

BETWEEN REFORM AND TRANSFORMATION: SHALOM FOR SOUTH AFRICA?¹

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OPSOMMING

TUSSEN HERVORMING EN TRANSFORMASIE: SHALOM VIR SUID-AFRIKA?

In hierdie artikel word uitgegaan van die standpunt dat daar in Suid-Afrika feitelik konsensus bestaan oor die noodsaak vir ingrypende sosio-politieke verandering, maar dat menings oor hoe en in watter rigting sodanige verandering moet plaasvind, wyd uiteenloop.

Daar word twee basiese benaderings ten opsigte van verandering onderskei, naamlik 'n reformistiese en 'n transformistiese benadering. Binne die reformistiese kategorie word weer 'n reaksionêre en 'n pragmatiese groepering onderskei en binne die transformistiese kategorie 'n pragmatiese en revolusionêre groepering.

Veranderingstrategieë wat tot die bogemelde groepe se beskikking is, word ondersoek. Klem word veral op drie moontlike strategieë gelê: politieke mobilisering, geweld en isolasie. Ten slotte word oorweeg of Christene in Suid-Afrika 'n bydrae tot politieke verandering kan lewer. Daar word tot die gevolgtrekking gekom dat dit wel moontlik is, maar dat skouspelagtige resultate nie verwag moet word nie.

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Aangesien die artikel reeds in Mei 1989 as 'n referaat by 'n konferensie aangebied is, is sekere van die heel jongste politieke ontwikkelinge in Suid-Afrika nog nie daarin verdiskonteer nie. Die basiese analise-model word egter as steeds geldig aangebied.

1. AGREED - ON CHANGE

"We accept the verdict of the past until the need for change cries out loudly enough to force upon us a choice between the comforts of further inertia and the irksomeness of action." (Learned Hand.)²

The vast majority of South Africans, from the radical left to the far right, are agreed on one issue: change, far-reaching change. This proposition should, however, be qualified. Agreement is restricted to the fact of - perhaps even the necessity for - change. It does not include the nature, the direction, the final object or the most desirable end results of change.

Change is always unpredictable, and it can be unexpectedly rapid:

- In February 1917 Lenin spoke of the struggle in Russia which he then thought would still last "for a very long time". In October 1917 the Bolshevistic Revolution was a fait accompli.
- Rhodesia became Zimbabwe in the lifetime of its former prime minister, Ian Smith, who - with reference to the possibility of majority government - once exclaimed: "Never in a thousand years!"
- In South Africa any suggestion of peace in Angola and independence for Namibia would have been shrugged off less than two years ago.

People's perceptions of the future as signified by their reactions to the inevitability of change, can guide an analysis of the present situation in South

² All quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from Tripp RT 1985 The International Thesaurus of Quotations Penguin Books: 73-75.

Africa, and stimulate reflection on a possible future - without getting trapped in the impasse known as the paralysis of analysis. My analytical model hinges on the aforementioned perceptions and reactions of people, and it obviates the need for inadequate categories such as left-right, liberal-conservative (or verlig-verkramp), radical-reactionary and especially black-white. This model is premised on two basic attitudes towards change in South Africa: a reformist and a transformist attitude.³

Reformers see change - or reform, as some of them call it - as essentially a process of socio-political adjustment and accommodation. This distinctly evolutionary process is designed to leave - in principle at least - existing structures of society and the current rules of the political game intact. Transformers, on the other hand, work for transformation that is root-directed or radical socio-political change. To them the basic structures of society cannot remain, and therefore a fundamentally new style of politics is called for.

These divergent attitudes do not inevitably coincide with the variety of party political affiliations in - and outside - South Africa, although basic trends of thought within most of the groupings on the political scene are either predominantly reformist or transformist. The reformist-transformist dichotomy is most visible in South Africans' basic attitude to race as a political factor. Reformers are bent on maintaining the racial basis of the present system - albeit

³ The basic reformist-transformist categories were first explored by Christo Nel, co-ordinator of the first workshop of the Consultative Business Movement. More can be read about it in the publication which resulted from this workshop: Du Preez, Max, Evans, Gavin and Grealy, Rosemary (eds.), 1988. *The Broederstroom Encounter*. Johannesburg : Consultative Business Movement. (Available from: The Consultative Business Movement, P.O. Box 2352, Johannesburg, 2000.) I myself have extended and refined this model by adding the reactionary and revolutionary dimensions; see below and also see Du Plessis, L.M. 1988. "Die RSA in die jaar 2000: 'n Politieke Toekomsblik". *Woord en Daad/Word and Action*, 28(315):11-15.

in an overhauled form. Transformers on the other hand are committed to its replacement with at the very least a non-racial democracy.⁴

2. THE REFORMERS

"The more things change, the more they remain the same." (Alphonse Karr.)

