

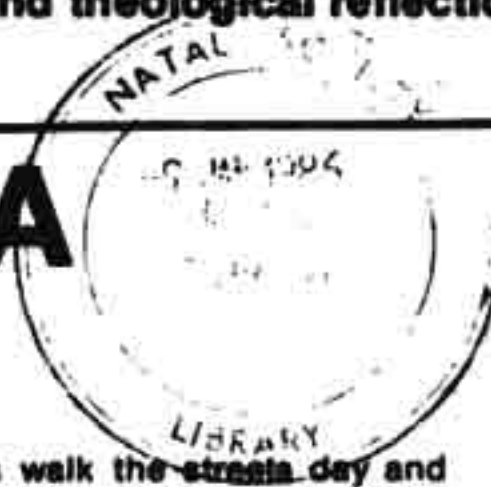


CRISIS NEWS

A bulletin of news and theological reflection on the State of Emergency

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ZWELETEMBA

~ siege intensified

Driving into Zweletemba is a depressing experience. At a roadblock, permits are checked. Our permit restricted us to going only to two places and speaking only to two people. The residents of Zweletemba are only allowed to go to their homes on production of their pass books. Cars are searched and drivers harassed on the way in and out.

On the right-hand side of the road, at the entrance to the residential area, two watch-towers, adorned with search lights, have been constructed. A police station is being built at the same location. It is ironical that no funds were available to electrify Zweletemba but an electrified police station, with powerful searchlights could be constructed.

Nightly the searchlights sweep the streets in search of transgressors of an imposed, yet unproclaimed, curfew.

Foot patrols walk the streets day and night intimidating and terrorizing the inhabitants. People are afraid to venture out.

The most sinister matter reported to us concerned the role of Zulu-speaking policemen. These people, dressed daily in blue and nightly in brown, are alleged to have committed the most ghastly atrocities against the people.

• We heard of them dragging young people, who would prefer to remain unnamed, into the veld and beating them. The beaten were then taken and left next to the Roman Catholic Church.

• We heard of people arriving home from work in taxis, only to be ambushed by these police who lie in wait for their arrival. These people are too afraid to lay charges.

• The police apparently enter the

homes of their victims and await them there. One was found hiding in a toilet of a private dwelling.

The funerals of victims of unrest are severely restricted to only 50 people plus the family. The police invariably harass the funeral proceedings.

While we were in Zweletemba 40 young people were detained whilst participating in a funeral vigil. The Senior police officer we approached in this regard refused to assure us that these children, many of whom were 10 years old or younger, would be released in the same condition as when they were detained. No reasons for the detentions were given.

The ruthless repression of the people of Zweletemba is an assault on all that constitutes human dignity. The lives of the residents are so disrupted that many may have left to seek temporary refuge elsewhere.

How does the Senior police officer, who angrily assured us that he was a "born again Christian" reconcile such viciousness with the Gospel of Justice and Peace? Such actions are an insult to all that is Christian!

REFLECTION

The Bible of the Oppressed

A recently released detainee remarked to an interrogator who insisted that the Bible was the only literature allowed:

"If you only knew what a revolutionary document the Bible is!"

In a time of crisis, such as the present, we read the Bible with an entirely different perspective and with new urgency. We suddenly see passages

like Mark 13:9,11 in a new light:

"But take heed to yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them... And when they bring you to trial and deliver you up, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it's not you who speak but the Holy Spirit."

A re-reading of these verses, and the overwhelming majority of biblical books reveals that it was precisely in and for times of crisis that they were written. These crises were almost

always political - which ensures the intensely political nature of the Bible. Mark wrote during the vicious persecution of Christians under Nero, Paul wrote from a prison cell, John of Patmos wrote the book of Revelation as "underground" literature to a community suffering under Emperor Domitian. The nature of the Old Testament is moulded by the political crises of the Exodus, the transition to the Monarchy and the Babylonian Exile.

Apart from the political crises out of which the biblical books emerged they do not make any sense at all.

It is not escapism, therefore, for us to turn to the Bible for inspiration and courage for the continuation of the struggle for liberation in South Africa. The very same God who delivered the oppressed Israelites from captivity in Egypt and in Babylon is He who assured the triumph of justice and truth for us today. We do not turn to the Bible in a fundamentalist way however, we view it as a document which emerged in the struggles of Christians and Jews in their historical crises. We see the Bible as a book written for the oppressed by the oppressed in the name of the

Liberator. The rich and powerful, the tyrants of Apartheid cannot claim the Bible as their own. A New Jerusalem was promised to the oppressed masses. The Bible is in its way more profoundly subversive than any other document of history.

