

A FEW REMARKS BY MANGOSUTHU G. BUTHELEZI, CHIEF MINISTER KWAZULU,
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ON THE OCCASION OF A FUNCTION ORGANISED BY THE UNITED STATES
INFORMATION SERVICES, DURBAN
IN REMEMBRANCE OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING.

ULUNDI. 10 FEBRUARY 1988

I feel honoured to have been afforded this opportunity of saying a few words to commemorate the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King. It was Dr. King, Mahatma Gandhi and Chief Albert Mvumbi Lutuli who were so influential in my own early years as a political leader. Dr. King's message to Black Americans was a message to all oppressed people and what he said and did had a profound effect on my own thinking. His influence will live with me all the days of my life.

When I visited the United States in 1971 I went on a pilgrimage to Atlanta to be at Dr. King's grave. Although I did not meet Mrs. Coretta Scott King, his widow, my wife and I were privileged to meet his late father, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Senior. Later I was to meet his father again in Los Angeles, when I was the guest speaker at the International session of the Urban League, at the invitation of my friend Vernon Jordan, when he was President of the Urban League.

Martin Luther King was a man who was truly filled with love. He used love as a weapon and its reality in his own life gave him a power which was innovative and creative in the struggle which he conducted. In his book "Strength of Love" he said:

"An overflowing love which seeks nothing in return, agape, is the love of God operating in the human heart. At this level, we love men not because we like them, not because their ways appeal to us, nor even because they possess some type of divine spark; we love every man because God loves him. At this level, we love the person who does the evil deed, although we hate the deed that he does."

We can pay no greater tribute to Dr. King than to say that he allowed the love of God to work within him for the benefit of the despised and the destitute. He was a worthy repository of the living love of Christ for the people among whom Dr. King struggled for justice and hope.

Dr. King's message always did have a relevance for the South African situation. In his paper "The Trumpet of Conscience" he said:

"In a world facing the revolt of ragged and hungry masses of

God's children; in a world torn between the tensions of East and West, white and coloured, individualists and collectivists; in a world whose cultural and spiritual power lags so far behind her technological capabilities that we live each day on the verge of nuclear co-annihilation; in this

world, non-violence is no longer an option for intellectual analysis, it is an imperative for action.â\200\235

Love indeed did act as an imperative for action in Dr. Kingâ\200\234s own life. The meaning of love had a special application in the life and work of Dr. King. He knew as he said:

"The American Negro is not in the Congo where the Belgians will go back to Belgium after the battle is over, or in India where the British will go back to England after independence is won. In the struggle for national independence one can talk about liberation now and integration later, but in the struggle for racial justice in a multi-racial society, where the oppressor and the oppressed are both â\200\234at homeâ\200\235 liberation must come through integration.â\200\235

He strove always to inject new meaning into the American way of life. He loved Black Americans into walking tall and harnessing spiritual forces for revolutionary social change. His constant call to employ love was made against the background thought that action outside the parameters of love, could only lead to shame. In his book â\200\234What Manner of Manâ\200\234 Lerone Bennett recalled Dr. King saying in a sermon:

"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you. If we fail to do this our protest will end up as a meaningless drama on the stage of history, and its memory will be shrouded with the ugly garments of shame.â\200\235

Millions of Black South Africans cry out for the kind of love that Dr. King so evidenced. The message of Dr. King to Black Americans is a message which is particularly applicable to our South African situation. The message of his life and his labours for the benefit of his people condemns the worst that there is in the South African struggle as we watch the upward spiralling of internecine Black-on-Black confrontation. His message condemns the worst that there is in the inhumanity so evidenced as violence is used against persons in the name of the struggle for liberation in this country.

Not that Dr. King did not have his share of the flak which came from Black-on-â\200\224-Black conflict. There was Black conflict in American Black society although it never exploded into violence of the proportions we see in South Africa. I get a lot of inspiration

and encouragement from some of the labels of denigration which Dr. King received from some Blacks who disagreed with him. Name-calling is as bruising to one's soul as violence itself, that is why name-calling does lead to violence. I am not referring here to criticism which one must expect if one is constantly in the public eye. I refer to labels of vilification and character assassination. For example, some ridiculed Dr. King for his famous "I have a dream" speech, which I watched him make on television in Chicago in August 1963. That speech stands as a milestone for all time. Others called him "Martin Luther King" because of his commitment to non-violence. I get a lot of inspiration when we who are committed to non-violence are presented as "losers", from the fact that that great giant - was pilloried as a loser by some. They saw him as wrong in the short term but we all know that he was right in both the short term and in the long run. It is, however, better to be right in the long term than in the short term. Dr. King was right in both the long and short terms.

Right now we are witnessing atrocity after atrocity being committed in the Greater Pietermaritzburg Area in the name of the struggle for a just South Africa. Dr. King's message is that this kind of violence we see in the Pietermaritzburg area is a shaming violence. His message to Black South Africa in more general terms, is that Blacks will have to live with Whites, Indians and Coloureds after liberation and that we must be reconciled one with the other now while we struggle. We cannot wait for victories over apartheid before we begin treating each other as human beings in this country. i

The message of Dr. King's life is a message that Black South Africans are keen to hear. We as a Black people are disgusted with violence from wherever it comes. We are disgusted with the kind of violence that the State has dispensed for so long in its attempt to

make apartheid society a racist society in perpetuity. We are disgusted with the counter-violence which has dragged our people into the very gutters of moral degradation. We are disgusted with

the violence of intimidation as one group tries to ram its will down the throats of the ordinary poorest of the poor men and women in the country. Black South Africa yearns for progress in the task of eradicating apartheid for the scourge that it is, but it yearns for this progress in peace.

In this country we face a whole new generation which is being

inducted into the employment of violence. This induction is far more than teaching youngsters how to get something through violent means. First, you have to teach youngsters how to hate and then you can teach them how to employ violence. Violence is not employed in love. It is contrary to love and those inducted into violence are being inducted into a way of life in which love is cast aside as an attribute of the weak. The moral character of

this whole new generation is now being attacked.

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I always thank God that in South Africa there is a Black population which is dominantly Christian and which yearns for a Christian response to the poverty and social and political deprivation they suffer. Black South Africans want to walk tall and Dr. King's message is a balm on the open wounds of their souls. It is not a palliative; it is a balm that heals to create real strength.

It is so deeply tragic not only for American society but for oppressed people everywhere in the world that Dr. King was so brutally slain by an assassin's bullet so early in his life. His whole life was in fact yet before him when he died. He was just graduating into a life of great service in the years of his growing maturity when he was slain. Dr. King was a great tree chopped down before its full life of bearing fruit for future generations had passed.

It is right and proper that Dr. King's memory be honoured in South Africa. Had he been alive and with us his message to us would have been the same as his message always was to Black Americans - Love your God and love your neighbour as yourself. His message always was: employ love because it is powerful; and walk tall in everything you do because you and future generations will have to bear the consequences of what you do.

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