

Living Churches Challenging the World.

Missiological Society Congress

1985

The "World" the Church has to Challenge.

I feel it is necessary that at the outset I indicate which "world" I shall be referring to in my address. I have resisted the temptation to refer to the world in which humankind is living as a whole although in a sense it would have been easier to refer to S.A. ^{only} as part of the wider world, because there would have been less need to specifically concentrate on South Africa. Such an exercise, however, ~~is~~ ^{of} could easily have become a flight from painful realities which I believe we need to face as a church in our attempt to challenge the world. Therefore I shall limit myself to South Africa and the situation in which we find ourselves in South Africa to-day. How does one depict this "world"? I shall try and give as clear an answer as possible of this "world" as I experience it. daily fully knowing that many of you who are present here to-day have perhaps a totally different perspective of the same "world" in which we live alongside of one another.

The "world" I'm referring to is:

Boonhat (Deo)

- Dr K: Bekkental
- BN: Prandhi long one
- Black...

1. World in deep division.

I'm referring here specifically to the world of black and white living not only alongside each other in South Africa, but in fact living in two vastly different worlds although they all form part of ^{the one} South Africa. Perhaps the most successful (and the most tragic & dangerous) aspect of the policy of apartheid is that it has divided our society so effectively in so many spheres of life over so many decades that an almost unbridgeable gulf has been established between these two racial communities as well as between ^{certain} sectors of the black community (African, Coloured & Indian). Nowhere is this more noticeable than in the political and the educational spheres. In the political sphere, for instance, the goals and aspirations of the majority of blacks, Coloureds & Indians stand almost diametrically opposed to the goals & wishes of the majority of whites. What the majority of whites regard as meaningful steps of bold political reform, the blacks to-day regard either as window-dressing or as totally inadequate to meet the minimum demands of the black community. To prove my point: compare the declared intentions of the N.P. on steps of reform with the expectations of

a body like the NSF. Or to make the illustration (3) trans more pertinent: compare the intentions of the government with an organisation like the ANC with the declared intentions of the ANC.

The same deep division of outlook and expectation can be established in the economic sphere: where the vast majority of the white community happily accept and put into the system of free enterprise + capitalism whilst it is very strong impression that a substantial majority of the black community, if given the opportunity, would support some form of socialism or even Marxism. An equally serious gap exists between the goals & objectives of the white and black trade unions of South Africa.

In the field of education this serious difference in outlook has brought us to the verge of a national crisis where the danger exists that if the government does not accede to the demands of the blacks, ~~we~~ our country may end up with a situation where on June 16, 1986 (10 years after Soweto) black & coloured schools in the country may ^{by a large} have ceased to operate.

But nowhere is the division more clearly seen and more painful to admit than

in the sphere of the church. The issue of apartheid (4) has forced the churches of this country into 3 main groupings: the 3 white D.R. Churches supporting the policy of apartheid; the group of multi-racial ^{anti-apartheid} churches which form the membership of the SACC plus the Catholic Church; and as a third group the politically non-active and non-involved churches comprising the Pentecostal, Baptist and a number of African Indip. Churches. The differences between these 3 church groupings run very deep and touch on a number of issues: their judgment of a body like the World Council of Churches, their respective contradictory views on conscription objection, on conscription, on apartheid chaplains, on the issue of social justice, on violence + counter-violence, on civil disobedience. These differences are exacerbated by the fact that there is practically no communication of any meaningful nature between these 3 - for all practical purposes they live, work, worship and witness in 3 different worlds.

2. A World in serious Conflict.

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I have already pointed to one aspect on the political level where these 2 worlds ~~are~~ are far apart namely on their understanding of political reform. Anyone who takes the trouble to probe a little deeper will discover ^{not only} how deep these differences lie but also how serious the conflict is which has developed or could further develop. Just consider the situation of serious conflict e.g. between a political organisation like the UJF and the government: meetings banned, leaders arrested & charged on all kinds of charges, others detained or banned - so the fight goes on almost daily. And whilst the government talks about reform (whatever it may mean) bodies like the UJF are planning for a people's democracy in a military state. This can only lead to further conflict.

In the economic sphere the conflict expresses itself in a series of ongoing strikes, of consumer boycotts, of widely divergent goals regarding the issues of disinvestment and sanctions.

In the educational sphere the young people ¹⁶ have set themselves as goal in their Education Charter the establishment of a system of people's education the contents and goals of which the white community would be in almost total disagreement thus leading to further tension and conflict.