This Bible, must be wrenched and rescued from the hands of the tyrants and oppressors in our country. The spiritualised and privatised interpretations of scripture deviously used by oppressors to legitimise their midnight deeds must be ruthlessly unmasked. The Bible is a proud symbol of the Christian faith - but it is also a symbol of liberation. It must be used to liberate! I conclude with some words of Gustavo Gutierrez:

"It is time to open the Bible and read it from the perspective of 'those who are persecuted in the cause of right' (Matt. 5:10), from the perspective of the condemned human beings of this earth... It is for them that the gospel is destined, it is to them that the gospel is preferentially addressed."

There is little more frightening for the oppressors of this world than the Bible properly read and obeyed!

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STATE OF EMERGENCY

What does it mean?

A State of Emergency has existed in 36 magisterial districts in South Africa since 21 July. The emergency was later lifted in six districts. On 26 October the State President declared a state of emergency in the Western Cape. Since that date, many people have been detained in terms of the emergency regulations, many organisations have been restricted in holding meetings and the distribution of information and the freedom of the press has been placed under rigid control. The emergency regulations have affected the lives of many people and many a question has been raised about what a state of emergency really means.

Powers

Provision is made for the declaration of a state of emergency by the State President in terms of the Public Safety Act no. 3 of 1953. This act allows the State President to declare the existence of a state of emergency "where circumstances have arisen in the country which seriously threaten the safety of the public or the maintenance of public order and the ordinary law of the land is inadequate to enable the government to ensure the safety of the public or to maintain public order".

The State President is also given the power, once the state of emergency has been announced, to make rules which he regards as necessary for the insurance of the safety of the public and the maintenance of law and order. The state of emergency is declared for a period of a year but can be extended ...

In everyday language this means that the State President hands over extraordinary powers to the security forces (which include the South African Police, the South African Defence Force, the South African Railways and

Force, the South African Railways Police and the South African Prisons Service).

The emergency rules give power to the Commissioner of Police in any emergency district to issue orders about matters such as curfews, the 'black-out' of news, the sealing off of areas and the banning of meetings. The Commissioner of Police can also close down businesses where he has reason to suspect that such businesses are likely to promote an existing boycott campaign against other businesses. He has the power to make it an offence for any child of school-going age not to be at school during school hours, unless the child has an excuse acceptable to the police.

The state of emergency regulations have an indemnity clause which gives any member of the Security Forces protection against criminal or civil action on the basis that he acted in good faith so as to "ensure the safety of the

state". Again, a number of official words that can cover gross mistakes and brutality on the side of the Security Forces. It means that the members of the communities have no protection legally against the actions of the security forces. The Courts cannot act on behalf of the people against the Security Forces. This 'freedom' leads to very little control being exercised over the actions of the Security Forces.

DETENTION

Detention became a household word before the declaration of a state of emergency in the Western Cape. Since 26 October massive swoops have been made all over the Peninsula and more and more people want to know what detention under emergency rule entails.

The rules made in terms of the state of emergency give wide powers to ANY member of the Security Forces. This means that any member of these forces, whatever his rank, may, without a warrant, arrest any person whose detention is, in his opinion, necessary for the maintenance of public order, or

the safety of the public or the safety of that person. The members of the forces also have the right to interrogate any person who they have arrested or detained.

Emergency detention can be ordered at the uncontrolled discretion of the police. An immediate court appearance plays no role anymore. Such detention is for an initial period of 14 days, but it can also be indefinite as the Minister of Law and Order can extend it after the first 14 days have elapsed. The Minister, by writing to the Prison Authorities, can order that any detainee be further detained for the period mentioned in his letter or for as long as the state of emergency remains in force.

Very strict rules cover the detention of people during the state of emergency. A detainee can be searched when taken into custody and searched again whenever it is thought to be necessary. These searches can be very embarrassing and harrassing.

Detainees are not entitled to ANY visits - not from a doctor, lawyer, magistrate or a family member, except with the permission of the Commissioner of Police and the Prison Commander. If a visit is allowed the detainee may not be in physical contact with the visitor. A prison official must be present and the detainee and the visitor have to use Afrikaans or English. If one of them is not proficient in either official language, an interpreter must be used. The detainee may not come into contact with any other person, or other prisoner, except with the Commissioner's permission.

The latest regulations about emergency detentions say that detainees may NOT, without special permission, receive letters, read any books other than the Bible and religious material. They are not allowed to study or listen to music. Selected magazines may be provided by the prison authorities.