The two most powerful white political parties in South Africa, the ruling National Party (NP) and the official opposition, the Conservative Party (CP), are the home bases for reformist politics. However, many of the blacks, so-called coloureds and Asians operating within the present political system and participating in its institutions, are probably more reformist than transformist. Reformers are also not totally absent among supporters of the Democratic Party (DP), a white political party to the left of the NP and the CP.⁵

The movements I have labelled with a reformist tag are in many respects, to say the least, not exactly birds of a feather. An additional distinction must therefore be drawn between reactionary and pragmatic reformers.

⁴ I use the qualification "at the very least" because there are also transformers who would want to substitute a more thoroughly black or "African" political system for the present white or "European" dominated one.

⁵ This party was formed through amalgamation of the Progressive Federal Party (PFP), the Independent Party (IP) and the National Democratic Movement (NDM), i.e. the former parliamentary opposition to the "left" of the government. The new party still experiences difficulty to develop a new identity, since it has to provide a new home to former political rivals. It is for instance still led by a triumvirate.

2.1 Reactionary reformers

The reactionary reformers are mostly neo-Verwoerdians who subscribe to the traditional model of apartheid: a South Africa divided among its various ethnic (in effect: racial) groups in recognition of what is called the right to political self-determination of peoples.

There are two main variations on this theme. The CP perceives separate development as a grandiose model of social engineering, designed to help distribute the country geographically among its peoples in such a way that white privilege remains essentially intact. With certain reactionary groupings - to wit the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB), the Afrikaner Volkswag (AVW) and the Herstigte Nasionale Party (HNP) - the partition idea has taken on separatist dimensions. These people, mainly Afrikaners, are prepared to restrict their demands for a people's state to a smaller portion of the country, on condition that they must then be left free to determine their own affairs in their geographically (more) modest Boerestaat. What they actually envisage is a form of secession, recognizing that the greater part of South Africa (outside their homeland) will be racially mixed or desegregated.

With all reactionary reformers the bottom line is, however, the same: political structures in a new South Africa must guarantee white self-determination, while racial segregation must remain and must come to full fruition in an utopia of optimal territorial separation.

2.2 Pragmatic reformers

The pragmatic reformers are prepared to go a long way in making concessions to other groups in order to get rid of ugly apartheid. During the last few years they have been coining a number of ostensibly new political phrases such as accommodation for all in a society of minorities, the abolition of unnecessary and offensive discrimination, political participation to the highest level - all of these within the framework of racially defined own and general affairs. This last qualification evidences the bottom line of these neo-segregationists: the final effective say in political matters has to remain with the privileged minority. This is why race has to be upheld as a decisive constituent of any new juridico-political dispensation.

The pragmatic reformers are in power. Their policies have not won - and will probably not win - legitimacy with the voteless majority in South Africa. NP reformers have raised expectations which, in turn, have unleashed renewed (and unprecedented) opposition to the regime. The response of the powers that be has been the conversion of civil government into securitocracy. The lack of legitimacy of the regime is compounded by the lack of planned and systematic reform. Reform is often equated with mere ad hoc reaction to political pressure. In the long run the legitimacy crisis makes for an increased dose of strong arm tactics for the regime to retain power.

In all fairness, however, let me add a footnote to what I have just said. The NP initiated political reform against considerable odds. It has also gone some distance in allaying certain deep-seated prejudices and fears of many of its traditional supporters. I am referring in particular to the success it had in canvassing support for the idea of power-sharing relative to the 1983 referendum. The majority of Afrikaners traditionally believed that power-sharing would be the death-knell for the survival of whites in South Africa. It is therefore in this sense a pity that reform has stalled during the last three years or so of P.W. Botha's leadership.

3. THE TRANSFORMERS

"Nothing is permanent but change." (Heraclitus.)

