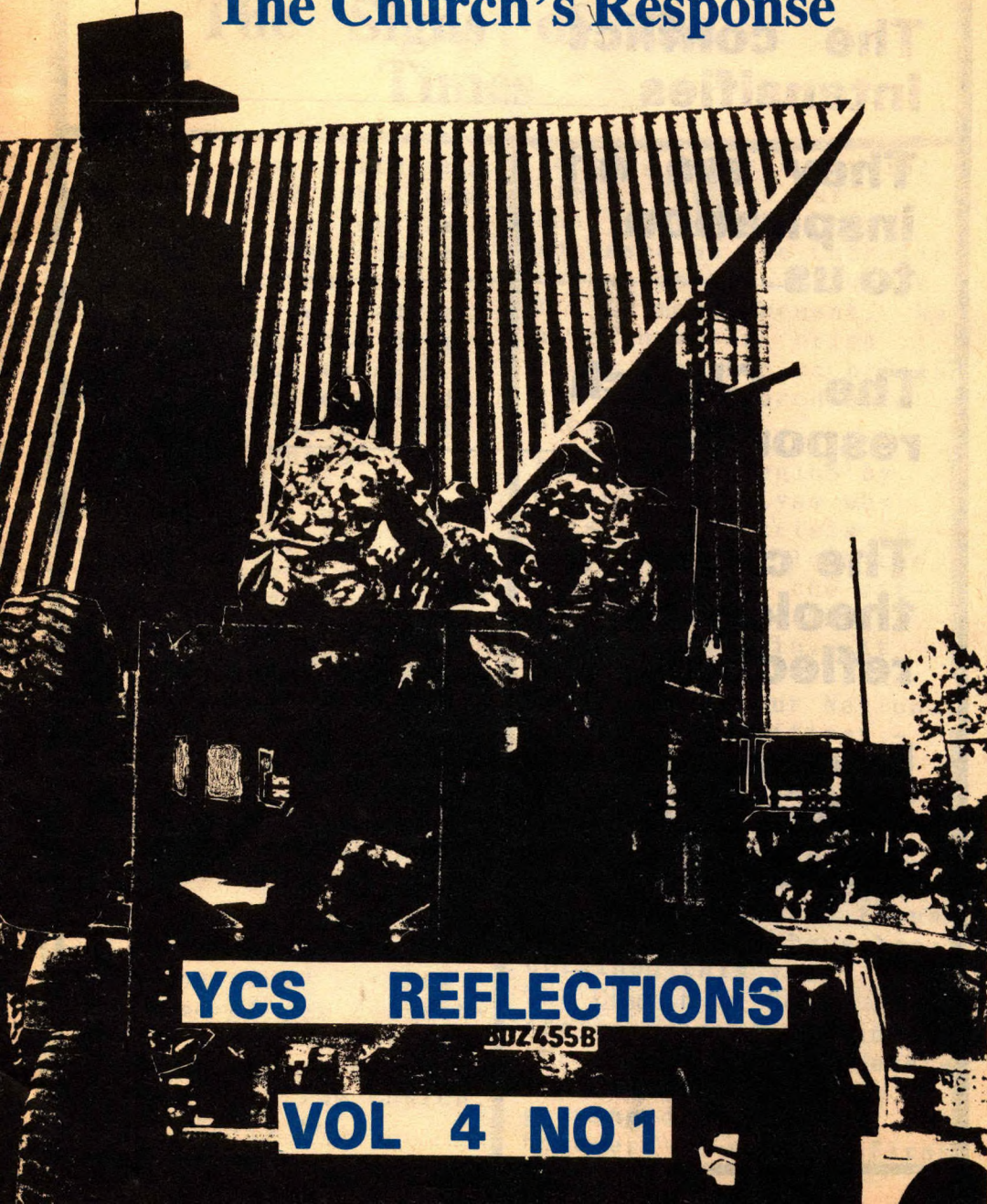


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The Signs of the Times

The Church's Response



YCS REFLECTIONS

302455B

VOL 4 NO 1

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Editorial

The Signs of the Times

The conflicts, suffering, repression and upheavals in our country over the past few months raise a number of issues for Christians. We need to ask ourselves what does God feel about this situation. Surely He is 'weeping' as he did over Jerusalem. One of the first responsibilities of those wishing to build the Kingdom of God is to read the 'signs of the times'. In fact, Christ's despair of the Pharisees was that they would not read the signs of the times.

