

The Christian Church and the Freedom Struggle

ZAPU

Commentary by ZAPU on the Audience given by Pope Paul to the leaders of FRELIMO, PAIGC and MPLA. Published in Zimbabwe Review (Lusaka), No. 9–10, September–October 1970.

Eye-brows were raised in Lisbon and there was going and coming to and from the Vatican by the Portuguese envoy to the Holy See. The Portuguese are predominantly Catholic in religion and ruthlessly imperialistic in politics. Economically they are die-hard capitalists whose basic and unadulterated wish is to retain their colonies for merciless exploitation. They were, therefore, surprised that the leader of their Church should intimate that he sympathised with the noble cause of the violently oppressed African masses.

What must have surprised most people who profess to be Christians was the alleged surprise of the Portuguese fascists. The Church, as we understand it, stands for equality, justice and complete harmony among mankind.

We felt that the Pope's expression of his understanding of the problem of the oppressed masses was a revelation of his understanding of these three cardinal virtues which the Church should or, rather, purports to represent.

The Portuguese, as members of this same Church and reading the same

religious material read by the Pope, should have understood why the Pope expressed his understanding of the plight of the oppressed people of Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissau.

It is a known and historically proved fact that imperialists use religion only as a vehicle for their inhuman ideas. Religion is used in colonised African countries as a kind of mental anaesthetic whose effect renders the colonised docile to their oppressors because they have been made to believe that what matters is the life hereafter.

The present trend by young militants to despise and, in many cases, dislike the propagators of the Christian faith is caused by atrocities perpetrated on the majority by fascists like Caetano, Vorster and Smith who profess to be acting on behalf of Christianity.

It should be pointed out that those who feel strongly that the Christian Church should be protected and promoted must take a decisively strong stand against these fascists and not hide behind excuses about why they do not call a spade a spade.

We differ with some Church leaders in Zimbabwe because they wish to settle for what they term a moderate racial policy (this means moderate oppression, if such a practice can exist) while we demand the complete and unconditional destruction of all forms of oppression.

The Roman Catholic Church had better take stock of its activities not only in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissau but also in South Africa and Zimbabwe with a view to establishing whether its activities are more in keeping with Christian principles and teachings than with those of the temporal powers of the day.

Its stand must be made clear to all and sundry vis-a-vis oppression.

It would be unjust and base not to point out that the recent conference of Roman Catholic bishops from Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Malawi in Lusaka made a laudable stand against oppression in their communique.

Those short-sighted people who indulge in wishful thinking to the extent that they say the Church should concentrate on ecclesiastical matters and leave temporal affairs to politicians should realise that man is man irrespective of whether he is a clergy or a politician.

His feelings when he is praying before an altar are not different from when he is sitting in a national assembly. If they are, then that individual is a downright sinner and hypocrite who has no moral right to pretend to be a defender of the Christian faith.

The line often, if not always, followed by the fascists is exactly like that of Nazi Germany when most churches where the clergy opposed Hitler's tyranny were objects of attack by the politicians.

South Africa's Vorster's attitude towards the Church is that, if the religious leaders strongly criticise his inhuman racist policies and practices, he will deal with them by silencing them once for all or deport them if they are not South African citizens.

Smith, for his part, pretends to be negotiating with Church leaders in order to reach an agreement acceptable to his dictatorship and the clergy. We

fail to see how this is possible. If it is possible, then we dare say it is also possible for Christ to strike a *modus vivendi* with Satan – absurd!

Church leaders have betrayed the very principles they profess to stand for in Zimbabwe by failing to stand firm against injustice and political intimidation.

None of them in Zimbabwe (we are referring mostly to the white clergy) has come out strongly enough to such an extent as to embarrass the Smith regime internationally in the circles of Christian churches.

We do not underestimate efforts of people like Bishop Skelton who, until recently, was based in Bulawayo to head the Anglican Church in Matabeleland. His voice was brave but it was too weak to be heard as he was virtually alone.

His colleagues in Salisbury, Umtali and elsewhere, refrained from standing out openly and bravely against the sad state of affairs. They acted as if they did not really care.

They behaved as if they were scared of Smith and his bunch of racists. They disgraced themselves and their faith.

Had Jesus been alive today, they would cowardly abandon him at the crucial time of reckoning.

We condemn them but call them at the same time to live up to their teachings if what they preach really comes from their hearts and not just from their heads.

We draw their attention to the Lusaka communique of the Roman Catholic bishops, a part of which states: 'We deplore the creation of an atmosphere of fear in which citizens are afraid to raise their voices in opposition to policies in their own countries . . . No member of the human family can claim authority before God to deny human rights and social justice to another member of that human family on the grounds of race, colour, tribe, religion, political views or conditions of life in any country . . .'

We regard these to be great words which are pregnant with wisdom and reality. We believe that Rhodesian Church leaders ought to remember and propagate them to their congregations instead of behaving as if they do not want to displease the fascist members of their congregations.

It is only when the Church leaders practise and suffer for what they preach that the oppressed masses can ever regard that institution with respect.

Many a time it has been stated that the young generations have chosen a path leading to what church leaders call darkness because they have turned their backs against the Church.

This assertion ignores the fact that the Christian Churches (their leaders) have failed themselves by not acting bravely and correctly in times when the oppressed masses expected them to come to their aid.

We have experienced incidents in which most of these leaders act so opportunistically that, when they think that the wind is blowing in favour of the oppressed masses, they begin to use their pulpits as platforms to denounce the fascists.

They never denounce these racists when it is clear that the situation is

under their (the racists') control. This is a shameful attitude which is not in keeping with what the world understands to be Christian teachings.

It is very important for these Church leaders to realise the fact that future relations between a free Zimbabwe and the Christian (and other religious) institutions will depend to a very large extent on the performance against and attitude of these organisations to the fascists in Zimbabwe at this very difficult period.