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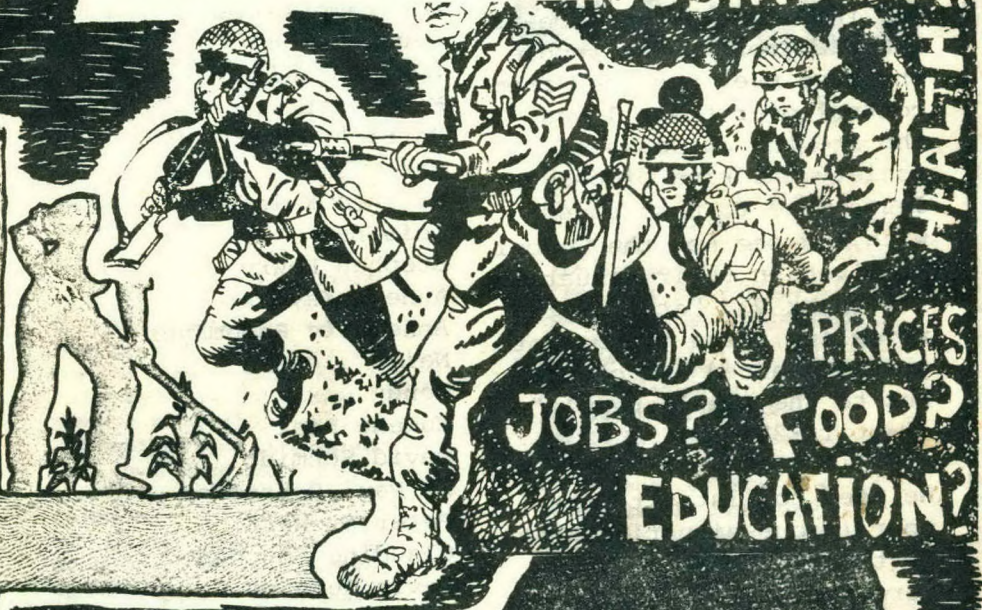
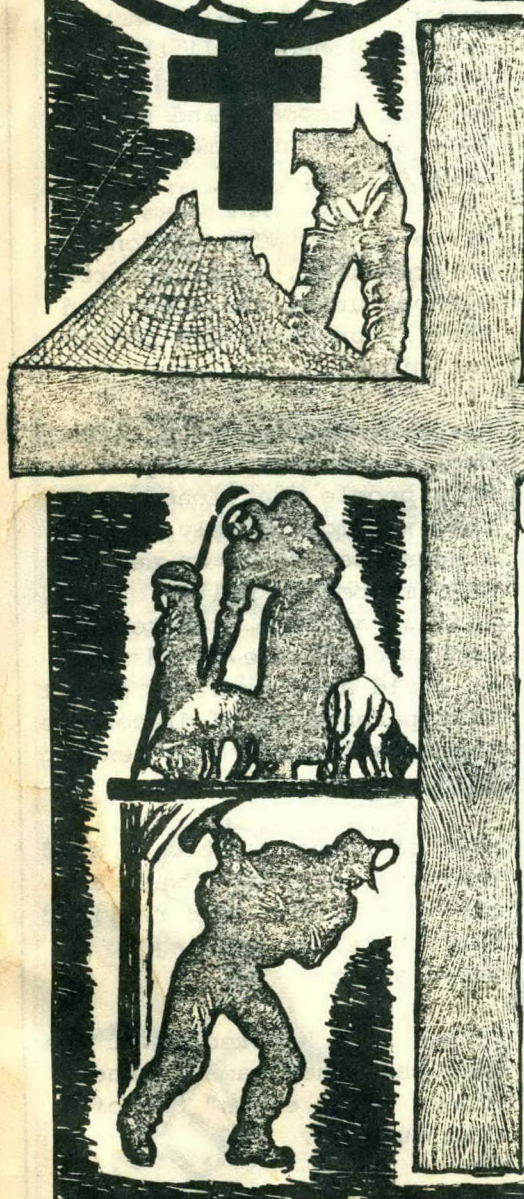
CROSSFIRE

AN NCFS PUBLICATION
DECEMBER 1983

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AFFILIATE



The Challenge to the Church



AFRICA



EDITORIAL

The theme of this edition is the theme chosen at National Conference; "Formation towards a Church of the Poor". The IMCS International Conference in Canada last year took 'a preferential option for the poor'. The AFS has chosen 'Option for the Poor' as a focus for the year. All this points to a renewal in the Church, a shift away from a faith divorced from life to a faith that is informed by, and then transforms, the way we live our lives.