"You know how to read the face of the sky but you cannot read the signs of the times". (Matthew 16, 3-4).

YCS as part of the Church wishes to share with other concerned Christians some of our reflections on these momentous events which are shaking our country. The Church cannot afford to be

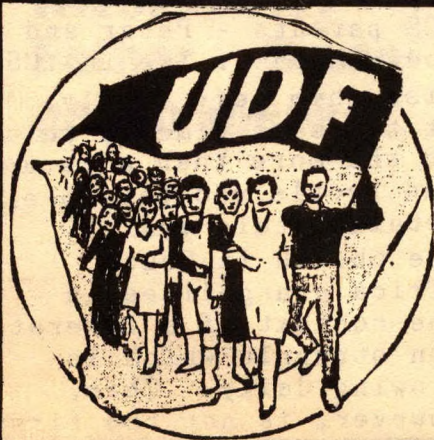
napping at this crucial time. Most of our analysis of the Church focusses on the Catholic Church as this is where YCS is most present. We have, however, tried where possible to broaden out to the Church as a whole.

The booklet begins by trying to analyse why this present crisis is occurring. It lays the foundation for the situation that the Church finds herself in. It goes on to look at the detention of our National Publications Officer - Rapu Molekane and two YCS parents - Peter and Zodwa Mabaso. We in YCS miss them very dearly. At the same time we think of the more than a thousand people who have been detained this year. The Church in South Africa evangelises in the context of a liberation struggle which is growing daily. This, however, is not the first

time that the people of God are faced with this situation. So we include a theological reflection on the Exodus which is the story of the Jewish people's struggle to free themselves from Pharaoh's bondage.

Then we move on to the Church's response to the growing conflict in South Africa. We see the Church moving ever more closely on to the side of the poor and oppressed.

Lastly we interview Fr. Smangalis Mkhathshwa (General Secretary of the Catholic Bishop's Conference) who is a symbol of the 'New Church' which is based on justice. He shares with us his prophetic views on key issues facing the Church and his hopes for the future.



The conflict intensifies

The underlying facts

During 1984 the conflict in South Africa between the rulers and the ruled has intensified to a level not seen in the last 25 years.

After the Government's 66 % "yes vote" success in the White referendum at the end of last year, over 80% of Coloured and Indian people boycotted the tri-cameral elections, and the African town council elections attracted even less support.

Black pupils and students have been boycotting classes for most of the year, with at times over a million pupils staying away from classes.

Many of the African townships have become virtually ungovernable, and the "unrest" this year has left at least 170 people dead and thousands injured.

About 1 100 people have been detained this year. More workers have been on strike in 1984 than ever before - despite the recession. And popular opposition is becoming increasingly focussed through the United Democratic Front.

The South African economy is also in a bad way. The inflation rate now stands at

13 % and the value of the rand has declined rapidly against the dollar, making foreign imports costly. Thousands of workers have been laid off in the last few months and the unemployment figure stands at well over 3 million.

At the diplomatic level the Government is also floundering, P W Botha opened the year with his "historic" tour of Europe. South Africa's "friends" were euphoric. But the first flushes of success did not last long. P W was met by over 50 000 demonstrators in London and thereafter things went downhill,

As a result of the Consulate 6 sit-in and the Government's refusal to send back the Coventry 4, diplomatic relations with Britain have become more strained than ever before. Despite Reagan's re-election, in the USA the disinvestment movement has reached new heights.

