr. Naude, these are frequently second-level, rather than internationally-known leaders. Detainees have included Smangaliso Mkatshwa, general secretary of the Catholic Bishops Conference and Zwelakhi Sisulu, editor of The New Nation, a

publication sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church.

- * The South African government ordered the expulsion of two West German clergymen and an American Lutheran missionary.
- * While the South African government stated that "bona fide" worship services were allowed, services commemorating Soweto Day were banned. Clergy advised parishioners to come to church in small groups of no more than two or three. Authorities have confirmed that one entire Anglican congregation, at a mixed-race township near Capetown, was detained.
- * The New York Times reports that three people were killed, including a child who was trampled to death, when security forces raided two Methodist churches in the Eastern Cape region.

The precarious state of the church in South Africa demonstrates the vulnerability of the church when rudimentary civil and political rights -- hallmarks of democratic governance -- are abandoned. South African as well as American Christians are divided about the most appropriate ways to seek to bring liberty and justice to South Africa. But, as with the harassment of the church in Nicaragua, U.S. Christians must join together in speaking out to defend the independence and integrity of the church.

— DLK

involvement of high-level religious figures could mobilize more "people in the pews" to push for the Harare agenda of comprehensive sanctions and other pressures. So far, 24 Protestant and Orthodox denominations, almost all from within the National Council of Churches, have enlisted in CECSA.

The Emergency Committee immediately committed itself to the drive for stringent economic sanctions against South Africa. Sanctions were the major focus of Soweto Day observances planned by CECSA. Church services on Sunday, June 15, were to stress that theme in a spiritual key. The WCC and the Emergency Committee distributed politically-charged liturgical materials for the occasion. Bulletin inserts prepared for that Sunday describe "how you and your congregation (can) get involved in this kairos moment" by following the lead of the Harare Declaration.

On Monday the 16th the Emergency Committee sponsored a legislative briefing and an ecumenical service in Washington, DC. Avery Post of the UCC opened the former by declaring, "We are absolutely convinced that the way to achieve a free, just South Africa is through strong, tough economic sanctions -- punitive if necessary." Nzo of the ANC and other speakers at the two events stressed the need for sanctions, and on Tuesday the 17th top denominational officials took their case to the Capitol.

Of the various sanctions bills under consideration, church activists favor one which would inflict the maximum damage on the South African economy. The Emergency Committee is backing a bill which would, in the words of its principal sponsor, Rep. Ronald Dellums (D-CA), "require the immediate withdrawal of all U.S. investment from South Africa and impose a total ban on U.S. exports to that country until apartheid is finally abolished." The audience at the legislative briefing was not swayed by Rep. Howard Wolpe (D-MI) and Sen. Nancy Kassebaum (R-KS), sponsors of less extreme sanctions bills, who gently warned that Dellums' economic quarantine might expend all U.S. influence without bringing down apartheid.

Besides sanctions, a second priority of the Emergency Committee has been an ongoing campaign of letters asking U.S. banks not to "roll over" loans to the South African government or private sector. The resolution establishing the Emergency Committee also advocated disinvestment and boycotts against corporations with operations in South Africa.

Tough Questions Unanswered: A Silence of Ignorance or of Complicity?

But has our churches' zeal for extremist "liberation" movements carried them too far? They pride themselves on the anti-apartheid purity of their militant posture, shoulder to shoulder with South African radicals. But do they know where those radicals would take South Africa, and have they counted the cost they would have the South African people pay to get there? There are issues of tactics and goals, much discussed in South Africa, that mainline U.S. church leaders have not addressed adequately.



Allan Boesak is a political activist and president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. Above, he protects a man suspected of being a police informer from an angry mob during a funeral. The tragic black-on-black violence is cited by the government to justify the state of emergency; it is also encouraged by black radicals to promote anarchy and the overthrow of the government (RNS photo).

First is the issue of whether violence is appropriate, particularly in the South African context. The authors of the Kairos Document appeal to the just-war tradition as a basis for a legitimate resistance to the South African government. But many other South African Christians, while equally intolerant of apartheid, do not see violence as the way to overthrow it. Some of these are pacifists, convinced that Christians should never use force to resolve conflicts; more rest their judgment on prudent grounds. They fear that escalating violence might produce not liberation, but catastrophe: a bloody, uneven contest of firepower between the South African military, considered by experts to be the most powerful on the continent, and the relatively unarmed black masses. Only cold-blooded racists, or totalitarians, can fail to shudder at the casualties that might result.

