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MINISTRY
IN
CONFLICT SITUATIONS

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Consider the following two pastoral counselling situations.¹

The first concerns Steven Louw², a former parabat, who told a magistrate's court how his perceptions had turned full circle during three stints of military service in the townships from June 1984 to June 1985. He started with "positive feelings" toward the SADF. In a year of township duty he toured Tembisa, Uitenhage, Adelaide and Port Elizabeth townships. During this time he was told by his major to "beat up blacks" and to drop them on the other side of the townships; he witnessed troops shoot stones at vehicles and pedestrians using homemade catapults, to try and provoke reaction against the SADF. He was once ordered to drive into a crowd of church-goers leaving a church building. As people scattered, he was ordered to drive from left to right and teargas was thrown. He was ordered by the same major to "drive up and down" to try and attract attention, while troops lay hidden among the shacks. On one occasion a resident who waved a fist was beaten several times while he took snapshots³. He left the army in a state of mental turmoil, his initial view of "protecting the peoples of the country" having been shattered by a host of violent incidents.

The second is 17-year-old Rifleman Steenkamp, quoted as he reacts to his first sight of a dead enemy body, on the northern Namibian border:⁴

"When you look down at the dead man, you think, it could have been me. Being a Christian, you feel it's a life lost but there again it could have been an innocent life, a woman or a child (that the terrorist killed). Because they don't care who they kill. They kill their own people because they are brainwashed by the communists. Somebody has to do it. I've got people I love at home and you are only doing your duty.

¹ Potential counsellors include parents, teachers, pastors and ministers, youth leaders, chaplains, theologians and other leaders of the community, all of whom have contact with troops before, during or after their service. Thus the focus is on the ministry offered by the church as a whole to military personnel, and not on individual military chaplains.

² "Horrorifying Tales of SA Violence", City Press 24 May 1987; and "Ex-Soldier Tells Court of Orders to Beat People", Weekly Mail 15-21 May 1987

³ These were handed to the court as evidence.

⁴ Sunday Tribune 22 February 1981

You are not fighting for the white skin in South Africa, you are fighting for everybody. You are taken from school benches and expected to kill. People don't understand. They call you a racist. It's you or them".

We do not know if chaplains actually did counsel these young men, but the situations of these two are not untypical. What is the Gospel of Christ to Louw and Steenkamp as they wrestle with their emotions? How may the church - probably, in this case, a military chaplain - best minister to them?

Before answering these questions, let us analyse the two situations further. Both men are wrought up emotionally. Both know that it is (usually) wrong to oppress and kill people, and so doing this they feel an overpowering sense of guilt and shame. They deal with these guilt feelings in different ways. Steenkamp deals with his guilt by rationalizing his actions, saying that the dead man "kills his own people because he is brainwashed by the communists"; he copes with his emotions of revulsion at observing death at close hand by insisting that he is fighting "for everybody" - since he knows that to kill on behalf of the "white skin in South Africa" is wrong for the Christian. In short, Steenkamp achieves emotional equilibrium by accepting the military view that the SADF is defending all the people of South Africa against terrorists and communists.

Louw could not initially bring himself to break with the "macho", "tough guy" image promoted by the army. However, the incidents he observed in Port Elizabeth horrified him and created doubt about the morality of his and his colleagues' actions. After initially justifying these actions, he changed his views and on leaving the army joined the End Conscription Campaign. Louw achieved emotional stability by rejecting his former self together with the military justification of the need to keep the townships under control.

Most young men, of course, do not have stories to tell as dramatic as these. Nevertheless these two accounts set in high relief the dilemmas facing chaplains as they preach, offer the sacraments, counsel, and otherwise engage in ministry in the military context. Even if most troops, and most chaplains, are not confronted with heart-rending situations like this at present, it is likely that they will in time to come as the conflicts in South Africa intensify. How might the church and its chaplains respond?

There are three options, which I shall call the pro-military, the anti-military, and the impartial options.

