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ADDRESS by HR NELSON HANDSLA, PRISIDENT 0! THE ANC

AT THE AWARD PRZSJNVATION CERINONY 0! 253 CARTB-NJNIL

HUMAN RIGHTS 98128 AND THE RDIHXO CHAPEL HUMAN RIGHTS

AWARDS, SDNDA! DECEHBSR 8, 1991

Preeident end Hrs Carter, Hte(?) de Menil, distinguished honoureea, honoured guestl, ladle: and gentlemen. I am deeply grateful for this honour to deliver the keynote address at this prestigious accession. I am humbled to be chosen to speak in the name of all thone who have through decades struggled for the upholding of recognition of human rights. The honour is even greeter now that we call to mind the courege, commitment and heroism of the six priests from San Salvador who gave their lives for the cake of justice to: the poo: end oppressed o: El Salvador on November 16. 1989.

In honouring them, we of course honour individual courage and strength of thereCter, but we also honour Christian-who represented the beat tradition of the Christian church. In El Salvador, as in all a! Latin America, the church hes played a meaningful and important role in the etruggle for justice end !:eedoa. We know something about this since in our own countty the church had indeed made its contribution to our own battle against colonialism, exploitation and racism. and had continued to inspire South Africaia cppteead people as they taught egainet that particularly Vicious form of racist oppression the world knovs as apartheid.

In South Africa both Christians and non-Christienl acknowledge with gratitude and pride the contribution or the church in the struggle for human rights and human ,dignity, even as we acknowledge with that same gratitude the role 0: all people a: zeith to the struggle.

a: course noching is as Simple as it seems and those Christien heroes in the struggle for humnn rights univetaelly will be the first to acknowledge that the history of the church in this regard is complex and fteught with contradiction. In fact, in SA our Christian comrades would insist thet the contradictions in the history of the church be recognised. They are aware that this process ceuiee some pain, but they tell us that without the pain that this controntation with the pest brings there will be no joyful discovery of a new role to: the church in our societies to: the future.

So they epeek o: the tinee in the history of the Christian church when the church we: hopelesely locked in the prison of its own connivance with the pewexs o! oppression and exploitation. They speak a: the time when the church gave comfort to slave merchants and justified the dehumanisation of men and women made in the image of God. This was true to: the church in Attite. in Latin America end the new world.

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In South Africa it is: even true to say that broadly speaking two churches developed: the church that supported and justified apartheid and the church that saw it as its duty to support the struggle against apartheid. In my country the pain that we speak about went even deeper. Hinterlanders still see that apartheid as an idea and a system must be seen not as an initiative of a state but as the brainchild of the church, in particular the white Dutch Reformed Church.

Long before apartheid had become a legal and political system in South Africa, it had become part of the life of the church, and the talk of the white Dutch Reformed churches in helping to prepare SA for the advent of apartheid cannot be overstated. If one takes into account the all-important role of religion in our society and the impact on the shaping of both our society and our people the development of what has become known as the theology of apartheid in order to justify that system and its practices attains a special significance. The contradictions that flow from this historical development mark our society and our churches to this very day. It is becoming clearer however, that those in the Christian church who supported structures of oppression were not in the right; they were wrong. Those who sought arguments from the Bible to justify slavery were not in the right; they were wrong. Those who preclaimed God's approval for apartheid even while our people died and children suffered were not in the right; they were wrong. They, as our Christians would claim and I agree, do not represent what Christians call the true prophetic tradition of the church.

That tradition speaks of the Christian God as a God of the poor and places this God firmly and without apology on the side of the oppressed. That tradition proclaims that the church is not at liberty to endorse injustice but must in fact take up the cause of the oppressed against the injustices that are done to them. That tradition confesses that the church is not to remain aloof from the struggle and the suffering of the people but must itself become passionately involved in those struggles until justice is done.

This is the tradition that represents what is most noble of the Christian church. In this tradition stand those gallant men and women who actively fought against slavery and for its abolition. This is the tradition embodied represented by men like Wilberforce in England, Frederick Douglass of the United States and the Christian missionary Johannes van der Korp in South Africa. This is the tradition of the prophets of the church who refused to adjust themselves to the unjust conditions of their day and who were not afraid to stand alone in the struggle for justice. Such a man was Bartholomew de la Cassas who,

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in an ago when tho church in Latin and control Amorica
mod. common cauo with slave drivers and tho matchantl of
human flesh. took it upon hin-olt to Do the voice o: the
voicolool and to act against thou. evil practises with
which the church of that day identitioid itself.
This is the tradition so nobly roproatod by tho six
brathers whom we honour today, as it is repreatod by
thooo from Central Ano:ica who will receive the awards to:
Commitment to Truth and iroodon.

They know how to spook tho truth when it was so much
oaaio: to lie in order to suxvivo. But they knew more:
they know that tho :uth should not only be spoken but
lived so that their commitment transcended the spoken word
and boosmo & way or life. Tho truth they stood to: was
the truth that sets human beings froo. It artirmed life
rather than death and i: colobrated life in the midst of
death. It known that our childron are no: born for
donstruction but are meant to :oach thei: full human
potential.

They know the truth: that human rights are insopnably
tied to human dignity. Thoir origin, as Martin Luthoz
King Jr used to say, does not lie in human thinking but in
the dim mist of eternity. People have human rights
because they are made in the image of their Creator; an
image which confers upon them a dignity that cannot be
denied. Thoroforo human rights are not a government's to
give or arbitrarily withdrawn or suspended, they can only
be recognised.

It is this essential :zuth tho: makes the human spirit
ultimatoly invincible. It enables us to rise above
circumstances or the cruaiat machinations : oppression to
a:lizu what is too: in us. Even in the midst of
intimidation and torture it empowers us to rise abovo cur
foot, to reach into deep walls of courage so that tho
tortuzors remain dumb-foundod. That dignity refuses to be
inclooad or inca:co:a:ed by prises wells; it soars above
those walls into tho heaven: to grasp and shape a vision
that we continue to sea oven though our eyes are blurred
with tears o: pain and 39::ezing.

That dignity prevtdes people who struggle for justice with
an amazing sourco o: stroagth. Hotbox: in South Africa's
:olocation camps see their children die; mothers in
Guatonola oz El salvador o: Nicaragua havo soon their
childton disappear and have stood at the side: of mass
gravos. Yet they themselves havo not only refused to give
up hopo, they have continued to inspi:e hop. in others.
Priests like Archbishop Oscar Ronoro have died. brutally
murdorod by tho approxno: as An oxamplo to others who
would dare speak up against injustice. rot, lianu then
many continued to follow in 313 tootszonl and 8! II
himself said, his spirit continue: to liao on an ta. lite