American churches have generally refused to weigh seriously the question of violence. Several speakers at the January Emergency Committee meeting termed it "a non-issue" in comparison to the moral outrage of apartheid. On February 24 the National Council of Churches' Executive Committee turned down, on similar logic, an attempt to commend a nonviolent approach. The defeated amendment would have prefaced an affirmation of the Harare Declaration with a statement of "the commitment of the NCCC to urge peaceful resolution of the conflicts and nonviolent change." Elenie Huszagh, a Greek Orthodox representative speaking on behalf of the amendment, contended that it would establish that the NCCC was not making a "blanket endorsement of any group that purports to act on behalf of liberation" in South Africa. But the majority sided with Avery Post who replied that churches should reserve their condemnation exclusively for violence committed by the white government.

Likewise, the issue of foreign economic pressure -- official sanctions and private disinvestment -- seems to trouble South African church leaders far more than it does their U.S. counterparts. There are

many in South Africa who encourage such tactics; however, they are scarcely as unified or as vehement as their American friends. Bishop Tutu, in his April 3 call for "punitive sanctions" against the minority government, did not express certainty that they could bring major change. Instead he treated them as a last-ditch attempt to avert violence: "We face a catastrophe in this land and only the action of the international community by applying pressure can save us." The South African Catholic Bishops Conference, while favoring some sanctions, added a caution: "Intensified pressure can only be justified if applied in such a way as not to destroy the country's economy and to reduce as far as possible any additional suffering to the oppressed through job loss."

Other South African religious leaders, such as Bishop Thomas Stange of the Anglican Church and Bishop Elijah Mokoena of the Black Reformed Independent Churches Association, have pronounced themselves against sanctions or disinvestment. They and other critics fear that such measures would not be enough to shake the hold of apartheid, but would be enough to cause added pain and deprivation in South Africa's black communities and throughout southern Africa.

Yet the Church's Emergency Committee backs the most stringent measures -- total disinvestment by U.S. corporations, Dellums' trade embargo -- so as to send the most strident anti-apartheid message. CECSA leaders do not, however, reflect on whether that message will have the intended effect inside South Africa. Many American church officials care more about separating themselves symbolically from the sin of apartheid than they do about helping South Africans overcome that sin.

Finally, there has not been sufficient discussion of what happens after apartheid falls. The Kairos Document speaks briefly and vaguely of the coming of "liberation and a just society." The Harare Declaration similarly takes it for granted that "a new

democratic and representative government" will arise once the present government has resigned. Nowhere, it seems, have Christian leaders examined in detail how that new government might be constituted. Perhaps some delicate division of powers will be necessary to moderate the tensions among South Africa's many ethnic groups and political tendencies.

Those church leaders who attended the January 13 meeting of the U.S. Emergency Committee were given the opportunity to consider the matter in more depth. Rev. Ernest Gibson, a black pastor and Executive Director of the Council of Churches of Greater Washington, submitted a resolution calling on international church leaders to explore how majority rule might be combined with minority rights in a post-apartheid South Africa. Gibson expressed the hope that this approach might lay a realistic groundwork for negotiations inside South Africa. Gibson's proposal encountered surprising opposition. Lorenzo Shepard of the Progressive National Baptist Church objected that Americans should not "impose (upon South Africans) our ideas" about a negotiated transition of power. Gibson's motion was voted down by a margin of over 2 to 1.

Why this determined resistance to seemingly innocuous resolutions about nonviolence and guarantees of minority rights? Apparently many religious leaders enjoy striking anti-apartheid poses, but shrink from the difficult search for constructive and humane ways to dismantle and replace apartheid. They would -- quite appropriately -- deliver a prophetic verdict against the South African government; however, they do not dare offer guidance to the African National Congress and other "liberation movements." In this, as in such recent controversies as Central America, Grenada, and Indochina, our churches too frequently manifest a clear tilt toward the non-democratic Left. They borrow the confront-

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The African National Congress: What Kind of Liberation?

When religious or other groups express support for undefined South African "liberation movements," it is commonly presumed that they have in mind the outlawed African National Congress (ANC). The ANC is the oldest and most widely known South African opposition group. Founded in 1912, the ANC dedicated itself at first to the nonviolent pursuit of an integrated, democratic society. But since the early 1960's, when the South African government banned the organization and many ANC leaders fled into exile, the ANC has changed greatly. It now sends trained guerrillas into South Africa to conduct a "people's war." They stage attacks on government security forces and on blacks whom the ANC brands as "collaborators." On occasion the ANC also resorts to terrorism. It has taken credit for bombings of civilian targets resulting in scores of innocent deaths.

Equally worrisome is the close alliance that has developed between the ANC and the South African

Communist Party (SACP). SACP members now hold many key positions in the ANC. Although neither Nelson Mandela nor ANC President Oliver Tambo is an avowed communist, it is clear that a large proportion of the ANC Executive Board -- estimates range from 12 to 23 of the 30 members -- comes from the SACP. Among the most influential communists are the ANC Secretary General, Alfred Nzo, and its chief military strategist, a white named Joe Slovo. The SACP has strong links to Soviet-bloc nations, which supply training and arms to ANC guerrillas.