The Pro-Military Option

The pro-military option is to help people like Steenkamp and Louw to understand that the church accepts that wars of defence against unprovoked aggression are justified. Christians are not motivated by greed or revenge when participating in war. They are motivated by duty to their country's legitimate government which is the only institution with the knowledge, the competence and the legal right to decide on

what form of military policy would best serve the interests of its citizens. The chaplain could adduce Biblical support for this view: Jesus did not tell the Roman soldiers to be conscientious objectors, but to be satisfied with their pay; Saint Paul uses military imagery to describe spiritual value ("the whole armour of God"); when the Israelites followed God's commandments they were rewarded with victory in war. Saint Paul urges the Roman Christians to be in subjection to the governing authorities because they are established by God (Rom. 13:1).

To the charge that the present war is in defence of apartheid, our hypothetical chaplain would reply that the SADF is defending South Africans and Namibians against terrorist groupings bankrolled and armed by communist superpowers. The SADF is a politically neutral shield behind which reform may take place. The SADF is better viewed as the state, in which all the peoples of South Africa have an interest, than as an arm of government with political objectives. Indeed, the SADF was the first state institution to deracialize. It is true that the black population of South Africa has genuine grievances. The government is doing all that can reasonably be expected to encourage black development. It has brought 'coloureds' and Asians into the central government through the Tricameral system and has plans for power-sharing with blacks as well. Unfortunately there are radical and communist elements which are manipulating the legitimate grievances of blacks in order to create chaos out of which, they hope, will arise the classless society. It is against these elements that the State of Emergency is aimed: not the bulk of the citizenry, who are well pleased with the Emergency since it allows them to get on with the business of living unhindered.

With this rationale, then, the chaplain would proceed to minister spiritually to the troops. Chaplains should, and do, protest illegal actions by troops when they occur, so they are not encouraging wanton killing. They offer spiritual guidance and care only in order to help soldiers to be mentally prepared for their work. When Rifleman Steenkamp and others are disturbed by violence the chaplains remind them of their duty to their country, their military leaders and their families and loved ones. The chaplain's task is a positive one of encouragement of young men who for perfectly understandable reasons do not want to be in situations of extreme discomfort and danger. So runs the pro-military counselling strategy.

The Anti-Military Option

The anti-military option is to point out to troops like Steenkamp and Louw that the SADF has commandeered them into fighting an unjust war, and that spiritual peace is not found in rationalizing their actions by believing the military propaganda about communists and the like. The only course that could satisfy their conscience is to get out of the whole sinful situation immediately. They might try the official channels by seeking recognition as conscientious objectors, or they might object outright and go to jail, or they might leave the country. Chaplains who believe the war is unjust are spiritually obliged to challenge troops like Steenkamp, in as sympathetic and gentle a way as pos-

sible, to reconsider their position; to leave them justifying the death of "the enemy" on the grounds that they are communists would amount to gross pastoral neglect. To pray with them, offer them the sacraments, and comfort them in a "non-ethical" way, without challenging their twisted moral assumptions would be to contribute directly to military efficiency in an unjust war.

The chaplain adopting an anti-military stance can, like the pro-military chaplain, claim Biblical support. One should not read the Bible selectively. To look at Romans 13:1f only is disingenuous: the subsequent verses read,

"For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behaviour, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake."

If, therefore, rulers become a "cause of fear for good behaviour", if they cease to be "ministers of God to you for good", then the Christian is no longer obliged to be in subjection to them. A simple example will suffice. Franz Stangl, the Kommandant of the extermination camp Treblinka, was convicted in 1971 for collaboration in the death of 900 000 men, women and children.³ Could a German soldier being told to drive Jews to the ovens regard his Kommandant Stangl as a "minister to God for good"? Should he subject himself to Stangl's authority "for conscience' sake"? Heaven forbid.