The transformist approach also covers a wide spectrum of political affiliations: the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), the Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO), the South African Communist Party (SACP), the African National Congress (ANC), the United Democratic Front (UDF),⁶ Inkatha, certain so-called coloured and Asian political parties participating in the tri-cameral system (for example Alan Hendrickse's Labour Party (LP)) and the white parliamentary opposition to the left of the NP (the DP). The transformers consist of a revolutionary and a pragmatic group.

⁶ Which actually is an umbrella organization with a number of more localized affiliates.

3.1 Revolutionary transformers

The aim of the revolutionary transformers is to substitute a people's democracy for the present structures of oppression through a struggle of the people. Violence or armed struggle is an important dimension of this strategy but it is neither the only nor necessarily its principal dimension. What is of prime importance though is that democracy must ultimately be an achievement of the people. The physical and spiritual mobilization of the oppressed masses is therefore of paramount strategic significance. South Africans are to be educated politically for a fundamentally new future much of which must, already in the present, come to right in alternative people's structures: people's movements, people's education, people's courts etc. Infection by the structures of the status quo takes the edge off revolutionary action. All possible forms of co-operation with and co-option into the present system is therefore vigorously opposed.

There are two main streams among the revolutionaries. The first is (black) Pan-Africanism aspiring to restore Africa to her natural children who are predominantly - though not necessarily - black. Non-blacks can be Pan-Africanist as well if they identify with and allow themselves to be absorbed by the black cause which is, in a word, the cause of the oppressed. The PAC and AZAPO are the chief proponents of this black consciousness stream.

The non-racial or charterist⁷ stream as espoused by the SACP, the ANC and

⁷ So to signify adherence to the Freedom Charter, a distinctly non-racial statement of liberation dating from 1955 and the preamble of which contains inter alia the following statements:

"...(S)outh Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white ...

"... (O)nly a democratic state, based on the will of the people can secure to all their birthright without distinction of colour, race, sex or belief ..." (my emphases).

the UDF with its affiliates, is more consciously inclusive of all races in South Africa. It is furthermore less prescriptive as regards identification with a racially defined cause: oppression is to a larger extent defined in socio-economic rather than black-white terms.

3.2 Pragmatic transformers

The pragmatic transformers by and large champion non-racialism in a multi-party democracy. In a sense they understand non-racialism and democracy different from the revolutionaries, but they do share the latter's conviction that doing away with the racial basis of the system will require much more than mere adjustment and accommodation. The pragmatists are also at odds with the revolutionaries as to strategy. They are less in favour of using brute force and are mostly repelled by the idea of resorting to violence. Their approach is many-sided, their strategies experimental in nature. As multiple strategists they also have less qualms about working - to a certain extent at least - from within the system. They will therefore also try to use the system in order to transform the system itself.

This grouping is in real political terms the least powerful. Most of the non-white pragmatic transformers do have political power bases. So-called coloured and Indian political parties participating in the tri-cameral system have it right in parliament, while some black political movements, like Inkatha of Gatsha Buthelezi, have it in self-governing (non-independent) homelands.* These groupings are, however, rejected in no uncertain terms by the supporters of mass democratic movements such as UDF, AZAPO etc. Their most serious political concern seems to be their deficient legitimacy at a national level - as evidenced, for instance, by ridiculously low percentage polls in elections for the bodies and institutions through which they seek to operate.

* These homelands refuse to accept independence because they regard themselves part of the larger South Africa, but they do co-operate within a system of legislative and governmental autonomy provided for in a pre-independence phase.

While pragmatic transformers have not been very successful in mustering popular (white) support - due partly to a lack of political experience and partly to the fact that they are individualists who have not really defined themselves as a distinct political grouping. Furthermore their message is not very popular with the privileged minority whom they have to convince that forgoing some of their privileges today, will be in the long term interest of South Africa.

This category of transformers nevertheless remains a political force which is not to be neglected, with a total percentage support more or less equalling that of the far rightest CP, presently the official opposition in the white House of Assembly. Furthermore some of the most creative political thinkers in South Africa are thriving in the trial and error atmosphere of pragmatic transformation. Their multiple strategy approach enhances their political mobility and they are well equipped to keep abreast of change. This could win a future DP considerable (white) support in a situation of change and transition - if only it could pull its act together and consolidate its membership and, most importantly, its leadership.