Militarily, the Nkomati Accord was a success for the Government. After at least 4 years of concerted de-stabilisation by the SADF and its surrogates the Mozambique Government was forced to expel the ANC. A similar agreement with Swaziland was revealed, and later one with Lesotho was squeezed out. The main aim of these "accords" was to break the ANC.

They have clearly failed to achieve this aim. The ANC has

managed to increase, rather than reduce, their number of sabotage attacks and numerous independent polls show that its popularity is growing within South Africa.

What is clear from all this is that there is a crisis in the South African state. But we need to look beyond the surface appearance and examine some of the underlying reasons.

The basic problem permeating the fabric of South African society is apartheid. 30 million people are ruled by a government representing 4½ million people, and no amount of tampering with tri-cameral parliaments has changed this fact.

In the late 1970's the skills shortage caused by job reservation, growing labour unrest, the 1976/77 uprisings, South Africa's growing isolation and the liberation of Angola and Mozambique, prompted P W Botha and others in the National

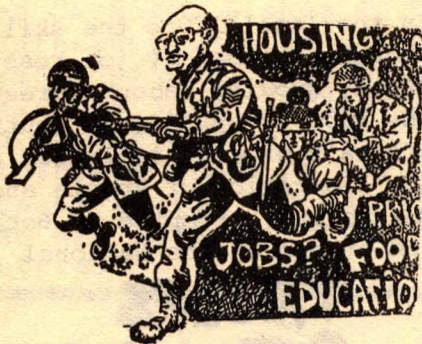
**TROOPS
OUT NOW**



Party to push for certain piecemeal reforms while tightening up on the State's repressive apparatuses.

From the sections of the White population the response was a backlash. From the Black majority the response was complete rejection, and a growing and increasingly organised opposition, culminating in the formation of the UDF.

Black education, housing, wages and living conditions have deteriorated. Forced removals have continued. And as more opposition has grown, repression has intensified, with the SADF playing an increasing role within the country.

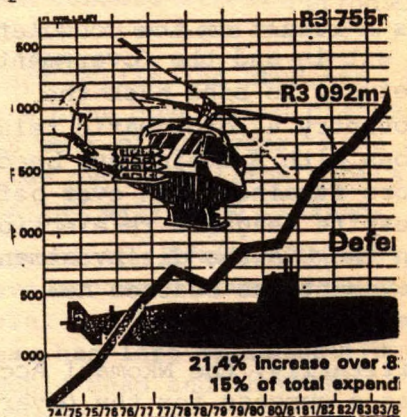


What has happened over the last few years is that the different aspects of the crisis - political, economic, diplomatic, etc - have come together to create a situation from which there is no easy escape for South Africa's rulers.

In the economic sphere, for example, "objective" factors

like the drought, the strong dollar and low gold price, and South Africa's position as a country dependent on foreign technology, have contributed to the severity of the recession.

But even if some of these problems were to be alleviated, the South African economy would still be in dire straits. One of the main causes of the high inflation rate is the nature of Government expenditure. Last year the official defence budget increased by over 22%, and real defence expenditure last year was



close to R 5 billion - or 20% of the total budget. And with millions of rands being pumped into the Bantustands, the illegal occupation of Namibia, the implementation of influx control and the pass law system, the Group Areas act, and numerous other areas of the apartheid edifice, there is simply not much left for Black education, housing and welfare.



High unemployment, low wages, increasing rentals, these are some of the hardships which face residents daily

*Whoever wants to help must do it now and not wait for the perfect moment when conditions both here and elsewhere will have changed fundamentally anyway. Hunger can't wait. —
Gunther Grass*

11 times as much is still spent on the education of each White child as on each African child. This, combined with the prefect system, the age limit, and corporal punishment, has been the underlying cause of the boycotts this year.

In the Vaal high unemployment, low wages, increasing rentals were some of the hardships which residents were facing daily. In the Town Council elections at the end of 1983 polls ranged between 2 and 10%. Some residents voted because candidates promised to reduce rentals. But in August rent increases were announced and the township erupted.