The focus on the poor means that we look to the people who have been excluded from control over their lives, who are the outcasts of society, the kind of people Jesus used to hang round with, and see how the Gospel is lived in their situation. "I thank you Father for revealing these things not to the learned and clever but to the simple people" (Matt 11:25)

We need to listen to the poor in our situation; what do they want? how do they perceive reality? what does their situation demand of us? how does our faith relate to this? what is the Christian response? how do we together live out Gospel values in our situation? what does this teach us about being open, to God and to the people around us?

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An NCFS person is currently in detention because she was involved in the struggle for justice in this country. In the Ciskei hundreds of people are being beaten, detained, raped and tortured. We urge you all to pray for and actively support all those who suffer persecution for what is right - an option

for the poor is very difficult in a country like ours, but this is a challenge we have to face in our attempts to live out our faith.

* * * * *

In this edition we have tried to present more than one view point where this has been possible. The editorial team welcomes feedback, disagreement and other points of view. This magazine is for the people of NCFS, and if anyone has anything to add please send it in.

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Do not be afraid of them

(Mtt 10:26)

All people who attended the NCFS conference in July have recently been questioned in connection with a banned pamphlet, police alledge was distributed there.

"I've never seen it in my life" said Michael Rade-meyer, one of the first to be questioned. All the people questioned had a similar response and some have signed statements to that effect.

Steve Lowry, NCFS National co-ordinator, spoke to Archbishop Hurley who suggested that it probably was police intimidation.

Rosemary Hunter, Wits Cathsoc Chairperson commenting on the Wits people questioned said this was most likely to have a negative effect on new NCFS members; "police questioning can be a frightening experience"; she added that it could also have the effect that parents would discourage their children from attending NCFS activities.

Most of those questioned said that initially they were a bit scared, but soon realised that there was nothing to worry about.

"I was more hassled about the fact that they came in the middle of my exams" one of them quipped.

PROJECTS '84

As students and Christians we are continually in search of the truth so as to have a meaningful and integrated faith, and to help our understanding of our role in the world.

NCFS Projects is looking at ways we can explore these areas. It aims to focus on the issues and questions facing us in the complex situations we live in.

Its aims include:

- to increase our awareness and understanding of our reality
- to study what the Church is doing and saying in this context
- to better discern our specific role in the university, the Church and the world
- to develop skills in discovering root causes of problems facing us
- to discover ways of living out the challenge of our convictions which arise from reflection and analysis on shared experience
- to work with other organisations (e.g. SUCA, SACC, PACSA), to further links with them and to build on their experience

It was at the Exec meeting in September that the need became apparent for Catholic students to get together at a "mini-conference" to develop an identity for Projects. At the IMCS sub-regional Study Session in Zimbabwe, the NCFS delegates participated in an exposure programme, visiting a commercial farm and a rural community and talking to the people there.

The experience of the IMCS session has provided a basis for planning the National Project. This will be an "experiential learning programme", designed to further the aims listed above through contact and dialogue with the poor and then reflecting on, and learning from, that experience.

It is planned to include:

- a basic introduction and orientation to Projects
- developing useful guidelines for the exposure and discussing the reasons for having the programme in a resettlement area
- "Exposure" to the community (in small groups of about 2 or 3 students), spending time with and sharing with them
- Coming together for a reflection on our various experiences so as to further our understanding of "poverty" through workshops and input. We will focus on issues of concern to us and on questions like "Who are the poor?", "What are the various types of poverty?", "What are the possible causes of poverty?", "How does poverty affect us and the broader community?".
- A theological session, planned to develop our faith and make it more integrated, also to explore and clarify our vision and our understanding of God's will for us, as individuals, and as a group of Catholic students.
- A concluding session toward the end of the programme, where we will decide on the implications of what we have learnt and experienced means for us on a local and national level. There will be discussion of relevant issues such as:



- What are the needs and possibilities of action in each local situation?
- What does it mean for NCFS to "a preferential option for the poor"?
- How best can follow-up programmes be implemented?"

One of the immediate difficulties facing Projects is the lack of finances. A raffle has been organised and it will be a great help to Projects if this is a success. Raffle forms are available from your local Cathsoc chairperson or from the address given below.

DETAILS OF THE MINI CONFERENCE

Date: 23 - 26 January 1984

Venue: Resettlement camp in the Northern Transvaal.

Costs: R25 estimated; final figures will be calculated once numbers are confirmed

(note: subsidies may be available if the raffle is successful)

Applications must have the following details:

Name, Term address and phone number, Home address and phone number. Please send these as soon as possible (at latest by 15 December)

to: NCFS Projects
37 Olivia Rd
Berea
Johannesburg
2198

Enquiries: Tel 643 6405 (011)
Claudine



CHRIST WAS A SQUATTER



DO YOU REJECT HIM?

UDF Launch



Our response to the crisis facing us today is the politics of refusal. It is the only dignified response black people can give in this situation. In order to do this we need a united front... This is no reason why churches, civic associations, trade unions, student organisations and sport bodies should not come together in the struggle for a non-racial, democratic and unitary South Africa; pool their resources and inform the people of the fraud that is about to be perpetuated in their name"

These words were said by Rev Allan Boesak, President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches at the Transvaal Anti-SAIC Congress in January 1983. This began the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF).