Detainees will be punished for misconduct. Misconduct includes "insolence", "idleness" and "negligence" as well as "singing" and "whistling". Punishment for these offences are solitary confinement for up to 20 days; reduced food and up to six strokes with a cane for male prisoners under 40.

Detainees may not receive any food parcels but a reasonable supply of clothing is allowed. Detainees are also entitled to R20 which they can spend at the prison shop. Family and friends should immediately take items of clothing to the place where the detainee is being held. Practical clothing like track-suits is advisable. If the detainee is undergoing any medical treatment this must be brought to the attention of the prison authorities.



It is an offence to tell anyone that someone has been detained in terms of the emergency regulations, before the police have confirmed the detention and officially released the name of the detainee. It is often impossible to get this information from the police for days after the detention. This power game instills more fear and uncertainty amongst the family and friends and fellow workers of the detainee.

GATHERINGS

Severe restriction have been placed on meetings or any other public gatherings in areas under the state of emergency. These meetings or gatherings can be banned if the Security Forces are of the opinion that the gathering may endanger public safety or public order.

In the Western Cape a number of organizations have been banned from holding meetings right from the very start of the state of emergency. Other meetings under the auspices of other organizations have subsequently also been banned. All meetings in any area of the Western Cape to protest against the state of emergency have promptly been banned.

TEARGAS CAN BE A KILLER

How to cope with it

Teargas has become a vicious weapon in the hands of the Security Forces. Officially seen as an efficient distant control method for rioting crowds by the authorities, teargas has directly and indirectly killed people. This happened in Mamelodi, Pretoria during the third week of November when Security Forces fired teargas at a massive crowd. Old people and children were trampled to death overcome by teargas or trying to flee it.

The death of Maud Nzunga a seven month old baby, a number of days after the police threw teargas in the house in which she was sleeping, can according to several doctors and the mother of the baby be subscribed to the use of poisonous teargas in a limited space.

Teargas is dangerous and more and more people in the Western Cape have had some form of experience of being teargassed. This is often a very nasty and frightening experience and not everybody knows what to do during and after such an attack. The following information supplied by the Health Information Centre might help you to prepare for such a possible attack and also tells you what to do about it.

WHAT DOES TEARGAS DO TO YOU?

Anyone who has been gassed knows what it is like. As soon as there is a lot of teargas around:

- Your **EYES** become itchy and begin to feel sore. Often people can't see in bright light after their eyes have been exposed to teargas.
- Your nose runs and it will start to sting. After a while you may not be able to smell things.
- There will be a stinging pain in your **MOUTH** and **THROAT**.
- After a while your **CHEST** will feel tight and will be painful.
- You may begin coughing. Many people may have difficulty in **BREATHING**. Later you may vomit.
- Teargas hurts your **SKIN**. There will be a stinging pain on your face mostly around your lips. When you are hot and wet the teargas does more damage. You may get blisters and skin will crack open. In some cases this may turn into a bad infection.

Many doctors believe that teargas should be banned.

What to do during a teargas attack

- Do not panic. More people will get hurt if you panic.
- Try to get out of the teargas cloud. Check the direction of the wind and try to get to the other side of the cloud.
- Breathe slowly and not too deeply. Do not hold your breath. If you hold your breath now the next one you are going to take while still surrounded by gas is going to be that more deeper and will cause more pain and burning.
- Do not rub your eyes. It can only make it worse.
- Remember if you can no longer smell the gas it does not mean that the gas has gone away. Teargas often makes you lose your sense of smell.

TEARGAS MIXES WITH WATER

What to do once you are out of the gas

Teargas mixes with water or sweat. Combined with water it makes a poison that burns. That is why teargas burns your eyes, your lips and the inside of your mouth. It can also burn your skin where you are sweating. Therefore after the attack:

- Try to find a cool dry place.
- If you can you should change your clothes.
- If you are wet you must dry yourself.
- Do NOT put water on your face and body. The gas will just burn you more if you do this.
- You can try and wipe your face with vegetable oil. Then you can wash it off with a lot of water and dry your face immediately.
- If you swallow your spit it will make you vomit. It is better to spit it out.
- If you have had a lot of teargas, you should try to see a friendly doctor. He will provide you with medicine to put in your eyes and will treat skinburns.
- If you are sick, especially if you have asthma or hay fever, you should try to stay away from teargas. If you do get teargassed when you are sick or suffer from a lung condition, try to get to a doctor quickly.

Be ready for teargas

If you think the police are going to use teargas you can prepare yourself for it.

