

The message of The Church: a Sign of Hope

Partners in Mission

1-06-1980.

Eph. 1: 15-23; Col. 1: 23;

1 Peter 3: 15.

Your deliberations of the past days have covered a wide range of issues and concerns regarding the life and witness of the church in many parts of the world. The events in our country during the past weeks involving thousands of scholars, students and workers in a series of boycotts and strikes followed by the march of 53 clergy and laymen of all denominations after to protest against the arrest and detention of Rev John Thome have sharpened your awareness of the time situation currently prevailing in S.A. But I am not sure that there is a definite awareness that in these and similar events we are experiencing the death - throes of an old society and the birthpangs of a new

For many in our country - especially on the white side - it seems a hopeless situation fraught with danger because of the growing polarisation between black & white, whilst for many more - especially on the black side - it raises expectations and hopes of a new future and a new day. I assume that during your consultation more than once the question would have been asked: what is the task and the responsibility of the Church under these circumstances? What should be the nature of the message of the church? And what

2.  
should be the nature and form of its witness and action  
to give credibility to ~~the~~ <sup>this</sup> message? Is this message of  
the Gospel such that it could become a sign of hope for  
all Christians, black and white, and that this message  
will ~~stand~~ be based on such sound foundations that  
~~it~~ could emerge triumphantly out of the gathering  
storm?

I believe that if we ~~wish~~ wish to discover the nature  
of the hope <sup>on</sup> which we as Christians should build our  
witness and action, we should first of all discover  
and acknowledge the real nature of the struggle in  
which we are involved. There are important facts  
which we have to recognize before we begin to seek  
the correct interpretation of the hope that we proclaim.

①  
1. The events of the past few years clearly show  
that the struggle for political liberation is gaining  
momentum and no power, however self-assured, nor  
or power, however strong, is going to prevent it  
from eventually achieving its ultimate goal.



② 2. Although none of us as Christians want the change from the present oppressive system to a more just society to come about with violence I am forced to the conclusion that so much institutionalised violence has over many decades been built into the fibre of our present society, that a measure of counter-violence seems inevitable. If the white community continues to respond in the same Kragdadige way to the demands of the Black community as it has done during <sup>especially</sup> the last 4 years I see no alternative other than increasing polarisation and ~~even~~ escalation into bitter violent conflicts which could stretch over many years

③ 3. The church as institution is totally unprepared for these far-reaching changes political and social changes which are going to occur. Its sinful historic division into many denominations, its contradictory theological convictions on the <sup>many</sup> issues of social justice and its in general its dangerous identification with the political and social status quo of the minority white group makes it impossible for the church as institution to make any meaningful contribution to the struggle of liberation. Over against the total strategy for survival as propagated by the state the church in S.A. needs to have and to implement a total strategy for renewal

4.

But when are the signs that the churches as institutions see ~~this as an urgent need~~ <sup>and are willing to</sup> deal with ~~it~~ <sup>it</sup> as a matter of great urgency and high priority?

Now that we have prepared certain basic facts and realities we can proceed to ask the crucial question: Not:  
How can the church in S.G. <sup>actually</sup> proclaim a message of hope  
- but how can the church in S.G. become a sign of hope  
for the future?

① 1. By totally and finally rejecting the present political and social system as ~~even~~ unjust, immoral and un-Christian and by dedicating itself not to rest until it is finally ~~destroyed~~ <sup>exterminated</sup> - The church will only be able to raise <sup>an authentic</sup> ~~the~~ sign of hope <sup>in the hearts of people</sup> if it is prepared to proclaim that there can be no compromise with this kind of evil.



2. By learning to stand in solidarity with the oppressed, the poor, the dispossessed, the imprisoned, the victims of injustice. This includes a deep sympathy with the oppressor, with his wilful or unwitting blindness to see and admit his selfishness, his greed and his suppressed fear of losing his privilege and power. // But such sympathy must not lead to an attitude of fear in giving one's prophetic witness of God's judgment on evil or to a false compromise on principle. This ~~implies~~ surely implies that, as far as S.A. is concerned, the church will have to learn how to reach out to the youth, to the worker, to the peasant, <sup>to the poor</sup> with a message, a style of life, a christian witness which students and workers will see to be relevant to their needs and their <sup>aspirations</sup> ~~aspirations~~. If we as Christians, claiming that Christ is the hope of the world, give account to students and workers of that hope, will it mean anything to them in their struggle for liberation? If not, what sign of hope does the church become for the world of the student and the worker?

3. Through willingness to suffer in obedience to the Gospel Christians will again discover the true nature of the Christian Church as the community of all those who,

6.  
regardless of race or class or sex or education or intellect or dequar  
confess that Jesus Christ is their Lord, their Saviour, their Brother  
- and who truly seek to live in obedience to Him. If  
the old institutional church in S.A. truly believes in the  
power transforming power and the guidance of the Holy  
Spirit it will welcome and encourage the many  
groups of people who, are busy in the forms of small  
fellowship or community groups, are busy - perhaps  
unwittingly - establishing a confessing church  
of Christians who are equality, yes hungry, reaching  
out to each other across the borders of race or  
class or institution in their longing to express  
their belief in a human society where love and  
justice will reign in the hearts of all people!

(4) 4. By concentrating, through study and prayer and action,  
much more seriously on the question: what should  
be the nature of the new society that we are see-  
king? If as Christians we claim that the King-  
dom of God is the fulfillment of the hope that  
is in us, how does that Kingdom express itself  
in an adequate way in the social and  
educational and political systems of a new  
society? In what sense do we as Christians



7.  
believe that it will be ~~more just~~ less exploitative,  
more less wicked, more loving, more just than the  
present one? The institutional church in S.A. knows  
- or should know - that for millions of South Af-  
ricans the Freedom Charter which was adopted nearly  
25 years ago, stands as the most meaningful ex-  
pression of their belief in this new society. ~~How~~ <sup>How</sup>  
does the church respond to the convictions and hopes  
expressed in this historic document? If these con-  
victions and hopes are in accordance with the  
demands and hopes of the Gospel for social  
justice and freedom, will the church be willing  
to support it? And thereby become a sign of  
hope for the future?

Let us move forward into the unknown future  
with the prayer of St. Paul (Ephesians 1: 18-19) ~~in~~ in  
our hearts: "I pray that your inward eyes may be  
illumined, so that you may know what is the hope  
to which he calls you, what is the wealth and glory  
of the share he offers you among his people in their  
heritage, and how vast the resources of his power  
open to us who trust in him"

Amen.