The UDF is a front of various organisations. It is not a national political organisation. It was formed to oppose the constitutional proposals and the Koornhof Bills. It is guided by the principals set out in its declaration.

The UDF is a loose alliance of over 400 organisations, e.g. the TIC (Transvaal Indian Congress) COSAS, Women's Federation, Young Christian Students (YCS).

The first regional UDF was launched in Natal in May 1983. The president elected was Archie Gumede. Soon afterwards the Transvaal UDF was launched, led by Albertina Sisulu. On June 24th the Western Cape UDF was launched with Oscar Mpetha as president.

On 20th August, busses and cars converged on Rocklands Civic Centre, Mitchell's Plain, Cape Town for the launching of the National UDF. Frank Chikane opened the conference with the following words:

"Our common stand is that we reject the constitutional proposals and Koornhof Bill in a national and representative voice of the masses"

Resolutions were passed and a national executive was elected. Three presidents - Archie Gumede, Albertina Sisulu, Oscar Mpetha; six vice-presidents and national representatives. Chants and songs hailed the leaders.

Archie Gumede:

"THIS HISTORICAL OCCASION DEMONSTRATES FOR ALL TO SEE THAT WITH AFRICA IS ONE COUNTRY"

In the afternoon 12000 people attended the rally. Speakers included Francis Baard, Samson Ndou, Archie Gumede, and Helen Joseph - after being introduced as the 'mother of the struggle' she got a five minute standing ovation - she is listed and so cannot be quoted. Allan Boesak ended off with the following words:

"WE ARE HERE NOT TO BEG FOR OUR RIGHTS, BUT TO CLAIM THEM. WE WANT ALL OF OUR RIGHTS, WE WANT THEM HERE AND WE WANT THEM NOW! "

Messages of support came from all over the world, and were read out. The rally ended with the singing of Nkosi Sikelele. The crowds of people packed back into the busses to start the long journey back.

National Executive meeting was held on the weekend 17-18 September. A programme of action was drawn up and was later accepted by regional general councils of the UDF:

1. workshops for volunteers in all areas to be held.
2. door to door campaigns
3. local mass meetings
4. Provincial Rallies

The workshops held would be around the following issues:

1. history and nature of UDF
2. Koornhof Bills
3. Constitutional Proposals
4. A programme of action for the area

A media campaign will also be organised and part of this is to distribute "UDF News" and all other publications of the UDF.

The UDF now faces the challenge of elections to the new Koornhof community councils and the referendum. The UDF has rejected the referendum and calls on all people to reject this new constitution and the Koornhof Bills and to support the UDF programme of action. In this way the people of SA will show that they will control their own destiny, and will demonstrate that the UDF is the people's representative and thus the official opposition in SA.

This report was taken from YCS Reflection No.4

CHRISTIANS & THE UDF

As christians we believe that everyone is equal in eyes of God. Christ proved this by mixing with people who were considered to be outcasts of society; the poor, the sinners, and the oppressed - and by his association with such 'undesirables' showed that discrimination and exploitation of any form is wrong.

It was in this context that the NCFS Exec meeting in September passed the motion "that it is our christian duty to align ourselves with the UDF declaration of 20th August 1983". This declaration exposes the injustices of our society and shows the peoples' vision of the future. These principles are:

1. The cherishing of a vision of a united, democratic South Africa based on the will of the people
2. Striving for the unity of all through united action against the evils of Apartheid and exploitation
3. Standing for the creation of a true democracy in which all the people will participate
4. Standing for a single non-racial, unfragmented South Africa free of bantustans and Group Areas
5. Demanding that all forms of oppression and exploitation end.

The United Democratic Front was formed in order to unite different organisations to oppose the undemocratic new constitution which excludes the majority of the South African population, and to say NO! to the Koornhof Bills which aim to deprive many South Africans of their right to live in the land of their birth.



The Catholic Bishops and many other Church leaders have come out in support of the UDF and its principles; on the 24th August the Administrative Board of the S.A.C.B.C. issued the following statement: "The Board decided that, while it was not in a position to speak in terms of the Bishop's Conference as a whole, it could not fail to note that the defined goals and intentions of the United Democratic Front concerning the proposed new Constitution and the so-called 'Koornhof Bills' agree with positions taken by the Bishop's Conference on these issues."