The anti-military stance concedes that the SADF has not, and is not likely to, kill six million people as Hitler did. It stresses, however, that the SADF is occupying a foreign country, Namibia, where the South African government is engaged in imposing apartheid; and it is involved in keeping the townships in a state of siege. Blacks in South Africa have no way of exercising their political aspirations other than through bantustan governments. These bantustans occupy only 14% of the country's land area, while blacks (that is, Africans) are 71% of the population. Most of them do not live in the Bantustans. They stay in "white" South African cities where they are regarded for political purposes as foreigners. This is the basic injustice of apartheid, to which population registration, group areas, separate and inferior education, and forced removals are ancillary. Despite its reform stance since 1983, the government has not wavered from the policy of separate development and is in the process of granting independence to KwaNdebele. In its insistence that group areas are to stay it is evicting blacks from "white" Cape Town and elsewhere. It is firmly resisting integration in schools. It has rejected the Indaba plan for power-sharing.

³ Sereny, G., *Into That Darkness: From Mercy Killing to Mass Murder* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974)

The anti-military position further notes that the government is resisting negotiation with black political organizations (e.g. UDF, ANC, PAC, AZAPO). Over the past twenty years it has steadily tightened up the security legislation, culminating in a State of Emergency which grants the police indemnity in almost any action that they deem necessary for the maintenance of "law and order". The politics of peaceful protest are not working. It comes as no surprise, then, that blacks in desperation turn to violence. Whether their violence is justified is another matter, but it is clear that they have resorted to violence only after extreme provocation.

Hence, according to this perspective, the role of the SADF. It is being used, on the border and in the townships, to forestall any impetus for the broadening of political representation to blacks. As long as the government can resort to the vastly superior fire-power of the SADF to maintain "law and order", there is no need for it to alter the nature of the white supremacist state. This is not to say that violence against the government is justified, but only to stress that the the SADF has become a necessary condition for the maintenance of white rule and apartheid. Hence the anti-military pastor's belief that the SADF is not a shield behind which reform may take place, but is the government's instrument to keep whites in a position of power and privilege.

Thus the SADF is no longer a "minister to God for good". Christians cannot subject themselves to the SADF "for conscience' sake". Therefore on Biblical grounds young men should resist conscription and chaplains should not make any contribution to the efficiency of the SADF by giving credence to its propaganda. So runs the anti-military pastoral counselling strategy.

The Impartial Option

The impartial option recognizes the validity of both the pro- and the anti-military views, in their own time and place, but insists that the real situation in South Africa is far too complex for these clear-cut perspectives. This is not the time for the church to take unambiguous stands for or against the SADF. The church does not have the knowledge or the competence to do so. The church is not composed of politicians and would be rent apart if it were. Its ministers are ordinary citizens seeking only to impart the Word of God to all those willing to receive it. Besides, such facts of the case as are available suggest that neither the pro- nor the anti-military position is able to accommodate all the relevant information. Both are selective in their factual basis and ideological in their theoretical basis.

For example, the pro-military view ignores the fact that the government has never stated that it will scrap apartheid in the form of the Population Registration Act, the Group Areas Act, the Tricameral parliament and the extension of the 'homelands' system; therefore whatever good the SADF is preserving, it is also preserving the foundations of apartheid, which to the Christian are sinful.

The anti-military position ignores the fact that the ANC uses methods of terrorism which kill and maim noncombatants who are often blacks.

It plays down the influence that the Communist Party has over the ANC and the communist money and arms that the ANC receives. Most uncomfortable for the anti-military view is that thousands of blacks are presenting themselves for voluntary military service each year, and many have to be turned down for lack of places.

With ambiguities like these it is doubtful whether the church could assume a position for or against. Even if it did, the tasks of either rubber-stamping or confronting the military are best done by the church's elected officials not individual pastors. The pastor's role is to preach Christ so that young men are converted, to help them understand the Bible better, to counsel them on the problems they face (predominantly, at this age, relating to sex, drugs and self-discipline), and to administer the sacraments. This the pastor may do either in the SADF or in the ANC's military forces.⁶ In the military, ministers have a special role because of soldiers' fears of death. Soldiers are more receptive to ministry in combat and urgently need comfort and the assurance that God is with them. The pastor also has a role in comforting the family and friends of the fallen.