4. STRATEGIES

"The interval between the decay of the old and the formation and the establishment of the new, constitutes a period of transition, which must always necessarily be one of uncertainty, confusion, error, and wild and fierce fanaticism." (John C. Calhoun.)

Three mutually supportive strategic options face both reformers and transformers:

- political mobilization,
- the isolation of opponents and
- violence.

4.1 Political mobilization

Political mobilization in essence consists of canvassing and consolidating popular support for a political cause in competition with rivals. In a sense mobilization is what political activity is all about.

The reformers' success with this strategy is limited in principle since their political efforts are targeted mainly at the white electorate. Competition has remained intra-paradigmatic, between reactionary and pragmatic reformers. During the last few years the reactionaries have made noticeable inroads into the white electoral support enjoyed by the pragmatists.

Reformers eagerly claim that their particular political programme - be it pragmatic or reactionary - enjoys black support or, at least, approval. But it has been rather difficult for their whites only political endeavours to win legitimacy with blacks. The pragmatic reformers - who control the system - have had limited success in winning over black support. Winning over has mostly meant co-opting people into the system. This in turn has had certain unforeseen results. Blacks (and so-called coloureds and Asians) thus involved have generally speaking not been very reliable partners. Some of them have been seeking the kingdom of own interest first without any real concern as to whether, in the long run, they will be serving public interest as well. Others have been thwarting the intentions of those who co-opted them, by exploiting their involvement in the system to promote transformist politics.

The benefits which stand to accrue to black transformers from political mobilization, are restricted in principle too - not because their support base is unduly narrow, but because they themselves are excluded from normal political processes. What is an advantage from an overall transformist point of view though, is that white (pragmatic) transformists do have natural access to parliamentary politics, the result being that transformists do have immediate links with both parliamentary politics and the extra-parliamentary movement which exists on account of the votelessness of the majority.

Extra-parliamentary movements have furthermore had considerable success in mobilizing the masses for non-parliamentary political action: passive resistance, civil disobedience, demonstrations, boycott actions inside the country, mobilizing and organizing workers' power etc. This movement has in fact been so successful and so powerful that the reformist government has found it necessary to clamp down on it with force. More about this in 4.3 below.

4.2 Isolation

Since politics by nature involves mobilization, one way of obstructing political progress is to isolate the agents of mobilization from the masses they are to mobilize. This has been one of the principal strategies of the reformist NP: to outlaw transformist activists by (inter alia) detaining them without trial, banning them, banning their organizations, restricting their activities etc.

Transformist activists have responded to this with an isolation strategy of a different kind, namely to isolate the regime and its supporters internationally. This has been happening with respect to inter alia diplomatic, economic, cultural and sporting relations. Some black transformers claim that comprehensive economic sanctions against South Africa remains the only non-violent method that can help bring about changes of a transformist nature.

4.3 Violence

The increasing lack of legitimacy of the reformist regime has made for the ever increasing use of strong arm tactics in an attempt to avert resistance and maintain power. A government is sometimes entitled to use coercion to maintain law and order. This is to be done in public interest and not simply to promote a particular party political cause. In South Africa public interest, from a government perspective, is defined rather narrowly, referring primarily to the interests of the privileged minority which are to be protected against claims of the majority.

The reformist regime's failure to further public interest in a comprehensive sense, is the root of its lack of legitimacy. It no longer sticks to the basic rules of the game, and normal legal safeguards are by-passed or simply ignored to an ever increasing extent. More and more unfettered control is exercised over the lives of those who do not support the system. A securocratic system of government has emerged next to the already battered civil system with the former steadily gaining the upper hand.

A government which exercises drastic executive powers and which is not prepared to have its judgements and its conduct scrutinized on the basis of legal norms, is violent in principle - structurally violent. In South Africa this

violence has manifested itself in practice as well. Apartheid as social engineering has been forced through at a considerable price: insults by officials, the breaking up of families, forced removals, shootings, police brutality under a system of detention without trial - all these have been symptomatic of the chronic subversion of human rights, the perversion of civilised principles of law and, eventually, the growing delegitimization and dehumanization of civil government in my country. The continuation of the state of emergency is evidence of the fact that state violence is still considered necessary by a regime which apparently remains committed not to dismantle the structures of minority privilege.

It is one of the miracles of South Africa that transformist response to state violence has not itself been inevitably and totally violent. Even the ANC, the chief proponent of the armed struggle strategy, remained essentially non-violent until the early sixties when it was banned.