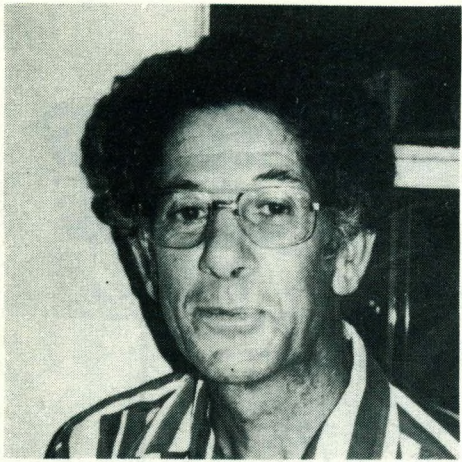
It is thus up to all of us to look closely at the principles of the UDF and to reflect on them in the light of our faith. It is important that we give our active support to this movement and learn from it the values of unity and sharing on which we can build a common future.

au revoir noel

Noel Rault, the star athlete of NCFS, the chief head-shrinker, the head banana taster, the top of the pops, the person who brought romance and marriage back into the Catholic student world, Maritzburg chaplain for many years and our national chaplain for the past three is retiring as national chaplain.

Noel's contribution to NCFS over the past decade has been considerable. He has attended the last 11 national conferences and numerous other executive and regional meetings, a feat of even greater perseverance and stamina than the ten Comrades Marathons he has run, and has played an invaluable role.

At a time when some chaplains have been less than supportive, Noel has been thoroughly enthusiastic, and encouraging of student initiative, innovation and ideas. At a time when the fortunes of NCFS have been low Noel's optimism and ability to see only positive things in situations that seem wholly



A sad farewell to Noel.

negative have given hope and renewed commitment. at those times of conflict and division, Noel's integrity and even-handedness have helped restore unity, trust and openness. If NCPS has made progress and come more together over the last three years, and maybe it has, this is in no small measure due to Noel's influence.

Noel, for your commitment, your refreshing cobweb-removing ideas, your sense of humour, your ability to listen, your faith, your humanness and all your other fine qualities, we thank you, and God, we hope we will continue to be blessed with your presence and inspiration at many more national conferences and that you will be blessed with fulfillment and happiness and possibly students, now and in the future.

CHRIST the Workman



It is the duty of the bishops, and not only their right, to speak to the Catholics of the Republic of South Africa about the Constitution Bill, as about other similar so-called 'political' matters.

This is certainly a political question but it is also much more than that. It is a moral matter; that is to say a question of right or wrong in the eyes of God. We have to pronounce on political matters as we must speak about economics, and social and cultural questions, and indeed on the whole of the moral conduct of individuals and on the moral ordering of society.

Man (sic) is one whole person, and his (sic) actions in the political, as also in the economic and other spheres cannot be separated from his moral conduct and behaviour. They are part and parcel of himself, of the acts on which he will one day be judged.

The Bishops too are but carrying out the command of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are the successors of the Apostles to whom Christ said "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me - Go therefore and teach all nations. Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Matt 2 :18-20)

We read also in Mark 16:15 "Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation"-

Our Lord also said to his Apostles: "He who

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nears you hear's me and he who despises you despises me". (Lk 10:16) The Bishops are therefore carrying out the command of Our Lord.

The Holy Father has said recently that priests should not engage in politics. This must be properly understood. By it he means that they should not join political parties or enter Parliament or similar bodies. This is the function of the laity. The priests must encourage their people to be active in the political world. Every citizen has an obligation to make his contribution to the welfare of the community and even must be ready to take public office, and the priest must expound this.

The priest as a citizen has a right to his political opinion, but he must not, because of his office, engage in party politics, nor enter into public office. He must only preach about the moral issues involved in any particular question, following the directive of his bishop. In extreme cases where there are no laity available for the defence of the faith, the priest may be compelled to enter public office but this is an exceptional case.

The right of the Government must also be properly understood. The

POLITICAL

CHURCH ?

Government, as the organ of the State, has not unlimited authority. Its authority, it is true, comes from God, because God has made man a social person who needs the help and assurance of the community i.e. society or the State to live properly and decently as befits his human dignity. The authority of the State however is limited to the pursuance of the common good, that is the good of all people and not merely of a section of the community. The

which does not recognise these prior rights and claims to be the origin of rights is a totalitarian State.

The State's acts can be right or wrong, in the eyes of God.

When St Paul therefore

the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God you must judge for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard". (Acts 4:19&20) "We must obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29)

Pope John XXIII in his encyclical "Pacem in Terris" (peace on earth) points out clearly the rights and duties of the state and of the individual person and of the family.

"The order, he teaches which prevails in society is by nature moral. An order of this kind whose principles are universal, absolute and unchangeable has its ultimate source in the one true God".

