

MEMORANDUM FOR DISCUSSION WITH MR. H-K HOFMANN, GERMAN INSTITUTE  
FOR YOUTH AND SOCIETY AND THE REV. J. GLENTHOJ FROM DENMARK  
BY MANGOSUTHU G. BUTHELEZI, CHIEF MINISTER OF KWAZULU  
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Mr. Hofmann and Revd. Glenthoj, I welcome this opportunity of sitting down quietly with you and to have the opportunity of mulling over what actually transpired during our meeting on the 24th April. From one point of view it was a very harrowing experience in which I experienced deep disappointments.

There was a harshness in judgemental attitudes and an alarming unwillingness to look at my point of view and the point of view of my colleagues. The sense of fellowship which should be there whenever Christian meets Christian to look at life and death issues, was not there. But of course I can say this more about one particular man, the Revd. Sugden than the rest of the party. He was nasty, partisan and mean in the extreme.

From another point of view, the meeting we had on the 24th was more than exhilarating. I am always exhilarated when I see the mountains stretching out ahead of me which have yet to be climbed. I understand the exhilaration of an athlete who has to push himself or herself to the utmost in contests. I understand the sense of exhaustion which comes with a really magnificent endeavour.

It is the mixture of the sense of disappointment and pain and the mixture of the sense of having faced a challenge that produces complex reactions in me. Part of me is tempted to allow anger to be turned into compassion because they just did not know what they were doing. Other parts of me say no, there was a calculating drive in the penetration of their thoughts which could only characterise those who know what they are doing.

I share these very personal reactions with you and I also would like to share some thoughts which just could not be tabled at the meeting itself. The first of these is that we just have to do greater battle with the misconceptions about our South African situation than we have done in the past. When clerics, and particularly theologians, make serious errors of judgement consequences can be dire.

So much of what was said demanded assessments which went beyond the actual words used and the concepts employed. There was a very real sense in which the questions that were asked and the points that were made, were made by those who would, for example, be much more at home dotting the i's or crossing the t's on the Kairos document.



They would be much more at home talking to revolutionaries about Christ in a bloody revolution than they would be in talking about Christ as the King of Peace working on all sides of all warring factions.

There is a sense in which I am justified in asking some questions about the Western Christian conscience of learned theologians. There is that in the Gospel which predisposes believers to side with the oppressed and with the poorest of the poor. I understand this and I praise God for it. When, however, the guilt of a whole Western civilisation, emerged as it did emerge from an era of slavery and colonial exploitation, leads to the glorification of the dramatic, then there is something wrong.

Because apartheid is as hideous as it is and oppression has endured for as long as it has endured, there is an unrecognised tendency amongst many Western thinkers to put some kind of mystique around freedom fighters who can be seen as fighting for noble ends. There is something more exciting about the sword used in holy battle than there is in the humility of the olive branch.

The First World exists in the kind of luxury the Third World can now not even aspire to. There are no prospects of creating an African continent in which the per capita consumption of raw materials and of energy approaches anything like the consumption in West Europe and North America. We face the fact that there is just not enough raw material for the whole of mankind to live the affluent lives of the West European.

There is a recognition that Western affluence is what it is because of past exploitation of the Third World. There is a guilt complex about it which carries over into religious and theological perceptions. Freedom fighters are seen as a breed apart.

There is a blindness to the actual intentions of placing a bomb on a street corner. There is a blindness to South African revolutionaries' real endeavours to bring about the ungovernability of South Africa by developing a people's war. There is a blindness to the real brutality of punitive economic sanctions against the South African Government which could well be thrusting the poorest of the poor beyond the reach of life itself in the future. There is an austerity of love in the theologian who sees God as involved in a vicious backlash of the oppressed and who is there with revolutionaries who are making ordinary men and women, and more tragically children of tender years, the cannon fodder of their campaigns.

I have a vision of South Africa in which many things are delicately poised and finely balanced. I believe in democracy; I believe in people and I believe in South Africans, whether they are Black,



White, Indian or Coloured. I believe we can make the grade and that we will establish a multi-party democracy in South Africa. I believe that we will yet establish a society in which there is equality for all before the law and the constitution and in which there is also equality of opportunity.

I strive for noble objectives because I believe in these things. I remain committed to tactics and strategies which are compatible with the noble objectives which are normally not the fruits of violence and killing. I strive and I remain committed, however, against a back-drop in which it is written that the final achievement of decency in South Africa will have to be striven for by South Africans. In the back-drop of my world it is written that we as South Africans can fail. God has given us the right to fail. He has created in us the propensity to sin if that is what we choose. We are free to choose or not to choose. We are free to believe or not to believe.

It is therefore not certain that the things I believe in will come to pass. There are finely balanced scales; there are delicately poised forces and counter-forces. There is no certainty; there is only faith.

I am so appalled when theologians and senior churchmen thrust the spear into the delicacy of the human balance in which we find ourselves. That group we met on the 24th of this month here in Ulundi could be doing just this. I at times got the impression that they were putting us under analytical microscopes and seeing us through the lenses that they have shaped. I did not experience them sitting by my side, standing in my shoes, aching with my pain and looking out at the world through my eyes. There was an austerity which denied empathy.

I am not a theologian but I would say there is something theologically amiss in the thinking of Revd. Sugden from Oxford. I could see that some in the group itself were shocked at his and some of the other's theological and political antagonism but Glory be to God that these were human beings, His creations, our fellow sinners, in whom Christ is at work as He is at work in my sinful life. We must climb the mountain of prejudice that lies ahead of us. We must take our enemy by the hand and show him the beauty of the Lord's valleys of hope. Somehow we must become more effective in dealing with the situation which we met on the 24th.

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