While performing these exacting tasks it would be inappropriate to expect Christian ministers to adopt a political line in favour of one soldier's view and against another's. When a young man has been called up (on pain of imprisonment) to defend his country, and is faced with the possibility of death on patrol, it is an act of pastoral betrayal to instruct him that he is doing wrong. He has no choice whatsoever, unless he is so fortunate as to be a Christian pacifist - which is not the official theological position of his church. Ministers, as pastors of all of God's flock, must not close their minds to the personal agony and mental pain of their charges. Ministers should sympathize with the troops' position and help them to find solace in Christ alone.

For precisely the same reasons, ministers should help potential conscientious objectors in whatever way they can, by pointing them to biblical and literary sources, writing testimonials, persuading the Officer Commanding that the objector is sincere (if this is the case), and if necessary appearing at the objector's hearing before the magistrate's court or the Board for Religious Objection, as the case may be.

The minister is therefore impartial, offering Rogerian-type nondirective counselling, both to the mass of ordinary troops who do not think much about these things, and to the zealous patriot, and to the doubt-crazed potential conscientious objector. Thus far the impartial position.

EVALUATION

Each of these positions has strong points. The strength of the pro-military position is the logic that if the church believes the war to be just, it has a responsibility to use its moral and spiritual influence to convince the citizenry that this is so, and its ministers

⁶ The ANC in Lusaka has an Anglican chaplaincy, and SWAPO has a Lutheran chaplaincy.

should help prepare soldiers mentally and spiritually. This is the philosophy of "geestelike weerbaarheid"⁷ promoted by the N.G. Kerk and the Afrikaans-speaking chaplains. Incidentally, this is the role that government politicians and the military itself believe that the chaplains to be playing.⁸ (Whether the chaplains of the English-speaking churches actually play this role is of course another matter.)

All three positions claim Biblical support. I shall argue now that this makes perfectly good sense for the first two positions. I shall also argue that it makes no sense for the third, but this argument is deferred until later in the paper. Consider the pro-military position. If the government is basically good, then Christians have an obligation to obey its laws. Given the official position of all the English-speaking churches, including the Presbyterian church, that legitimate rulers are authorized to wage war when this is found to be just and necessary⁹, Christians are further obliged to obey call-up instructions in a just war¹⁰ and the church is morally obliged to support the war effort. Biblical support for this position may then validly be claimed from Rom. 13:1-4.

If however the government is basically bad, then Christians in terms of Rom. 13:1-4 and Rev. 13 are not obliged to obey all its laws. If such a government wages an unjust war, the church is obliged to oppose it and individual Christians are obliged to be conscientious objectors. Biblical support may validly be claimed.

The chief point of difference between the pro- and anti-military positions is not Biblical interpretation or the quality of the internal spiritual lives of their proponents. The basic distinction is in their analysis of the military, political, economic and social position. Having adopted one particular style of analysis, the moral and theological justifications follow.

The question that faces this conference, then, is not to seek out this or that Bible text or theological principle which will dictate - irrespective of the real-life situation! - the content of ministry to military personnel. The question is instead to find out what the real-life situation is. Is the government reforming with sufficient speed or is

⁷ "Spiritual preparedness" or "spiritual battle-readiness"

⁸ The Minister of Defence stated that "Religious preparedness is ... of the utmost importance, and in this regard the Chaplains' Service is playing a significant role in keeping up the morale of our troops" (Hansard 22.4.1982, Col. 301(S)). The Handbook for Chaplains says that chaplains' periods are to be used, among other things, to "promote esprit de corps in the SADF" (p.9); the officer commanding must "use the chaplain as a means at his disposal for the raising of the morale of his troops" (p.10).

⁹ Article 37 of the Thirty-Nine Articles; Calvin, Institutes, Four, XX, 11 and 12; the 1689 Baptist Confession, reprinted in A Faith to Confess (Haywards Heath: Carey Pubns., 1975), p.54; etc.