He explains:

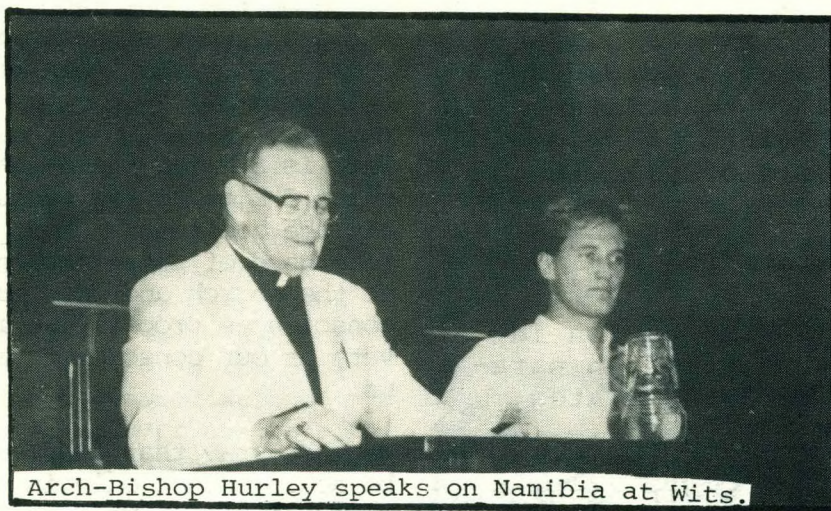
"Any human society if it is to be well-ordered and productive must lay down this principle, namely that every human being is a person, that is, his nature is endowed with intelligence and free will. By virtue of this he has rights and duties of his own flowing

directly and simultaneously from his very nature, which are therefore universal,

common good means the pursuit of peace and prosperity. It also includes the recognition and the defence of the fundamental rights of the human person and of the family who constitute the community or society.

The rights of these - the individual person and the family - do not come from the State. They precede the rights of the State and must be recognised by the State. Any system

in Romans 13 says "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God and all those that exist have been instituted by God," he is saying correctly that the State has authority from God but it is a limited authority. We owe obedience to the State in its just laws, but not when it passes unjust laws. Then we can say with St Peter, "Whether it is right in



Arch-Bishop Hurley speaks on Namibia at Wits.

unviolable and inalienable"

The Pope enlarges in paragraph 2:

"We see that every man has a right to life, to bodily integrity and to the means which are necessary for the proper development of life."

He says further of Political Rights, in paragraph 9:

"The dignity of the human person involves the right to take part in public affairs and to contribute one's part to the common good of citizens."

"The human person is also entitled to a juridical protection of his rights, a protection that should be efficacious, impartial and inspired by the true norms of justice."

In paragraph 17 he says:

"It must not be concluded however, because authority comes from God that men have no right to choose who are to rule the State, to decide the form of Government and to determine both the way in which authority is to be exercised and its limits

He adds:

"It is thus clear that the doctrine which we have set forth is consonant with any truly demo-

cratic regime."

He says about civil authority in paragraph 18:

"The whole reason for the existence of civil authorities is the realisation of the common good. It is clearly necessary that in pursuing this objective they should respect its essential elements."

In paragraph 19 he continues:

"The very nature of the common good requires that all members of a political community be entitled to share in it."

"Every civil authority must take pains to promote the common good of all without preference for any single citizen or civil group."

On participation in public life in paragraph 26 he states:

"It is in keeping with their dignity as persons that human beings should take an active part in Government although the manner in which they share in it will depend on the level of development of the political community to which they belong."

In paragraph 16 he reminds us that:

"The conviction that all men are equal by reason of their natural dignity has been generally accepted. Hence racial discrimina-

tion can no longer be justified at least doctrinally or in theory. And this is of fundamental importance for the formation of human society according to those principles we have outlined. For if man becomes conscious of his rights he must become equally aware of his duties."

About the rights of civil authorities he says in paragraph 17:

"Since the right to command is required by the moral order and has its source in God it follows that if civil authorities legislate for or allow anything that is contrary to the Will of God, neither the laws made nor the authorisation given can be binding on the conscience of the citizens since "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29)

This is a brief statement which I hope covers adequately the question. We must all take heed of this teaching of the church and form our consciences properly. We must vote as our conscience tells us.

We must pray that justice may be achieved, not only in this time but always. We rely on the grace of God for all men that justice through love may be achieved.

"Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice and all things will be added".

Cardinal Owen McCann
ARCHDIOCESE OF CAPE TOWN

This letter was written to be read out at a public meeting held at the Cathedral in Johannesburg, organised by the Justice and Peace group to oppose the new Constitution.

Poverty in the Bible

OLD TESTAMENT

The poor play a large role in the Bible, but the poverty that the Bible speaks of is not only an economic and social condition, but it can also be an interior disposition or spiritual attitude. The OT reveals to us the spiritual riches of poverty and the NT sees the truly poor as the privileged heirs of the Kingdom of God.