What started as a peaceful protest turned into violence when police - and some councillors - opened fire on residents. This year it is estimated that over 200 people have been killed in the "unrest" and many more injured. The result has been that despite virtual police and SADF occupation the townships have become "ungovernable". **The people organise**

Similarly the strikes, the stayaways, the election and class boycotts are all expressions of widespread opposition to rule by a White minority government. For the majority of people the apartheid state is a foreign power

and their efforts are directed at ending colonial rule.

But it would be wrong to assume that the political action in the townships, schools and factories is simply a result of spontaneous anger. Since the late 1970's people have been organising themselves in trade unions, community-student-youth- and women's organisations and political groupings. Many of these organisations have seen the Freedom Charter, a document drawn up by thousands of people across the country in 1955, as expressing their basic demands.

In August 1983 over 400 organisations got together and formed the United Democratic Front. Despite massive State harassment, including the detention of hundreds of UDF leaders and members of its affiliates, false pamphlets, frequent raids on offices, and a constant barrage of abuse from the SABC, the UDF has grown and provided the apartheid state with its biggest challenge in 25 years.

The Town Council, management committee and tri-cameral elections were a dismal failure. Organisation spread to the rural areas. ½ million signatures were collected expressing support for the UDF and opposition to the new constitution. Internal and international opposition to military con-



11 times as much is still spent on the education of each white child as on each African child

scription, the Bantustan system and apartheid education has intensified. $\frac{1}{2}$ million workers stayed away from work for two days in protest against detentions and the situation in Black schools in response to a call by trade unions and UDF affiliates.

Through the British consulate sit-in by 6 UDF leaders escaping detention, South Africa's diplomatic attention has deteriorated and world attention has been focussed on apartheid.

South Africa's rulers are faced with an untenable situation. As opposition to minority rule becomes more

organised and militant, they will increase repression. But despite the vicious repression of the last few years, they have not managed to break the back of the organisations and movements opposing them. It appears that the more they resort to the big stick, the less chance they will have of breaking their international isolation.

What the democratic movement is saying is that until every nook and cranny of apartheid rule is removed and replaced with a government representative of all the people, the crisis will deepen.

They are an inspiration to us

Detentions have been on the increase and since the beginning of this year 1 064 people have been detained. The Church is not exempt from this repression and at present we in YCS are very aware of the fact that one of our members and the parents of two of our members are at present being held in solitary confinement under Section 29 of the Internal Security Act.

Rapu detained again ...

(23 years old) We all know Rapu as a highly committed and dedicated Christian. He is not only the Publications Officer of the YCS National Team but is also a very active person in his community. Last year he was detained for 3 months and held in solitary confinement. It would seem, however, that his experience did not reform him but made him even more determined to continue in the struggle for freedom and justice. On 7th September he was detained under Section 50 of the Preventative Detentions Act which allows for two weeks detention without trial. He was released on 1st October. Within 10 days he had been re-detained and this time we fear

another long detention in solitary confinement

Rapu has been involved in the heart of the battles for dignity and freedom. His life has been in danger many times, but his will, like the will of the people in South Africa to be free, is unbreakable.

Our hope and faith in Rapu's courage comes from his commitment to his 'people' and his incredible faith.

"We are in difficulties on all sides, but never cornered; we see no answer to our problems, but never despair; we have been persecuted, but never deserted; knocked down, but never killed; always wherever we may be, we carry with us in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus, too, may always be seen in our body."
(2 Corin: 4: 9).