¹⁰ Subject, of course, to the requirement that the law should guarantee freedom of conscience; thus alternative non-military service should be available for all conscientious objectors.

it not? Is apartheid dead or not? Does the military have a just cause or not? Is the military using means that are commensurate with the ends or is it resorting to "overkill"? Do the government and the military enjoy the support of the majority of the citizenry or not? Are the ANC and other extra-parliamentary opposition movements basically cats-paws of Moscow or are they basically nationalist movements fighting for what they perceive to be their rights? Is the government using its Emergency powers, the police and the military to forestall political change or not? Only when these questions are answered to our satisfaction will it become clear what should be the content of ministry to military personnel.

The Impartial Position

Before answering these questions, we turn to the "impartial" position. This position is open to three objections: (a) it contains a fundamental contradiction; (b) if expressed openly it would be silenced; and (c) it is a form of privatized religion. These points are considered in turn.

(a) On the one hand the moral ambiguities are so great that these pastors find it impossible to support either side and so they limit their moral guidance to issues of personal spiritual growth. On the other hand the pastors are willing to offer counselling and comfort, under military auspices, to soldiers in the SADF.¹¹ Such counselling and comfort puts the men in a better psychological position. With their personal hang-ups sorted out they are better able to integrate themselves into the military system. Therefore this counselling and comfort makes a direct contribution to military efficiency. The pastors may consider themselves to be impartial, but their actions belie this. In the eyes of the troops, military officers and the wider church body they are partisan. Thus the impartial position is self-contradictory.

Consider an example. At 6 a.m. the chaplain is called upon to read the Bible and say a prayer at the company parade. Company prayers that I have heard invariably include prayers for the unit and its officers and sometimes the Defence Force and the government. Suppose a patrol goes out to the townships where unrest is occurring and after intermittent fighting restores "order". One could not then expect the soldiers to think anything other than that the prayers signify that God is with them, that God approves.¹² Hence the contradiction: the chaplains may not think of themselves as partisans to the SADF cause, but through their actions they turn out to be partisan.

It is for reasons like these that Barth¹³ points out that the chaplaincy is tempted to make ethics servile to the ruling ideology:

¹¹ Note that the same argument would apply to chaplaincy on the other side.

¹² The South African Chaplains' Service (SACHS) slogan is "In Hoc Signo" (In This Sign). Legend has it that when Emperor Constantine was converted he saw the words "In this sign conquer" written in the sky.

¹³ K. Barth, (ed. D. Braun) *Ethics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1981), p. 158

"Servility of this kind was what made the war theology of all countries in the last war ... such an abhorrent phenomenon, a phenomenon incompatible far worse from an ethical standpoint than all the arming, shooting and killing, because by this servility the cause of ethics, at least as Christian ethics, was publicly betrayed in such a scandalous fashion. Ethically the most dangerous form of participation is not then that of service in the infantry ... but undoubtedly that of the Chaplains' Service, because this is the place where it is uncannily easy to betray the cause of ethics publicly and to promote that evil ideology instead of ethical reflection..."

Consider a further example. The patrol returns to camp bringing with it a dead body. Whether it is a Swapo guerrilla in northern Namibia, as in the case of Rifleman Steenkamp, or a youth from a South African township is immaterial. The troops are deeply disturbed, never having seen as heart-rending a sight before. What does the chaplain say about the death as he tries to calm the men? If he says, in effect, "Poor guy, what a pity he got involved in communism/terrorism/stone-throwing/unrest..." then he has justified the military action and is not impartial but pro-military. If he says, in effect, "It's apartheid that drove him to revolt, this killing should stop, the government should negotiate..." then he has condemned the military action and is not impartial but anti-military. It is a puzzle what a genuinely impartial pastor might say. When faced with a death, whether one of one's own men or one of the enemy, one has to respond with a justification of some kind or other. One's heart cries out for some kind of moral conclusion, in order to place this enormity, this tragedy, in some compartment of one's moral framework. In the unlikely event that the pastor tries to skirt the issue by getting on with a Biblical text, or speaking or praying on other matters, that too puts him into the pro-military camp, for to be silent about a killing is to condone it. How, in such a situation, could one possibly be impartial? It is beyond my imagining that a pastor would say, "There are so many moral ambiguities in this whole business that I don't know if you killed this man justifiably or not ..." One simply cannot consign tragedies of this magnitude to a moral and spiritual void.