On the ecclesiastical and confessional level a situation of equally serious conflict has developed during the last few years. The issue of apartheid has led to tremendous tension ~~at~~ within ~~the~~ specific church denominations and between churches with the same confession. I'm referring here ^{up} to the Ottawa resolution of 1983, the Belhar Declaration of the NG Sederkerk and recently the appearance of the Kairos document as well as the growth of sub-challenging but for a Confessing Community ^{transcending} old denominational & confessional boundaries and deeply challenging every church institution and every church structure. Add to that the challenge presented to the churches by the Narve Declaration

[7]

and you have some inkling of the serious conflict within the church. My impression is that the year 1986 is going to become a year of crisis not only for black education but even more a year of crisis for the church in S.A. It will leave the 3 white D.R. churches largely untouched because of its non-involvement in the struggle for liberation but all denominations with an exclusive or predominantly black, Coloured ~~and~~ ^{or} Indian membership which are concerned about the issue of political liberation will be deeply affected. There is no doubt in my mind: the KAIROS, the moment of truth for the church has arrived. The church cannot evade the issues any longer - and if it does so, it happens at the risk of losing ^{its} its life. It is not the church challenging the world - it is in fact the opposite: the world challenges the church!

[8]

3. A world in rapid transition. Constantly people are confronting political, academic, business & church leaders with the question: What will S.A. look like in 5 years, in 10 years time? If the situation in our country had been more orderly and less tense I would have dared to make some prediction. But because the situation is so fluid and so many unknown factors come into play, I ~~do~~ ^{do} not see my way open to ~~give~~ ^{make} any specific prediction. All that I know is that our world is one in which forces ^{for change} have been brought into play which can no longer be stopped. We are living in a world of rapid political, economic, educational & confessional transition the outcome of which, how much time it may take, will be a new political dispensation, a new economic approach and possibly new system, a different form of education and in certain church circles a new confessional movement of some kind which will deeply affect a number of church institutions. Two recent documents, one being

the Kairos Document and the other the 19
Harare Declaration of the December 1985 meeting
of the WCC in Harare, are going to play an
increasingly important role in this develop-
ment of ^{such} a Confessional Movement. The
meeting called by the Abydosse King of
clergy and laity for the weekend of 21-23
February, to consider practical steps for
~~going~~ considering how this idea could be given
~~concrete~~ momentum and direction, could become
a milestone of significance. The 3 white D.K.
Churches will be ~~very~~ affected only marginally
by these significant confessional and eccle-
siastical developments because none of their mem-
bers, congregations or official church bodies
are involved in any of these developments.
There is no doubt however, that the so-
called English speaking churches, especially those
~~but~~ multi-racial churches belonging to the SACC
are going to be deeply affected because ~~any~~
the Kairos Document, the Harare Declaration and
the ~~Confessional~~ ~~document~~ possible launching of
a confessing movement will constitute
a definite challenge for those churches to
take a clear stand on such issues as civil
disobedience, on violence and non-violence,

on their ^{attitude} relationship towards liberation move- 110
ments such as the ANC & PAC, and on the
moral legitimacy of the present government.
As the tension mounts and the crisis deepens
I believe we are also going to experience a tre-
mendous upsurge and growth of religious
ferours in evangelical and Protestant circles
and movements of the white community as
an increasing number of ~~white~~ whites are
going to seek for spiritual and emotional
refuge from the fear and uncertainty and
confusion of their hearts and minds. Many
of them will not realise that the spiritual
solace that they are seeking and may be
temporarily finding, is not going to solve
any of our problems until the issue of jus-
tice, repentance for past wrongs and resti-
tution for such wrongs has not been forced
and met. And in the Black Christian commu-
nity, currently suffering so deeply from the
oppression of the apartheid rule, it will be
interpreted as a sign of weakness on the part
of white Christians, an evasion of realities, a
turning away from the judgment of God.

This is the world in S.A. which I believe (11)
~~has~~ a living church has to face. But I
have very serious problems with the phrase:
A living church. For what do we understand
by a living church? But if a conference such
as this has not first of all probed in depth,
discussed, agreed and re-defined, in the context of
present events, what is clearly understood by
a living church, then how can we consider
challenging the world? I notice that the
theme refers to living churches in the plural
and not the singular: living church. That
in itself already reflects part of our prob-
lem in S.A. - that churches who regard
themselves as living churches, find it so diffi-
cult to see their life as a life in unity,
to be first of all a living church testifying
to the world. Surely a living church can only
authentically be seen as a living church if it
seeks to be obedient to Christ and his Gospel
in every respect: in love towards God and
neighbour, in the unity of love and faith
towards Christ as Lord, in seeking justice
for the poor and the oppressed, in denouncing

and removing all barriers of race, colour or class (12)
or sex in its own life, in calling for active
repentance for past sins, both individual and
structural, in seeking forgiveness for such
transgressions and actively participating in
removing all legitimate grievances and
stumbling-blocks toward effecting true and
lasting reconciliation!

Living church: Signs of a living church:

1. To understand and supplement its under-
standing of the realization of God's Kingdom
in our midst: its real nature, its
relationship to the Kingdoms of this world

2.