Rapu's mother



Parents taken

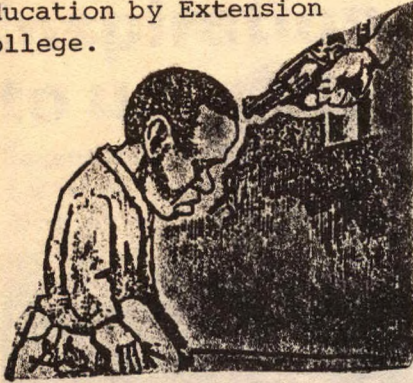
At 1:00 am on Wednesday, 3rd October, the police detained Peter and Zodwa Rosemany Mabaso, the parents of YCS members - Nhlanhla and Joel Mabaso. The other two children are Lindi (10) and Nkhuli (3). After the police ransacked their house, they took the parents together with the 3 year old Nkhuli to Protea Police Station. Nkhuli was brought back the following day. The parents are being held in solitary confinement under Section 29 of the Internal Security Act which

Left to care for themselves after Peter and Zodwa were detained

provides no access to a lawyer, doctor, priest, each other, or even the youngest of their children. Police have refused to accept the food and clothing that the children have taken to their parents.

Peter and Zodwa belong to the Regina Mundi parish in Soweto and are prominent Catholics in their community. They are also involved in Marriage Encounter and have helped to set up a family counselling service in Soweto. Zodwa is also an executive member of

the Grail in South Africa and she works for the Theological Education by Extension College.

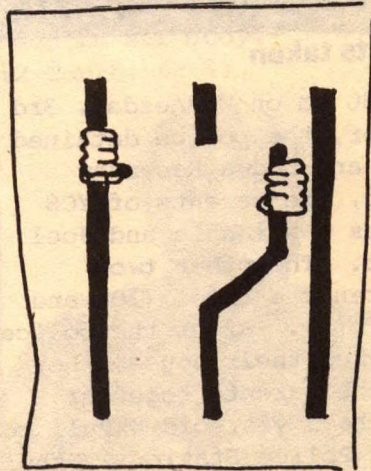


Zodwa and Peter have always supported YCS in Soweto. The commitment of their children is largely due to the support and education received from their parents. Although the children are well supported by their community, the removal of the parents is bound to have an effect especially on the younger children. We in YCS hold Peter and Zodwa in high esteem. They are an inspiration to us, as Catholics, as parents and as fellow South Africans involved in the struggle for justice and peace.

For centuries the Church has been persecuted. The option for justice can only result in suffering and struggle. We realise that many will have to make painful sacrifices in the effort to develop a free and loving society.

The Church responds

The events of the past year have been unlike any other period in our history. The resistance to the State is no longer only from students. Over 600 organisations have joined the UDF. Parents are members of the trade unions and are also becoming deeply involved in resistance to apartheid. State repression is more brutal than in the past ten years. Many more people are being detained, killed or injured. The SADF raids and presence in the townships implies a civil war as white youth face fellow black South Africans in the townships.



Church statements

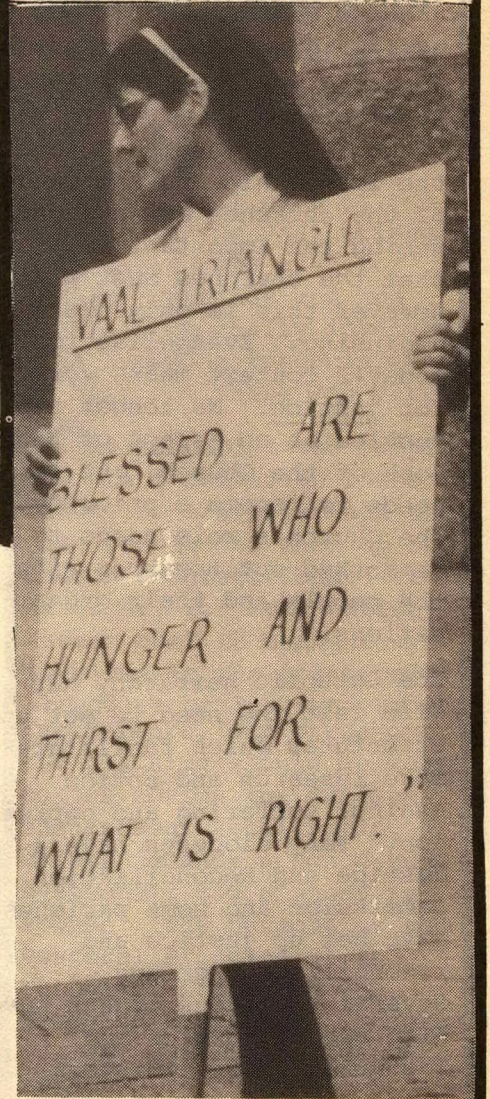
The Church has been aware of the "signs of the times" and has spoken out. The synods