On the issues that really count, therefore, it appears that there is no such thing as an impartial chaplain. One can be pro-military; one can be anti-military and be thrown out immediately; but impartiality is impossible. One suspects that most ministry exercised under military auspices is tacitly supportive of the military.

The soldiers might be excused for thinking that these pastors support the military. Military chaplains the world over wear military uniforms.¹⁴ In most chaplaincies they wear rank. In the SADF, National Service chaplains have the (visible) rank of two-pip lieutenant, Citizen Force and Permanent Force chaplains have the protocol rank of

¹⁴ Even the West German military chaplaincy which for historical reasons is further distanced from the military than are other chaplaincies, requires chaplains to wear specified overalls on manoeuvres.

colonel, and the secretariat of the South African Chaplains' Service (SACHS) have the (visible) rank of colonel to general. Soldiers have to salute and stand to attention before chaplains as they do to all officers. Chaplains undergo security clearance procedures. They are paid by the military, receiving not even a stipend from the church. They have chaplains' conferences, the minutes of which are not made available to the churches.¹³

These facts are not adduced in order to demonstrate guilt by association, which is a concept foreign to Western legal systems. The problem is not that the chaplains are associated with the military in some way or other (all of us are associated, in some way or other, with all kinds of organizations), but that the kind of association that the military requires of its chaplains (i) indicates that they are in support of the military and (ii) places them under the control of the military instead of the control of the church.

(i) follows from the security clearance requirement. It is unlikely that people who are genuinely impartial would be appointed to the position of permanent force chaplain. (ii) follows from the total financial dependence of the chaplain upon the military, which puts the military in a powerful position to influence the chaplain's views, and from the fact that chaplaincy is normally a career option, which means that chaplains are isolated from the wider church and are more influenced by other military officers with whom they mix.

(b) The second difficulty with the impartial position is that it has to remain covert. If these pastors were to state their position clearly, namely that the moral ambiguities on both sides are so serious that they cannot support either, they would be dismissed by the military. No armed force can afford to have elements in its midst which question its legitimacy. What armed forces need is either support for the cause, or silence about the chief moral and political issues regarding the cause. Discussion leading to moral ambiguities would raise doubts in the minds of soldiers who are desperately seeking absolute assurance that what they are doing is right - for lacking such total assurance they would not have the conviction necessary to make the supreme sacrifice. Even if it were possible to be impartial, one would never be able to "come clean" about one's convictions.

Therefore the impartial position is open to the same objection as the anti-military position: that once enunciated clearly, the military would silence it. Regarding the fundamental ethical question, "Is all this justified or not?", these chaplains would have to remain silent. This leads on to the third objection.

¹³ In 1979 a chaplains' conference was called by the Chaplain-General to discuss the "onslaught" on National Service by conscientious objectors. The author wrote repeatedly to the Chaplain-General for the minutes and was curtly informed to "cease" the letter-writing "forthwith". Contrast this with the openness of the Methodist Chaplaincy Connexional Committee, which supplied copies of all its minutes without demur.

(c) If chaplains confine their message and their counselling to issues of personal spiritual growth they have privatized their religion. They have said in effect that their faith, and the Bible, and their theology, have nothing of consequence to say about the great controversial issues of our day. Of course these pastors might not think of their own faith as privatized; but if the troops hear nothing from them about the justice or otherwise of the war, they could not be blamed for thinking that the pastors' religion actually does not have anything important to say about it.