In Biblical times, as in some African and South American countries of today there was no middle class, just a few who were very rich and powerful like the king and his ministers, and the majority who were poor and weak politically. In the nomadic life-style of the wandering Jews there grew up a close web of family ties and clan interdependence that ensured that widows and orphans, the weak and dispossessed of the community, were taken care of. Israel's earliest laws codified in the Code of the Covenant included laws to protect the poor. Far from spontaneously considering poverty as a spiritual ideal, Israel saw it as a misfortune - even a despicable state. This was the result of judging poverty according to an imperfect notion of divine retribution that considered material riches as certain recompense for fidelity to God, and poverty as punishment for sin.

The wise men of the Israelites knew that there are virtuous poor people, but the conditions under which poverty occur, i.e., sin, crime, dispossession, lead to social problems such as theft, bribery and apathy.

The poor are those who are open to receiving the Good News preached to them, and Jesus promises the Kingdom to those who are "Poor of Spirit".



With the growth of riches, there was the accompanying growth of poverty and the PROPHETS recognised this to be the seed of social problems. Amos, Isaiah and Ezekiel all warn against the dire consequences of incurring both divine

wrath and creating social unrest by treating the poor harshly. The prophets continually warned that Yhwh would destroy the Kingdom for denying the poor justice and their rights, and there was a sense of national guilt in this regard when the Kingdom of Israel was overrun by the Babylonians in 587 BS. Thousands of Jews were taken into captivity and suffered humiliation for 40 years.

In the POST-EXILIC period when they were allowed to return to their own cherished land in 537 BC, the Israelites expressed their gratitude to Yhwh in a sincere act of contrition that articulated the purification of the nation in terms of the destruction of the rich who were the wicked oppressors of the majority of Yhwh's people who were poor.

In this period of spiritual growth and deepening of insights into nature and workings of Yhwh, the idea of "the poor" was becoming synonymous with those who were God-fearing and devout. Yhwh is the deliverer of the poor and needy and they have a special relationship to him as their protector. The poor are understood as the ones who seek God for deliverance and, consequently, are those who open themselves to hear his word and are not proud and independent, as are the rich, and so have the attitude of their creaturely dependence on their God who created and sustains them. This idea of openness to receive God's word is taken up by the last of the prophets, John the Baptist, and then by Jesus the messiah himself.

NEW TESTAMENT

The Old Testament's demand with regard to the poor, ie. to take care of the weakest in society, the orphan and the widow, is carried forward to the New Testament as the minimum requirement; eg. James 1:27: "pure and genuine religion is taking care of orphans and widows in their suffering and to keep oneself from being corrupted by the world."

Paul's collection for the poor 'saints' of Jerusalem (Rom 15: 26; 2 Cor 9) indicates care for fellow Christians and shows what is needed for sharing and community life. This contrasts with the situation in South Africa today where there is a great discrepancy in wealth between white and black parishes. However 1 Cor 11:17 shows there was still some inequality in wealth among that community, although Paul does chide them for not taking care of the needy.

Other parts of the New Testament are far more radical in their demands of poverty than seems to have been the practice in the

early gentile church. The earliest Roman community, for example, sold all they had and distributed the money according to each one's needs.



Jesus' words are also more 'radical' when he says in Luke 6:20 "Blessed are the poor... woe to you who are rich"; yet he seems to be speaking of a different kind of poverty when he says in Matt 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit". These two expressions of 'poor' are the kernel of the poverty ethic amongst the Jews of Jesus' time: the need for all to have enough and not to be materially rich at the expense of others, and to be 'poor in spirit' - ie. open to God and humble in

relation to him and others. This can be seen in the Essene community who sold everything to live in common in total reliance on God for their material and spiritual well-being.

Jesus' call to us was "to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect". Thus we may have according to our needs, but in love we are required to give of our surplus and even then of what remains. This may not mean for all the challenge Jesus extends to the rich young man, "Sell all you have and give the surplus to the poor", but what is required goes beyond what we practice and leaves no room for complacency. There are questions we need to tackle; can a rich person be 'poor in spirit'? If so, can they inherit the Kingdom? What happens to a poor person who is not 'poor in spirit'? What do we do if there are things in society that make people spiritually and materially poor? How do we personally face Jesus' challenge?

EXEC PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

The meeting of the NCFS Exec. was held from 2-4 September, in P.E. at the Red Cross Youth Centre; a dubious choice due to the close proximity of the beach. However, this produced a wonderfully vibrant spirit, occasionally anarchic, due to the (bodily) suppressed desire to have a holiday.

The first people arrived at 4pm on Friday, with the last arriving at 10pm (Kolbe and Stellenbosch of course). At least one representative from each Cathsoc was there bringing the members up to 23 (a record!), and the enthusiasm of all present was tremendous as people greeted old friends or made new ones. On top of the holiday atmosphere was the active Holy Spirit which ensured that despite controversial issues and people's different backgrounds and experiences, the meeting was a success.