or conferences of the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational and Catholic churches have issued statements about the recent detentions and unrest in the townships, forced removals, compulsory military conscription and the role of the SADF in the townships. The leaders of most of the Churches spoke out strongly against the implementation of the New Constitution and in so doing encouraged people not to vote. Revd Allan Boesak called on people to reject the New Constitution. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches has condemned apartheid, pointing out that it is clearly a heresy. These statements have been crucial because the Church, with its large following, has a great deal of influence.

The Church also had access to basic resources of food, money and medical attention which the community desperately needed.

The invasion of Sebokeng by the army and police - Operation Palmiet - was condemned by the churches. The theme of the condemnations centred around the fact that the SADF was now the aggressor and was being used for more than keeping the "enemy" out of South Africa. A demonstration of nuns and priests was held outside the Carlton Centre

in Johannesburg to express publicly their condemnation of the raid. This was very important as picketing against the SADF and injustice is not seen as one of the traditional roles of a priest or nun.



A demonstration of nuns and priests held outside Carlton Centre in Johannesburg

Nuns and priests are no longer hidden away in churches but are on the streets with the people and their grievances. This is their true role - to fight for justice.

The challenge to the church

During 1984 the churches accepted the challenge of getting more involved in the struggle for justice. Both the leadership and the members of the churches are gradually seeing the important role that the churches must play. However this is only the beginning. Evangelisation in today's context means working for justice. No longer can justice be an aspect of the work of the Church, but it needs to become a priority. The Church's role needs to be worked out **together** with the people and their organisations.

The Catholic hierarchy has also felt the need to set up structures which facilitate more research and action against suffering and oppression. Many dioceses have a Justice and Reconciliation Commission and some parishes have set up justice and reconciliation groups. Several religious orders have also set up justice and reconciliation committees.

The role of church leaders in the struggle

Many Church leaders have felt

the need to ally themselves closely with political groupings which are involved in resistance to apartheid.

Both Revd Allan Boesak (President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches) and Fr Smangaliso Mkhathshwa (General Secretary of the Catholic Bishops Conference) are patrons of the UDF (United Democratic Front). Revd Frank Chikane serves as the Vice-president on the Transvaal UDF executive. Other Church leaders like Bishop Desmond Tutu (Nobel Prize winner and until recently Secretary General of the SACC), Archbishop Denis Hurley (President of SACBC) and Dr Beyers Naude (Director of the Christian Institute before it was banned) have been singularly outspoken in their criticisms of the Government.

Church leaders are not exempt from the repressive measures. Fr Smangaliso Mkhathshwa was detained in the Ciskei and Revd Jeff Moselane and Fr Lord McCamel and others have been detained in the Vaal and elsewhere. Archbishop Hurley is being charged under the Police Act for having spoken out against the atrocities in Namibia. The Minister of Police is now threatening to charge Revd Allan Boesak for his allegations against the police.

These church leaders are

symbols of the Church's participation in the struggles of the people.

Church actions

The need to become involved in action which challenges apartheid has become a priority for many groupings and organisations in the Church.

One of these actions was to explain the reasons for the forming of the UDF to Church people. A number of UDF leaders were asked to speak at Church events. Here the anti-election campaign and the Million Signature campaign were explained and discussed. Soon after that a number of Christians embarked on a campaign to collect signatures in support of the UDF at several parishes. This action was significant as it encouraged Christians to make their "mark against apartheid".



Actions around detentions have also been a central issue. A mass was organised for Fr Smangaliso Mhathshwa. Hundreds of Catholics attended. Services and prayers for those in detention were also held in

many parishes. Some Christians also felt the need to educate fellow Christians about the security legislation and the conditions of detention. The fact that prominent Catholics have been detained and that others are hounded by security police has brought this issue closer to home.