- You can wear long clothes like overalls, pants and long-sleeved shirts. Tuck the sleeves into gloves and push the bottom of your pants into socks.
- You can also wear a shirt with a high collar and a hat.
- You can wear goggles to protect your eyes. Some workers wear these goggles at work.
- DO NOT PUT VASELINE ON YOUR SKIN. This has wrongly been seen as a protective measure but the police are using different kinds of teargas. Vaseline makes some of the teargas go into your skin more easily.

In a small space teargas is a killer

Police often throw teargas inside buildings. They throw it into church halls, schools, houses and even clinics. Indoors teargas is especially dangerous, because it does not get blown away by the wind. This means you will breathe in much more teargas. You may get very sick afterwards. If a person cannot get out of a room which is filled with teargas, they may die.

Teargas in a small space is very dangerous for babies.

Never pick up a teargas canister with your naked hands. You could be badly burnt.

BRUTE SHOW of FORCE

to the food and became ill. She lost such a lot of weight that one of the senior wardens took pity on her and started bringing her nourishing food from her own home. It was the same woman who the day Lucille was freed at last said to her mother: "Mrs Meyer, your daughter was a pleasure to look after. She never grumbled or complained. I grew very fond of her."

Still the authorities found it necessary to handcuff this little woman during each trip that was made between East London, King Williams Town and the Court, something that is seldom seen in Cape Town for similar cases as Lucille's.

Though Lucille's brave resistance against apartheid, she has been active since the days of the tricameral elections, is nothing new in the Meyer household, the past few months, and, especially the state of emergency, has had its effect. Lucille's work and beliefs have split the family. The father and the brothers tend to be against Lucille, the sister takes a firm stand against the present day police and army activity, but the mother is the one who stands solidly behind her daughter.

"The work she does for the church is right. It is for that that they are after her. I believe in her church work and I believe in Lucille," she says proudly.

What she does not believe in is the police and army presence in Mitchells Plain. The day after the shootings the police were playing soccer with the kids. That was the day she went to them and said, "Today you want to play with our children, tomorrow you will shoot them again." Then she called some of the children she knew off the playing field, pointing out the casspirs ready at every corner.

Cries in her Sleep

Also in Mitchells Plain there is a 13 year old girl Tania who cries in her sleep lately and is under doctor's treatment for nervous strain.

Tania (her mother did not want to give the second name out of fear for reprisal) was playing with some kids in one of the little parks the Monday before the state of emergency was declared in the Western Cape. One of the neighbouring kids came running with the news that the police were picking up these children, including Tania.

In the meantime, Romay, Tania's 16 year old sister was already at the scene. She went up to the policeman who was holding her sister and said, "Take me, Tania doesn't even understand what is going on," making clear that Tania never had anything to do with any of the troubles in that part of the township. The police ignored Romay, swung their sjamboks and swore at her.

The mother who by this time also confronted the police and wanted to know what her little daughter had done to be taken away, fainted. The police laughingly stepped over her.

Tania, who was refused permission to go to the toilet had wet herself and was put in the police vehicle with others. They drove around with her for hours and asked questions about people throwing stones and making fires. By this time she did not answer any more. She just stared at them. Until they just let her go, she was never even taken to the charge office. It was merely another show of force and intimidation.

Bellville South

On October the 29, the day after the Pollsmoor march, police and army presence in most townships was particularly strong. Two young girls 15 and 21 years old (who for obvious reasons do not want to be named since the state of emergency came into effect) were walking along Amanda Street in Bellville South. Further along this street there had been some stone throwing at police vehicles and people had gone to see what had happened. Everything seemed quiet when suddenly buckshot was fired from nowhere. The two girls were hit and fell to the ground. There had been no warning and the police fired from behind a garden hedge where they were hiding.

One of the girls told Crisis News that she had been hit in the neck. While she was lying on the ground she started praying loudly to God to help her. One of the policemen said to her: "Hou jou bek - otherwise we will shoot some more."

The injured girls were taken to Tygerberg Hospital but the authorities did not tell the girls' parents where they were. They only found out that the girls were shot through a witness who happened to know where one of the victims lived.

Only days later a policeman phoned to say that a charge of public violence was laid against them. The girls, who emphasize that they had nothing to do with the stoning, have appeared in court three times in connection with this charge. They were granted bail and are due for a fourth appearance in the Bellville Regional Court.

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CANDLES FOR HOPE Every Wednesday thousands of people in thousands of homes in the strife torn community of the Western Cape light candles. They are lit as symbols of solidarity in this time of terrible repression and suffering. They are lit to remember all those in detention. They are lit as a sign of resistance to the State of Emergency and the presence of troops in the Townships. They are lit in the hope that justice and peace will come, 'The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.' (John 1:5)