Friday evening was games, Conference '83 slides (producing much hilarity) and despite pleas to "go to bed early" the joshing continued until 3am. Nevertheless people were ready to start by 8 am on Saturday. The first session was a discussion of the Year theme "Formation towards a church of the Poor"; it was immediately evident how different people's understanding of

it was. However consensus provided the basis for the rest of the weekend. The rest of the morning was spent on constructive discussion of portfolios and conference resolutions. Heated discussion followed in the afternoon on the Constitutional Proposals

dance or run will be held next year - we're broke!) and conference theme for 1984 National Conference (something on the lines of "Total liberation through Christ to a vision of the Church of the Poor"!!!). People then drank, and sang until the small hours again.



The Exec in Port Elizabeth.

and UDF (in which the effects of the night's joshing were noticeable). The result was a motion aligning NCFS to the principles of the UDF Declaration. The evening session revolved around the NCFS-CASA relationship (a team was appointed to work on a joint leadership course in January), finances (a fundraising marathon

Sunday morning saw the departure of the Wits people, while the rest discussed chaplaincy (Fr. Hy is temporary chaplain until Fr. Gerry comes to SA), Seminary affiliation and other miscellanea. It ended at 12. Altogether it was a tiring but enjoyable weekend.

FORMATION; A CHALLENGE

The call from God for a church of the poor is a call of the kingdom of God. The responsibility for us is to form ourselves and our Church so that we answer this call.

A Church of the Poor should not side with the rich and privileged, but with those who are the real poor, so that we together can change the destructive society around us. This is a humble confession that the Church has sided too often with the rich against the poor in South Africa. A Church that tries to fulfill its mission of proclaiming the Gospel and living the Kingdom of God cannot do so by relying on material means and a respected position in society that comes from "good connections" with the powerful groups.

That it has done so in the past is reflected in the Church structures (human-made and therefore imperfect) which have kept decision making in the hands of the well-educated, i.e. the affluent and middle classes. Thus authority and teaching has been seen only in terms of middle class values and concepts.

Formation towards a Church of the Poor means changing this to a balanced, living and authentic structure that works from the bottom as well. This means not taking only the lived faith experience of intellectuals, but focusing on interpretation and teaching as it is reflected in the daily struggles of the poor and how they live the Gospel in that situation.

What kind of Church is this we are striving for? A Church that first of all trusts God and his Spirit; and being so rooted does not need to make compromising alliances with

ruling groups. It means a striving for solidarity and oneness with the poor because you can't work with people from a distance.

Thus the emphasis is not so much on the poor being "saved," but more on the solidarity that leads to a mutual dialogue and earnest consideration of following Jesus Christ within the concrete struggles of oppression, degradation and manipulation. We must find ways to make the Gospel values relevant to this situation of alienation and frustration.

How do we discover together with the poor that a new life in Jesus Christ is a challenge to the totality of life? Our formation needs to be a spiritual openness to the transcendent God, and an openness to the people around us. A real living with Christ involves cost, yet there is

the powerful affirmation of the Holy Spirit: "The water that I will give you will become in you a spring which will provide you with life-giving water and give you eternal life".

Some questions we need to ask ourselves are; If I am surrounded by material comfort, can this lead me to trusting more in my personal comfort than in God? How far am I prepared to expose myself deliberately to a situation of need and poverty in order to remind myself of my being rooted in God and humanity? How far am I prepared to make free renouncements in lifestyle to express externally my option for the poor? How much am I prepared to openly and humbly listen to the poor? Do I integrate what I learn into my faith? How far am I prepared to trust God to inform my living faith/



A CHURCH OF THE POOR

The Gospel calls us to justice and love, because the Kingdom is coming. In our situation this demands that we move towards a "church of the poor", which will fully serve the interests of the poor. This is in contrast to what the church(es) do at the moment.

For us to see the limitations of the present church we also need to be able to see what is wrong in the world in general. The Church is 'the sacrament of history'; the church derives from history and cannot 'escape' from it. In the same way, love is practical, visible and situational.

So the project of a church of the poor does not come just from scriptural interpretation or reading of church doctrine. It comes from many peoples perceptive experience of these times. Though the world is permeated in subtle ways by grace, experiences of suffering injustice and alienation are dominant in most peoples' lives. Obviously we can suffer as a result of our own sins, but more obviously other people's wrong actions can make me suffer. Human institutions and structures cause most of the suffering of the poor.

We can most clearly see domination at work in that blind revolutionary force, capitalism. This force destroys traditional cultures and values;

it destroys previously existing economies. If necessary (i.e. if profitable) the environment is ruined. The poor are forced into continuous wage-labour, and totally abandoned if they are not needed for work. Capitalism is of course immensely productive, as a result of the motor of profit maximisation. This is based on and enlarges human greed, in the context of a world already divided in terms of wealth and power. The lives of the rich are characterized by alienation amidst a sea of commodities.