The Churches responded immediately to the recent unrest in the townships. Priests became an integral part of the struggles in the Vaal triangle. Church halls were used for community meetings and the Church was centrally involved in the numerous funerals which were held for those who were killed.

In the townships the people who are involved in these struggles are after all the same people who make up our Church congregations. It is necessary for each parish to assess what it means to be involved in the political struggles of its own members. Furthermore, our structure and planning should be geared to our option for justice. The present accelerating crisis demands a concerted, systematic and planned response. The outcome of the Pastoral Planning of the Catholic Church and the proposed Ecumenical Conference of 1987 must be an adequate response to these signs of the times, if we are to remain true to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The crisis - a theological reflection

1. Introduction

Crisis is a word that people are using to describe the events which are shaking the country at present. On a national level over the past year we have witnessed the rejection of the tricameral elections by Coloureds and Indians, the strikes, rent protests, school boycotts and rejection of puppet councillors. All of these events taken together, reveal the people's rejection of a system which denies them a living wage, a system which keeps the rich wealthy and the majority poor, and a system which denies genuine participation to the majority in the governing of this country.

2. The cry of the people:

The events of the past year represent the cry of the people for a new and just social order. The State has responded to that cry by piling on one repressive measure after the other. Killings, imprisonment, detentions, the harassment of popular leadership and the systematic distortion of the people's demands by the media are the techniques employed

by the State to silence the cry of the people. Despite the brutal reaction of the State, the people continue to mobilise, organise and express their rejection of the unjust system. The cry of the people will not and cannot be silenced.



3. A crisis or an exodus?

The ruling classes, through the medium of television, radio and certain newspapers, misrepresent and distort the meaning of the reaction of the people. Since their interests are threatened the rulers have to convince people that the demands and actions of the people are orchestrated by "subversives" and "agitators". In the name of "western christian civilisation" they claim to protect the people

from the forces of "darkness and Godlessness".

The people, and those Christians struggling with the people, are not deceived by these lies and blatant falsehoods. The Church of the poor reflecting on the actions of the people in the light of faith, believes that we have embarked on a new EXODUS in continuity with and fidelity to the EXODUS of old. In the name of the God of the EXODUS and in the name of Jesus of Nazareth the struggle against exploitation and oppression must continue. As Christians and as Church we are part of this struggle. Many of the oppressed interpret their struggle in the light of old Israel's interpretation of its own struggle for justice and liberation. In the Exodus story the poor and oppressed find inspiration and hope because it affirms the power of the oppressed in history. Let us look at that story.

Around

1720 BC a group of Hebrews were forced by drought and the lack of resources to migrate to Egypt in the hope of being able to work and survive. Initially they were allowed to settle in an area of land between the Nile River and Lake Timsah. In ancient and modern times this area was one of the richest sections of Egypt. This area generated more revenue at that time than

any other part of Egypt. The Hebrews worked the land and began to prosper and increase in number. (Exod. 1:2).

— The situation

In the 1500's a whole new group came into power and a change in the lives and living conditions of the Hebrews now took place. The new king regarded the Hebrews as foreigners and used this fact to justify their enslavement. The Hebrews were no longer allowed to make use of the land to grow crops and keep flocks of sheep and goats. They were coerced into the two cities of Pithom and Rameses where they were used as cheap labour. The conditions of work were appalling. Some of the Hebrews made bricks for the building projects of the king, others had to carve out stone from the hills to serve as building blocks for huge temples and palaces. Some were organised into gangs whose responsibility it was to drag the tons of stone for miles to construction sites. Most of the women had to do duty as housemaids in the houses of the wealthy Egyptians. The slaves were poorly fed and housed. Despite the harsh conditions the Hebrews increased in number. (Exod. 1:2) The Egyptian king ordered the midwives to kill all boys born to the Hebrews, in this way hoping to decrease the Hebrew population. The

midwives did not obey the request and the king decided on harsher measures. He ordered that all Hebrew boys be killed by throwing them into the river. (Exod. 1: 15-22).

