

PASTORAL LETTER OF THE S.A.C.B.C.

***A CALL TO BUILD A
NEW SOUTH AFRICA***

JANUARY 1992 PLENARY SESSION

Pastoral letter of the SACBC January 1992

A Call to Build a New South Africa

(I) Introduction : A Time for a New Beginning.

1. Over the years the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference has issued many pastoral letters dealing with the unjust system of Apartheid. Thank God, our country is now moving away from apartheid into a new era, a time in which a New South Africa is being born.

2. We thank God for the Peace Accord and for CODESA. The aim of the Peace Accord is to end violence and to create a climate for negotiations. The aim of CODESA (Convention for a Democratic South Africa) is to transform South Africa "from an apartheid state to a democratic, nonracial, non - sexist country with justice for all." We thank God for the many heroic people who over the years have made these negotiations possible.

3. The changes that have occurred are in fact a new call addressed to us. Through them God is inviting us to take part and to support this challenging work. The question which we often hear people asking is: How can we contribute to the building up of a new South Africa? How can we promote a prosperous and peaceful community of nations in the Southern African Region? How can we respond to God's call?

4. While we address ourselves primarily to the Catholic community we are aware that the task is the same for all South Africans. We therefore extend our call to all people of good will in South Africa and ask them to co-operate in promoting the good of all in our country. To work for the good of others is to fulfil our highest calling, namely, to love our neighbour as we love ourselves.

5. The changes that are coming over South Africa call to mind the passage from the Bible:

" There is a season for everything, and a time for every purpose under heaven:
A time for giving birth,
a time for dying
a time for planting,
a time for uprooting what has been planted."
[Ecclesiastes 3:1-2]

In our country at present it is a time for peace, a time for building, a time for healing and time for loving.

(II) A Time for Peace (Ecclesiastes 3:8)

6. Birth is never an easy process. It is no surprise that the bringing to birth of our new nation is proving so painful. This in no way means that a high level of violence is a necessary part of the birth process. Indeed it is a serious threat to the new society being born.

7. Violence is part of our evil heritage from the past. Violence was used to impose apartheid and violence was used to resist it. Still to-day violence wastes lives, destroys property, separates families and blights our very souls. People are being attacked and even killed for disagreeing about political parties or ideas. To make matters worse criminal violence has increased to an alarming extent. This constant recourse to violence is in total contradiction to the teaching of Jesus who said:

" Love your enemies " (Matt. 5: 44)

8. In the midst of all this violence we hear God call us to be peacemakers; to bring healing to those who have been injured by the past and to bring hope to those who fear the future. Christ's law of love demands this. He himself said:

"Blessed are the peacemakers, they shall be called children of God."
(Matthew 5:9)

9. What can we do to be peacemakers? First of all we can pray. For nine years we have had a special campaign of prayer for peace. Let us continue to pray. But prayer without action cannot please God. The Peace Accord offers a wonderful opportunity to those willing and able to participate. We should find out about it and help in every way we can.

10. We need to promote a spirit of peace and tolerance so that everyone will feel they belong to the one family of South Africans. In a family it is easy to solve disputes because each one cares about the others. Our children, especially, should be trained to live in peace and to be peacemakers so that they can help our new society grow into a happier, more united family.

11. Since we are called to be such a family there can be no excuse for using violence to promote a particular policy, or to oppose it; to change the political system or to maintain the status quo. Those who serve in the police or the armed forces are required to be absolutely impartial in maintaining order and in controlling conflict. The ideal of a just South Africa free of violence and free of weapons is a noble one.

III. A Time for Building. (Ecclesiastes 3:4)

12. All over Africa today there is a strong movement to promote democracy. This is also happening in the countries of Eastern Europe and, in fact, all over the world. We are part of that movement. Democracy is accepted as the best form of government. It uses the peaceful means of debate and discussion to solve problems. Democracy means government by elected representatives of the people. Since people have different opinions about how their interests can best be served they form political parties to promote their policies. This brings about healthy rivalry between parties as they strive to convince the voters that their policy is best.

13. But democracy only works when citizens keep themselves informed about political parties and policies and when they actively reject or support these policies in elections. Justice depends on good government. The social order often breaks down under bad government and people suffer. It is therefore clearly a christian duty to take an active part in the political process to ensure that the best people are elected to the government.

14. We should try to promote democracy by ourselves being an example of a united community where all members enjoy justice, respect and equality no matter what political opinions they hold.

" We are called to be both a sign and an instrument
of the unity God desires.
for the entire human race"

[Pastoral Plan P18]

15. We should strive to be good democrats, that is, vigorous supporters of democratic government. While individuals may support their favourite party the church supports freedom for all parties. The best way of doing this is to draw up and observe a code of conduct in politics which is inspired by the Gospel.

16. A Code of Conduct for Christian Communities with regard to politics requires that:

1. We remain a community united in faith and love and respect one another though we may differ in politics.
2. We encourage one another to be interested in politics even to joining a political party.
3. We seek guidance from competent church people before believing allegations that a particular party is against our faith.
4. If we are convinced that an opinion is harmful we try to convert those who hold it not by force but by dialogue.
5. We not allow politics to disrupt our church life,

consequently:

- we avoid making political propaganda at religious functions, whether by making speeches or wearing badges or uniforms.
- disagreements about political parties we resolve outside church meetings or at meetings specially called to deal with such disagreements.