Undoubtedly the ANC has the power to play a role in any attempt to solve South Africa's problems. The U.S. State Department has recognized as much in calling for the release of Nelson Mandela, the legalization of the ANC, and its inclusion in negotiations for a new political order. But the fact of the ANC's power is hardly cause for ignoring questions about the ANC's intentions. Surely if our churches are to have a moral witness, they must speak truthfully about the compromised character of the ANC.

— AFW



Bishop Desmond Tutu, probably the best known black South African churchman, is shown above upon his installation as the Anglican bishop of Johannesburg, February 1985. Bishop Tutu is cited by ecumenical church leaders as an impassioned advocate of punitive economic sanctions against South Africa. Less attention is given to his critique of the WCC-promoted Kairos Document (RNS photo).

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tational language of the radical Kairos Document, and they honor the ANC. Yet they will neither defend nor disclaim — they will not even acknowledge — the support for violent revolution and the risk of a new tyranny implicit in their words and gestures. This silence betrays either an astounding naivete or some dangerous sympathies.

Perhaps our church officials assume that any (leftist) alternative would be better than the status quo in South Africa. Unfortunately, that assumption does not bear scrutiny. However despicable the

policies of the present South African government may be, it is clear that there are, in Africa and elsewhere, other regimes more oppressive still. Given the presence of totalitarian and terrorist elements within the ANC, there is reason to suspect that its form of "liberation" might easily misbeget a vicious dictatorship. Therefore, our religious leaders, who rightly denounce the anti-democratic nature of apartheid, must equally guard against the installation of another cruel and repressive system. They need to be more restrained in their dealings with "Brother Nzo" and his comrades.

Regardless of whether the most drastic steps — sanctions abroad, armed resistance internally — are justified in the fight against apartheid, Christians have an obligation to work toward a future reconciliation. If the country is not to pass from one epoch of oppression and violence into another, South Africa's peoples must find a way to govern themselves by consent and by law, with majority rule and minority rights. There are numerous groups — the NIR, black labor unions, the Zulu movement Inkatha, perhaps even some elements of the government and the ANC — that have much to contribute toward opening a path toward democracy. Our churches should seek every practical opportunity to encourage all South Africans who would dismantle apartheid and build a just, free society in its place.

What we cannot afford is radical rhetoric that declares conflicts irreconcilable and writes off social groups as beyond repentance. Nor does it help to label as "quislings" those who share the same thirst for freedom, but differ on the proper means for attaining it. Instead of burning the few bridges that remain between South Africa's peoples, we need to build more bridges. That task demands more than anti-apartheid speeches. It will require hard thinking — a concern for the consequences as well as the intentions of our actions.

— Alan F. Wisdom

Listening to South Africans

The first responsibility of U.S. Christians, who seek to combat South African apartheid, is to understand better the motives and aspirations of all sectors of South African society. To that end you will want to read Richard John Neuhaus', Dispensations: The Future of South Africa as South Africans See It (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986, \$16.95).

Pastor Neuhaus offers a compelling and readable portrait of the many faces of South Africa. Using an interview style, laced with insightful commentary, he presents representatives of the Afrikaner, English-speaking, "coloured," Indian, and black communities, the latter ranging from the Zulu leader Gatsha Buthelezi to the African National Congress representative at the United Nations. The fact that the reader completes each chapter with some sympathy for the person or position introduced is testimony to the author's ability to listen and report fairly.

The book has, nevertheless, a perspective — a firm commitment to justice, peace, and genuine democracy. Pastor Neuhaus is not beyond raising a rhetorical eyebrow over the unselfconscious preju-

dices of an "inordinately British gentleman," his host at the Durban Club. And certainly Neuhaus is aware of the chilling effect of his understated interview with the ANC spokesman, Mfanafuthi Makatini, regarding the "human costs of the revolution":

I mention General van den Bergh's estimate that 3 million or more blacks would die in an all-out armed struggle....He pauses for reflection and says, "Yes, that is reasonable, 3 or 4 million...." I wonder if such a prospect is not inhibiting. "No, of course not, why should it be? Of course death is very sad, you would have to be a fanatic like Khomeini to deny that. But you look at revolution with your eyes open."

While Pastor Neuhaus explores the historical and political aspects of the South African tragedy, Dispensations is a profoundly religious book — about a religious people in a struggle in which the church has a prominent role. Dispensations focuses on analysis; no pat answers are proposed. Perhaps this is because the future of South Africa is in the hands not of Western observers, but of those whose voices are heard throughout this book.

— DLK