ANC violence, which by now appears to have become part and parcel of everyday life in South Africa, must be seen in perspective. Firstly, though the ANC has been responsible for several rather atrocious incidents of violence, their strong arm strength in no way matches that of the regime. It is most unlikely that the ANC would succeed in overthrowing the government through armed struggle. Secondly it is unfair to blame all forms of mob violence during riots on the ANC. Many of these incidents are pure thuggery for which individuals must accept full responsibility. Finally a perspective of a history of conscious and overt oppression in South Africa helps explain why the ANC has been resorting to violence as part of its strategy. It does not, however, necessarily provide a basis for justifying the use of violence.

5. THE FUTURE? ASSESSING ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES

"Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or the present are certain to miss the future." (John F. Kennedy.)

I am a transformist, more pragmatic than revolutionary, and my assessment of strategies will therefore be coloured by my own strategic preferences. Furthermore, as a Christian, I find certain strategies in certain situations unacceptable if not reprehensible. With this in mind, what then is an

appropriate strategy - or strategies - to help bring to reality a non-racial and democratic South Africa with equal opportunities for all her children? And how can one as outsiders best become involved in this process?

The obvious answer appears to be: support the transformers while, at the same time, convincing the reformers, if possible, and obstructing them, if necessary. To this end, political mobilization is the most basic of the three strategies I have mentioned, and it will in my assessment also be the most successful in the long run. Isolation and violence can, at most, be supportive strategies which should be employed with circumspection, lest they subvert the progress that can be made through mobilization.

Political mobilization should be aimed at making the masses politically conscious and at educating them for liberation. They should also be organized politically - something which, at present, has to be done against considerable odds because of government restrictions on many of the principal actors in the mass democratic movement. However, to reap optimal benefits from mobilization it should not be directed at the oppressed masses only. It is of vital importance that transformist forces in white politics be consolidated too. The new DP, for instance, will have to act within the broader framework of transformist political mobilization.

It will also be in the interest of transformation politics if non-white transformist revolutionaries and pragmatists can stop their reciprocal throat cutting. I know that, given certain deep-seated sensitivities, co-operation between these two groups do not seem very likely at the present moment. Nevertheless it seems ridiculous to me that people who subscribe to the same basic principles and who in essence cherish the same ideals, must be separated by style and strategy to the extent that they become fierce rivals.

Apartheid has not only resulted in but has also thrived on isolating people from one another on a racial basis. Political mobilization as a panacea to apartheid should therefore also actively concentrate on the de-isolation or, more positively, the integration of blacks and whites in South Africa. Of great significance in this respect are, to my mind, initiatives to involve whites from inside South Africa, and in particular Afrikaners, in explorative discussions with organizations such as the ANC. Not only have these discussions enhanced

factual knowledge of views and perceptions on both sides, but it has also had significant symbolic impact. The possibility that mass democratic organizations such as the ANC on the one hand and the regime itself on the other can become involved in negotiations on the future of South Africa, is no longer completely beyond contemplation.

International isolation of the regime and the supporters of apartheid has been very successful in many respects in spite of the predictions of prophets of doom that boycott will only result in a hardening of racist attitudes. A negative side effect of a strategy of isolation is that it also strikes at people who do not really deserve punishment. In the case of comprehensive economic sanctions undeserved punishment can devastate the livelihood of many of the very people to whose liberation the said sanctions are supposed to contribute.

Nevertheless I think that it is necessary that people and countries outside South Africa adhere - in principle - to a strategy of isolating the regime and its supporters internationally as long as apartheid appears likely to remain. Reformist South Africans should be constantly reminded that a system of government based on racial distinctions does not conform to either specifically Christian or generally civilized standards of civil government.

Isolation should, however, be carefully targeted. It should cause optimal inconvenience to the regime itself and those of its beneficiaries who can exert political pressure from inside. Boycotts and sanctions should therefore be directed primarily at the luxuries on which members of the privileged minority usually thrive. They should also, if possible, be aimed at those particular individuals who and institutions which in some or other way still indicate support for the racially biased socio-economic and -political system in South Africa. With an isolation strategy it is impossible to avoid that innocent people also suffer. This, I guess, is one of the unfortunate prices that will have to be paid for transformation in South Africa. Innocent suffering can nevertheless be restricted if sanctions are well targeted.