To people with fundamentalist theological convictions this is of course just as it should be. For them God communicates with each individual soul, whose salvation is the supreme good, and God does not have much to say about the world, either because that is the government's business or because the world is destined for sin and destruction anyway. This style of privatized fundamentalist religion is, however, not in accord with the Reformed understanding of the Bible which takes a positive view of the world, regarding it as subject to God's common grace. In the Reformed understanding the Bible and faith apply to all of life, not merely to the "soul".

Only Two Positions

Our conclusion so far, then, is that there are only two positions: the pro-military position and the anti-military position. The chief difference among pastors and ministers and chaplains is the degree of conviction with which we hold to these positions, and the volubility with which we express them; but none of us actually succeeds in being impartial. We have also concluded that the difference between these two positions is in political, economic and social analysis; it is not in the area of Biblical and theological justification, which both have aplenty. It remains, therefore, for us to answer the set of questions on page eight which will help us decide whether the war is just, and which in turn will determine the content of ministry to military personnel.

Before doing this, let us first clarify what we are not trying to do. We are not trying to decide which side - the SADF on the one hand, or the ANC and other guerrilla movements on the other - is more just. Beside its being illegal for us to conclude that the ANC and others are waging a just war, we simply do not have the requisite information to do this because of government censorship and deliberate disinformation strategies against these movements. Oliver Tambo's statements may not be quoted. To possess their documents, to make contacts with them, to promote their ideas - all of these are either illegal or are likely to attract Security Police reprisals in the form of detention without trial or worse. However, the outcome for our purposes is little different either way. Whether we conclude (a) SADF unjust, ANC unknown; or

(b) SADF unjust, ANC also unjust; we are equally under moral obligation not to support unjust wars.¹⁶

Consider, for example, the Falklands war. There is a widespread feeling that the whole effort was a waste. Countless millions of pounds were spent and many scores of lives were lost, all for the sake of a postage-stamp-sized scrap of land in the South Atlantic. Juan Borges, the great Argentinian novelist, commented: "A fight between two bald men over a comb". Both sides were unjust; it would be immoral to support either, for this leads only to futile bloodshed and financial waste. Which is what the Archbishop of Canterbury implied, to the chagrin of the Tories, in his sermon at the service at Westminster Abbey, which had been intended by the latter to be a service of "rejoicing" for "victory".

Is the SADF Waging a Just War?

We turn, then, to consider whether the SADF is waging a just war. We have already considered, in the "anti-military option", the overall political situation in the country: blacks who constitute the majority of the population have political expression only in the tiny bantustans; and the government has made it clear that apartheid in the form of group areas, forced removals, separate education and the tricameral parliament are here to stay. This much is common cause for most people, white and black, in the English-speaking churches. Also common cause is that racism and apartheid are sinful. Does it not follow, then, that the SADF's war is unchristian and unjust?

Some in the English-speaking churches would feel that this does not follow. They distinguish between the government and the country.¹⁷ The SADF is defending not the government with its sinful policies but the country and all its peoples. The SADF is above politics and is defending us against communism. There is no connection between the war on our borders and the legitimate grievances of black people against apartheid. The war is a nonpolitical war protecting the integrity of our borders and guarding against internal subversion which is encouraged by foreign powers like the Soviets. All South Africans benefit from this protection and should therefore support the SADF - while opposing apartheid at home.

The reply to this is that nonpolitical wars are a rarity if they ever exist. The dictum of the 19th Century German war strategist, von Clausewitz, is well known: war is the continuation of politics by other means. The South African variant may be: war is the continuation of

¹⁶ There is a third option: (c) SADF mildly unjust, ANC grossly unjust, so on average the SADF is fighting a just war. From what follows it will become clear that the SADF is not merely mildly unjust, and whether the ANC is egregiously unjust we have no way of telling, because of censorship and because it has never been in government. One may choose to believe the government's view that (c) is the case; but it would be unwise to believe the statements of any unjust government *voetstoots*.

