

Churches and Racism

in South Africa

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South Africa is officially one of the most "Christian"

countries of the world: 83% of the inhabitants

(93.8% of the whites) are members of a Christian

church. The various denominations can be divided into three groups.

RELIGION

TOTAL - 21,402,470

Dutch Reformed Churches	3,329,710	GROUP 1
Presbyterians	454,460	GROUP 2
Lutherans	884,120	
Anglicans	1,676,800	
Methodists	2,151,340	
Congregationalists	349,790	
Roman Catholic	1,844,270	GROUP 3
Independent African Churches	2,761,120	

GROUP 1 - THE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH

This church, which developed from Calvinist roots, supports the government policy of racial segregation - apartheid - which legalizes and maintains the situation of inequality and oppression imposed on the non-white majority.

It is divided into the "mother church" consisting of 40% of the whites of South Africa, mostly of Dutch origin, and the three "daughter churches" which consist of the so-called coloureds, Africans, and Indians.

The "daughter churches" are becoming increasingly critical of the "mother church" because of its racist policies.



Bishop Tutu's Column



The Government is clearly determined to retain political power in the hands of a small white oligarchy.

He said blacks are being asked to protect exploitable capitalism. The Government was prepared to give substantial privileges and concessions to certain blacks 'who are being co-opted to form a buffer between the white capitalist haves and the black have-nots'.

'Those who do not qualify in the core community will be condemned to the outer darkness.....blacks who don't qualify must go and starve and die in the resettlement camps. Quite callously huge concentrations of human beings are being moved from pillar to post just to satisfy an ideological blueprint,' he also said.

He urged the Church to transform its words into action. 'We can't sit around and see the death of District 6 and just shrug our shoulders and pass a pious resolution'.

People were being detained without trial.

He said White South Africa had to decide whether a black Prime Minister would be installed peacefully or after more than 20 000 deaths and destruction.

Turning to the events of the past year, Bishop Tutu predicted that Robben Island long-term prisoner, Nelson Mandela would 'almost certainly' be the country's Prime Minister within five to ten years.

We Africans have generously agreed to accept whites as fellow Africans. If they want to go back to Europe let them do so, but for God's sake let them not tamper with our nationality and our citizenship. We want to live peacefully with all South Africans. But let me warn South Africa — you are playing with fire. We will fight for our birthright.

You are provoking us almost beyond endurance. We are concerned for justice, peace and reconciliation — but there can never be any reconciliation before there is justice. Please hear us.

God help us all.

GROUP 2 - THE MULTI-RACIAL CHURCHES

These churches, which are mainly English-speaking, are opposed to apartheid, in principle. However, in practice, due to geographical reasons (racially segregated housing zones), congregations tend to consist of separate racial groups. These churches are grappling for a solution to this problem.

S.A.C.C. - South African Council of Churches

Originally formed in 1912 under the initiative of the Dutch Reformed Church, this organization now includes the major Protestant denominations except the Dutch Reformed Church which quit the organization during World War II, accusing it of becoming "political".

The S.A.C.C., under the leadership of Secretary-General Bishop Desmond Tutu, is very critical of the apartheid system. Its aim is to work toward "a new kind of South Africa, a more just, a more open and non-racial society where everyone counts because they are children of God."

The S.A.C.C. provides assistance to families of banned and detained persons as well as political prisoners, and also provides funds for unemployment self-help projects and community development schemes.

It has been the object of a great deal of harassment from the South African government. It has been charged with "fomenting unrest" and "promoting civil disobedience and passive resistance". Ministers and priests have been imprisoned. The government has also confiscated Bishop Tutu's passport.

The Roman Catholic Church

This church has also taken a strong stand against apartheid. In a statement released from the Catholic Bishops' Conference, in February 1977, church leaders said, "We add our corporate voice as leaders of the Catholic Church in this country to the cry for a radical revision of the system... The only solution to our racial tensions consists in conceding full citizen and human rights to all persons in the Republic, not by choice, on the false grounds of colour, but on the grounds of the common humanity of all men."

GROUP 3 - THE INDEPENDENT AFRICAN CHURCHES

These churches, now numbering over three thousand different sects, are a major factor in the liberation struggle of black South Africans. They have evolved since the early 1900's, due to a disillusionment with the traditional Christian mission churches and a desire to incorporate traditional African beliefs into their religious practices. Although these churches previously showed little leadership in the liberation struggle, they now are increasingly critical of government policies. They are potentially a strong force to be reckoned with because of their large following among the black population.

WHAT ARE CHURCHES IN CANADA DOING?

1. South Africa Education Project - a project of the United Church of Canada aimed at educating Canadians on the situation in South Africa. It prints a monthly newsletter.
2. Taskforce on Churches and Corporate Responsibility
3. Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace
4. The Lutheran Church - It is active in fighting apartheid in Namibia, a colony of South Africa. As a result of this, the printing presses of the Lutheran churches have been blown up twice (1973, 1980) by agents of the South African government.

C.A.R. IS WORKING WITH CHURCHES IN CALGARY

C.A.R. is helping local churches to develop programs to fight apartheid in South Africa and Namibia.

Contact C.A.R. for information, speakers, and resources.

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