In any event, international isolation as a strategy is preferable to violence which has been and will remain predominantly counterproductive. Violence as a means of achieving political goals is problematic in principle, but it is at best

also a highly insufficient strategy - even in a supportive capacity. Let me explain why.

As far as the reformist regime is concerned, structural violence cannot buy it the legitimacy it lacks. At best it can help reinforce structures which, in the long run, are bound to collapse because they lack political morality. A few battles may be won while, in the long run, the war is lost.

Violent transformist reaction to the violent system, however, gives the structural violence of the regime a moral face-lift. It provides the badly needed excuses for securitocracy. It stuffs government media with useful propaganda material to demonize or, at least, cast suspicion on all transformist endeavours. It sways people who could have been active transformers rather to close ranks with the threatened minority. Viewed from a transformist perspective I cannot but conclude that all this is too high a price to pay for a morally suspect strategy which has by and large left - and will probably continue to leave - the government unshaken.

I realize that neither the government nor the liberation movements engaged in the armed struggle will simply forgo violence as a strategy. On the contrary, if one is to believe political rhetoric, both sides are prepared to fight to the bitter end. This reminds one of the definition of a politician as someone who is prepared to sacrifice your life for his country! Fortunately, however, history has proved that political rhetoric ought to be taken with a pinch of salt!

I think that this is an area in which there should be considerable involvement from outside. Third parties coming from the international community are in a favourable position to exert pressure on both sides to talk to rather than to kill each other.

6. WHAT ABOUT CHRISTIANS?

"... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I and in you" (John 17:21).

I wish I could have told you that there is a third force in South Africa, comprising the 70% of its population who are (nominally at least) Christians,

ready and able actively to fulfil a mediating function, prepared to voice strong opposition to racial oppression while, at the same time, holding a tight rein over the excesses of liberation. Sadly enough this is not the case.

Christians are divided along very much the same lines as the population as a whole. White soldiers, fighting, for Christ, kill terrorists carrying Bibles in their pockets. Policemen professing to be Christians disrupt the funerals of fellow Christians killed in incidents of unrest. Political loyalties and prejudices have by and large been transplanted onto the churches and onto Christian life in general.

However, this is no reason why Christians should remain silent. Christians from outside the country can do a lot to help Christians from inside to see what common ground they actually share. The Christian faith has indeed transformed the minds of many white people I know to come to see the injustices that have been and are being committed in South Africa in the name of the idols of survival and progress.

People who call themselves Christians remain answerable to the Gospel - and must be confronted with it. They must also be brought into close contact with fellow Christians who, especially in South Africa, have been separated from them as a result of the artificial divisions of apartheid.

The results that can be achieved through working with Christians are unlikely to be spectacular - especially in the short term. In the long run, however, their effect can be much more than can be determined by human calculation only.

Let me conclude on a cautiously optimistic note with reference to three examples of encouraging incidents and changing scenarios which date from the recent past, and which (directly or indirectly) involve Christians.

The first goes back to late 1986 early 1987. I was involved with three other colleagues, all of them theologians, in a project which tested in practice the validity of a finding which emerged from a report of the Investigation into

Intergroup Relations of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC).⁹ It was inter alia concluded that, in principle, Christians in South Africa share values which can and will most probably be vital to the building of a new nation. The four of us initiated the drafting of a document in which such consensus could be spelt out. We sought (and obtained) the co-operation of Christians representing a wide range of political loyalties and affiliations.

The results of our project, which have been published,¹⁰ were rather encouraging. We found that, when it comes to basics, Christians are to a large extent agreed on the kind of political future that should be aimed at in South Africa. In practice, of course, much will still have to be done to remove obstacles which have been keeping people with substantially corresponding convictions apart. The possibility that the minds of Christians can grow together at a more practical or operational level can, however, not be excluded.

Secondly Christian leaders were actively involved in the resolution of the crisis caused by the hunger strike of people detained without trial. Progressively minded political transformers, such as Bishop Desmond Tutu, took the lead. I was astonished by the great measure of consensus reached between these leaders and the Minister of Law and Order, Mr. Adriaan Vlok, who is perceived as perhaps the most visible incarnation of reformist securitocracy. I was even

⁹ Main Committee, HSRC Investigation into Intergroup Relations. 1985. *Die Suid-Afrikaanse Samelewing: Werklikhede en Toekomsmoontlikhede*. Pretoria : HSRC. The finding referred to in the text was actually based on the more specialized report of the Work Committee: *Religion*. 1985. *Religion, Intergroup Relations and Social Change in South Africa*. Pretoria : HSRC.