It was in this context of suffering and oppression that Moses was born. (Exod. 2: 1-10).

— Moses and his commitment to the people

When Moses grew up he could not avoid being affected by the brutal oppression of his own people. One day he saw a fellow Hebrew being savagely beaten by an Egyptian. Furious at this injustice, he struck and killed the Egyptian. (Exod. 2: 11-15). Fearing the wrath of the authorities, Moses fled into the desert and went into exile.

While in exile he got married and looked after his father-in-law's herd of goats and sheep. During this time he had an opportunity to reflect on his life, his action in Egypt and the oppression of his people. He realised that isolated actions which blindly strike out at the system were not enough. He began to see that the people needed to be aroused and organised if the



'You have oppressed us for too long.'

oppression was to be thrown off. During this time God called him and said:

'I have seen the miserable state of my people in Egypt; I have heard their cry to be set free of their slave drivers. Yes I am well aware of their suffering.

So come, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring the sons of Israel, my people, out of Egypt.'
Ex. 3: 7-10

This call from God gave Moses the courage and hope he needed to return to Egypt to organise the people in their struggle

for freedom. God could now intervene on behalf of the Hebrews because they had become fully conscious of their oppression and had begun to organise themselves for a struggle. God could act together with the Hebrews only when they prepared themselves for action also. The sign that they were ready for a struggle is the prayer in Exodus 2:23:

'From the depths of their slavery, their cry came up to God.'
Ex. 2: 23

Moses, together with the other Hebrew leaders confronted the Egyptian king with the demand to be set free. Instead of listening to their grievances the king resorted to even harsher forms of repression.

'They were lazy and that is why their cry is 'let us go'. Make them work harder so they do not have time to stop and listen to the glib speeches of trouble makers.' ***Ex 5: 6-9***

As soon as harsher restrictions were imposed on the people, sections of the Hebrews began to doubt their struggle. They began to complain:

'You have made us hated by Pharaoh and his courts, you have put a sword into their hand to kill us.' ***Ex. 5: 20-21***

The fact that the people began to doubt themselves and their struggle was a source of great concern to Moses and the Hebrew leadership. The fear of victimisation needed to be overcome. Moses turned to God and received the promise that certain signs would be given to the people to encourage them.

'You will see how I will punish Pharaoh. He will be forced to set the people free.' ***Ex. 5: 22-61***

God encouraged his people to continue the struggle and afflicted upon the rulers of Egypt a series of plagues. (Exod. 7:8-11:10). These plagues weakened the resolve of the rulers.

Encouraged by the setbacks imposed upon the Egyptians, Moses led the people to freedom. The Egyptians tried to prevent the massive exodus of the Hebrews, convinced that their superior military might would stop the Hebrews in their tracks. The faith and courage of the Hebrews, however, was stronger than any arms the Egyptians could carry with them. Through this



successful struggle for freedom, the Hebrews became united into one people armed with a living faith in a God of justice and liberation. Through this action of Exodus they became a symbol of the power of the poor and oppressed in history. Their struggle was not yet finished. They believed that only when the whole of the world was reorganised and liberated in favour of the oppressed would the Exodus be complete.

5. Conclusion or beginning?

Despite the fact that our context is different from that of the Hebrews in Egypt nearly 3 000 years ago, there are some valuable lessons to be learnt from this story.

— Where is God and on whose side is he on?

The Exodus story locates the presence of God in the context of the people's struggle to overcome their oppression. If the church wishes to find God today it can only be through a conversion to the demands of the people. The action of the students, the workers and the residents and their demands for an end to a system which ensures wealth for a minority and misery for the majority is the place where the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition is to be found. The "God" of the rulers — the god of "western christian civilisation" is an idol and an opiate.

Collection Number: AG1977

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PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- Historical Papers Research Archive

Location:- Johannesburg

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