(III) A Time for Healing (Ecclesiastes 3:3)

17. Democracy will help to bring political freedom to South Africa but on its own it cannot solve all problems. We also need economic justice, that is, a fair distribution of the wealth of the country among all its people. At the moment we have a society in which there is a sinful difference between the very rich and the very poor. Here are some sad facts about South Africa which illustrate this.

- less than 5% of the population own 88% of the personal wealth in the country
- About 6 million people are unemployed, that is between 25 - 40% of those who are able and willing to work
- Only about 12% of school leavers are likely to find jobs
- A million families are homeless and seven million live in squatter camps.
- the most unequal distribution of wealth in the world is found in South Africa.

18. These facts (1) show that, if there is to be healing in our land, we urgently need a new economic order as well as a new political one. The new economic order calls for a common vision of how to use our limited resources for the good of all in the Southern African Region. The vision must aim at meeting our two urgent needs: greater economic growth and fairer distribution of wealth. But we must also meet these needs in a way that cares for the environment and provides for future generations. Success in these fields requires sound policy, good management and hard work.

19. As regards sound policy we support the proposal of a CODESA-like consultation on the economy involving government, big business, the development and small business sectors, trade unions and others concerned.

20. Work will be a crucial factor in the new South Africa. Major concerns in policy, management and trade unionism should be the encouragement of hard work, the promotion of training, the creation of jobs and the payment of living wages. It is important that jobs in the public sector be given to those qualified and willing to serve, rather than as bribes or rewards for political support.

21. Small businesses and development projects are undoubtedly vital for economic growth and the multiplication of jobs. Co-operatives and community projects promote the sharing of profits and the fostering of unity among people as they help build up the economy.

22. While it is not possible for all people to enjoy an exactly equal share of the fruits of enterprise and work, it is necessary and possible for all to contribute to society and in return to be able to live at a standard in keeping with human dignity. It is the duty of all even the humblest and poorest among us to do our share in promoting the christian vision of economic life. This vision emphasizes that people are more important than profits; and that, in terms of the warning of Jesus, "you cannot serve both God and money" (Matt 6:24), consumerism is an evil to be fought in all of us. Consumerism makes us want to buy more and unnecessary things, instead we should use our money sensibly to provide food and shelter for our families, to share with those who have less and to save for the future. Producing and using material goods according to God's will is, in the divine plan, a contribution to the coming of the kingdom.

(IV) A Time for Loving. (Ecclesiastes 3:7)

23. In our country, we have people of many different languages and cultures. This is a great blessing. Yet in each of us there is a tendency to fear and dislike those who are different from ourselves. This is completely against the spirit of Christ. Differences in people reflect the infinite perfection of God for which we should be grateful, not fearful. We can overcome hostile or fearful feelings by trying to see what is good and beautiful in all people.

24. Our history has tried to condition us to think that our own group can only survive at the expense of others. This is not so. We are all born with an instinct for certain basic human values: care for life, love of the family, respect for fundamental human rights, and concern for others. All religions and cultures call us to practise truth, justice, compassion and love.

25. Fear or anger can be overcome by getting to know the other groups in our own church. A good way to do this is by sharing activities especially as families. It can also be done by sharing local problems at joint meetings of a few parishes or by forming united parish councils in each town or area with representatives from each different group. These activities help us to listen to one another, to learn from one another, and eventually to appreciate one another.

26. Building unity requires that we also get to know people of other faiths. We all need to share our spiritual riches so that each religion can contribute to the spiritual upbuilding of our new society. This will protect it from secularism which leaves God out of the picture and materialism which denies the spiritual aspect of life. If all people of goodwill work together to solve local problems a healthy civil society will emerge. This will allow people to control many areas of their lives dealing with such things as religion, culture, welfare, sport and human rights without domination by either the market or the state. In working with others for a better society we should always seek to empower the poor and handicapped, the aged and youth, and women from every group as these, unfortunately, tend to be neglected in every culture, religion and nation.

V Conclusion

27. Our very future depends on how we contribute as individuals and as a church to the building of a new South Africa. Indeed, no new nation can be built without the enthusiastic support of as many people as possible. For this reason we would like this letter to become well known. That will not happen if it is read only once in church. It needs to be taken up, be studied and discussed in groups. If these discussion groups could cross language, cultural and religious boundaries it would help build unity and a common vision.

28. We recommend that all this be done in the spirit of which St Paul wrote to the Colossians: "Let the message of Christ in all its richness, find a home with you. Teach each other and advise each other in all wisdom." (Col. 3 : 6)

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We praise you for men and women
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throughout the ages.
Send your Spirit to us
in our present need.
Be with those who negotiate
and with all who work
for a new South Africa,
so that peace may flourish
in truth and justice,
love and freedom.
Through Christ our Lord.

AMEN

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Send your Spirit to us
in our present need.
Be with those who negotiate
and with all who work
for a new South Africa,
so that peace may flourish
in truth and justice,
love and freedom.
Through Christ our Lord.

AMEN

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