¹⁷ Alternatively, the government and the state.

apartheid politics when the police have failed to keep the resistance under control. The connections between apartheid and the SADF's actions are threefold. (a) Blacks have no form of democratic political representation. Despite decades of peaceful protest, apartheid has been steadily extended and security legislation tightened. Therefore blacks have turned to guerrilla warfare. Note that this is quite unlike the West German Baader-Meinhof terrorists who do have democratic channels but have forsaken them in favour of murky underground activities against business people. (b) The SADF is unable to rid itself of apartheid. Recall the racial separation of the Navy SWANS near the start of their training in 1986. If the SADF is nonpolitical, defending us from communism, and not preserving apartheid, why does it not prove its sincerity by deracializing? (c) Even if the SADF's motives were perfect; even if the ANC were communists; and even if the war was purely one of self-defence against Soviet aggression -- even then, we would be left with an undemocratic government pursuing apartheid policies! Whatever else the SADF is protecting, it is also protecting a political system which is racist at the core. It is academic to say that the war is nonpolitical when it is defending, among other things, a government committed to apartheid.

It is true that the ANC has a communist presence and that it receives money and arms from the USSR. Judging by the information gleaned by the business people and Afrikaner politicians who have met with the ANC recently, it appears that the ANC is committed to democratic procedures. In an interview with Oliver Tambo (published illegally in the Cape Times last year) the latter said that the ANC was committed to nationalizing only major industrial groups, thus preserving a mixed economy. If he is a communist, he is a very bad communist indeed, because these are nothing other than welfare state capitalist policies! Such a state would be less socialist than are India, France or South Korea. At academic conferences in Europe last year, ANC representatives made their capitalist position clear by saying that workers will not be permitted under an ANC government to do just as they please. Again, the leadership of the UDF is largely middle-class. These two organizations are basically black nationalist movements seeking to obtain a share of the political and economic pie of their country.

This pattern is repeated again and again in Africa. Nationalist movements conduct their struggle against white or colonialist governments with the military help of communist superpowers, mainly because Western governments are less inclined to give military aid to guerrillas.¹⁸ Once in power, knowing that the West is more generous with developmental aid, they adopt mixed-economy policies to attract aid moneys and multinational investment. Socialism becomes attenuated to welfare statism plus rhetoric. This describes the Zimbabwean experience. On the scanty evidence available to us, there is little reason to believe that the ANC would be any different if it were elected.

¹⁸ Note that alliances with foreign powers do not necessarily imply ideological agreement with or political subjection to those powers. Churchill formed a military alliance with Stalin during the Second World War in order to overcome a common enemy, the German Wehrmacht.

Therefore the argument that the SADF is waging a nonpolitical war in defence of freedom against communism represents a misreading of the political data that are available to us. The SADF is fighting a political war in defence of apartheid policies against homegrown nationalist movements. The SADF's side of the war is unjust.

The implications that follow from this conclusion have already been alluded to. If this conclusion is correct, the church's ministry will include efforts to persuade soldiers that the war is a political war in defence of apartheid policies against nationalist movements. Such ministry would not persist for long under military auspices. Ministry to military personnel could, and should, be continued outside of military auspices. Most Christian soldiers go to church when on pass, and they return to church after their stint in the army. When undergoing training they are frequently permitted to attend local churches in nearby towns, as I did in Grahamstown when doing military service at 84 TSD. Thus some forms of ministry can continue. The church should make special efforts to extend these.

But would this not constitute pastoral neglect? Is the church not obliged to minister to all of God's children, no matter how sinful? Murderers on Death Row receive ministry; why should not a troop, who has no murderous intentions and who is not in the army by choice?

Theologically the church is obliged to minister to all. However, the church is not obliged to minister in the fashion prescribed by the military. In Reformed theology the church alone decides the content of its ministry, without state intervention. If the church decides that its ministry includes, among other things, moral guidance on the great issues affecting the lives of troops; and if the church is convinced that the war is unjust; and if the military then declines ministry by the church, then that is the military's decision. The church's doors remain open to military personnel, even if the military closes its doors to the church.

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