The world system, in its rivalries and inequalities, largely reflects the same perverted revolutionary drive.

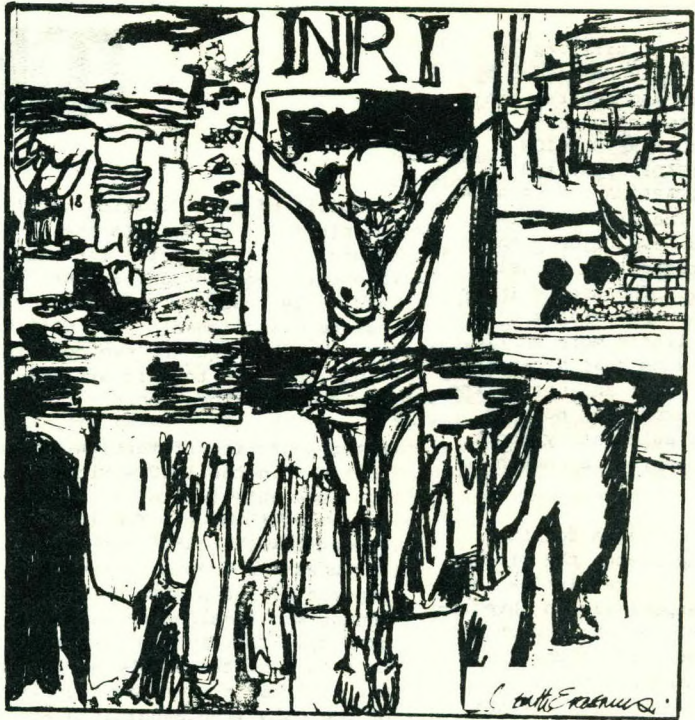


Even the non-capitalist countries, for example the Soviet Union, retain a state structure which uses manipulative power. Thus their efforts for justice in the world have limitations.

The crude force of capitalism is something which needs to be mastered and overcome. This is a general understanding which must feed the project of a church of the poor. But the church must also recognise the emancipatory movements which exist in our times - including political liberation movements. There is an existing process of human victory over suffering and oppression.

The church must recognise that the perversions of the world have produced much of the reality of what our church is - and also that the church may produce specific oppressions of its own. The church in South Africa at present has ^{has} an artificial unity. It [^]negative features associated with a colonial church, such as white dominance, and financial dependence on Western Europe and America. The church is deeply class-divided, largely along the 'fault-lines' of race. The church pretends it has a life independent of real historical processes - it is an institution of consolation where you can exercise your 'faith' free of the alienations of the world. In this traditional church, the norms of social behaviour are formulated. Norms and values are not in direct response to the history of which the church is the sacrament.

The 'church of the poor' that must emerge must be centred on the experience and initiatives of the poor. Theological thought and pastoral initiatives must come from oppressed people. Church finances must be at the service of the poor. In South Africa a church of the poor must be oriented predominantly to the needs of blacks. The church of the poor must make the struggles of people its first concern - this means having a new attitude towards 'politics'. A lot of the legalism of the Catholic church must go.



There are forces inside and outside the church which will oppose renewal; 'the light of Christ attracts a few mosquitoes', said Cardinal Arnns of Brazil. Within the context of desire for reconciliation and unity, the veto exercised by traditionalist Catholics must be shattered. The sacraments will work through celebrating the struggles and victories of the oppressed. Sacraments can no longer be linked to exclusiveness and self-righteousness. Theologizing will start with peoples' experience and the church will use mature social critique - dynamic class analysis, for instance. This will cause reaction that will threaten unity, but the conservatives must acknowledge the precedence of the church, rather than the other way round.

The changes must be started by small groups who put into practice the new understanding - what Helder Camara

called 'Abrahamic minorities'. These must slowly build up to local churches of liberation. This will come through unity of oppressed people and converted members of the elite with the ability to serve. New understanding inside the church must be linked to understanding and practice of emancipatory groups outside the church.

If love is practical, and loving, it must recognize limits to what can be achieved.

Firstly, the church cannot advance much further than the rest of society. This could refer to things such as class-division and bureaucracy in the church. The world as a whole is still geared to economic accumulation and social rationalization through technology and office-work. Economic accumulation too is not people oriented or community oriented, especially capitalist accumulation.

There is a slow process ahead of us - discovering, testing and perfecting people-oriented structures. The uneven yet interdependent nature of world development means that rich and poor countries must continue to interact, for better or for worse. The same applies to these areas of the church.

The relationship of the church to the power of God demands a special type of authority in the church - permanent, obedient and loving service. While the Curia cannot be replaced by Soviets overnight, there is room for a lot more democracy in church authority.

Lastly, in highly repressive nominally Christian states, the church is a protective institution, and it must temporarily accept some radical political functions, though this should be the concern of the whole of society.

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