¹⁰ See Lategan, Bernard, Kinghorn, Johann and De Villiers, Ettiene. 1987. *The Option for Inclusive Democracy: A Theological-ethical Study of appropriate Social Values for South Africa*. Stellenbosch : Centre for Hermeneutics. (Available from: The Centre for Hermeneutics, Department of Biblical Studies, University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch, 7600.)

more impressed by the spirit of responsibility and mutual concern in which the negotiations took place.

Allow me in the final instance to generalize somewhat. Developments during the past few weeks and months involving Christians in South Africa, have been promising. It appears as if a determination to settle disputes of long standing among certain Christian churches is emerging. Churches belonging to the so-called Dutch-Reformed family have had promising conciliatory talks in recent times. All of this is taking place against the back-drop of a political scenario which to an increasing extent seems to favour a negotiated settlement of the South African issue. In this respect the following should be noted:

- Internationally there has been an adjustment in the approach of some of the major powers to the South African issue. Most notable and dramatic is the Soviet Union's cautious involvement in peace initiatives in South and Southern Africa. It is realized to an increasing extent that armed struggle is not going to resolve any of the most pressing socio-political issues within the foreseeable future.
- There is a growing preparedness amongst major liberation movements in- and outside South Africa - and I am thinking in particular of the ANC and its allies - to engage in negotiations about a post-apartheid South Africa rather than to resort to violence. An ANC document, *Constitutional Guidelines for a Democratic South Africa*,¹¹ has for example been placed on the table as a serious contribution to the debate on the political future of South Africa.
- Since the election of Mr. F.W. de Klerk as leader of the National Party it appears as if government attitudes might mellow, and as if there is a growing preparedness to discuss issues which had previously been held out as non-negotiables. Let me, however, immediately add: the proof of

¹¹ 1988. *Constitutional Guidelines for a Democratic South Africa*. Lusaka, ANC. (Available from: The African National Congress, P.O. Box 31791, Lusaka, Zambia / P.O. Box 38, 28 Penton Street, London N1 9PR.)

the pudding will lie in the eating. Mr. De Klerk and his supporters must realize that promising signs alone are not sufficient to get South Africa out of its present dilemmas.

One event of major significance needs mention. On 11 March 1988 the South African Law Commission released a working paper on group and human rights.¹² The Commission is a creature of statute¹³ which, from time to time, advises the government on law reforms. It consists of judges, magistrates, lawyers, law academics and officials of the Department of Justice. Its advice in the past pertained mainly to matters which were not seen as politically contentious. The report on group and human rights was requested by the Minister of Justice, Mr. Kobie Coetzee.

The Commission does no beating about the bush in prescribing a panacea to human rights ailments in South Africa. Not only does it propose a bill of rights which, in every respect, lives up to international standards, but it is also very frank about the fact that far-reaching changes in the South African legal and political system have become compellingly urgent. The document is a well-argued plea for transformation in the true sense of the word. The conclusions of the Commission as well as the strategy it recommends for the implementation of its proposed bill of rights, is backed by an incisive and insightful study of the significance of human rights, nationally as well as internationally. What in effect is recommended, is a free, democratic and non-racial South Africa.

Of course the South African government is not necessarily bound to accept and implement the recommendations of the Commission which are, at any rate, still subject to comment until 31 August 1989 when working on a final report will commence. At the same time, however, the government will have

¹² South African Law Commission. 1989. Working Paper 25, Project 58: Group and Human Rights. Pretoria. (Available from: the Secretary, S.A. Law Commission, Private Bag X668, Pretoria, 0001.)

¹³ The South African Law Commission Act 19 of 1973.

to consider these findings very seriously and will have to make its position known in no ambivalent terms. The Commission has no party political affiliations and is respected as an objective and independent forum of experts. What is more: it is seen to be the government's own Commission and, in a sense, it is.

A concluding thought: the Christian faith exhorts its adherents never to despair; the signs of the times in South Africa at present lend increasing factual support to such an attitude of hope-through-faith. Please continue to pray for us!