

Is there still time?

Text of a speech given by The Very Reverend Desmond Tutu, former Dean of Johannesburg, now Bishop of Lesotho, to a meeting of the Transvaal Region.

I DON'T think we are fools. But possibly the rest of the world sometimes is left wondering about our sanity and perhaps our intelligence. Most people visiting this beautiful country, are quite flabbergasted by some of the things they see going on here.

Now of course our problems are extremely complex in many ways and it won't do to think that somebody can quickly provide an instant solution. I have, however, been amused by one thing.

If an overseas visitor arrives in this country and before you can say Jack Robinson declaims to all the world that we are quite silly and the South African way of life is obnoxious and quite inconsistent with Western norms, such a visitor is quickly put in his place and told not to poke his nose in the affairs of others, and that he is presumptuous to think he can provide a solution to our intractable problems.

Perhaps it is right that such an upstart should be appropriately vilified and cut down to size. But if another visitor from overseas arrives and spends an equally short period in our country and at the end of his stay declares that he found our system commendable and virtuous, then he is lauded to the skies.

His antecedents and other qualifications are help up for general admiration and we are told that he is an eminent this or that. But nobody seeks to question his competence to pontificate on our complex situation. By the wave of a magician's wand, this situation is no longer quite so complex.

You see, it seems to me that we are paranoically anxious to be loved and approved of — note how we South Africans whenever we are abroad seek the approval of those around us. We have a basic sense of insecurity and need constantly to be told that we are lovable.

Of course, that is a fundamental characteristic of most human beings, to desire approval from their peers. But such a basic insecurity often goes hand in glove with an obsessional and immature aversion to criticism. We don't want our mistakes highlighted at all. Nobody of course enjoys being told that he or she is awful, except perhaps a masochist. But we in South Africa are perhaps unbalanced in our hatred of being adversely criticised and I think it is at the basis of a lot of our so-called security legislation.

And it stems from a sick system of education. At almost every point our system of education is authoritarian. You know the story of the professor who gave his students an assignment to do.

One of these in making an assessment of the fact had the audacity to say "I think so and so..."

Back came his script with the professor's comment "don't think, give me back my notes". In such a system of education the emphasis tends to be on *what* to think and not *how* to think. It does not encourage the development of critical questioning minds which refuse to be domesticated, which refuse to be docile.

It is education for conformity, for orthodoxy, for safety, the dull security of the familiar. It does not encourage asking the awkward question "but why?". It is utterly unaware that the truly inventive creative people have been the ones who stood up against the orthodoxies of their day, who asked "but why?", when everybody else accepted the official line as the state of affairs.

Everybody had seen the phenomenon of a boiling kettle but this particular chap asked but why does the lid go up and down? And from that inquisitiveness, that eagerness to question the accepted values we got Stevenson's *Rocket and steam locomotion*.

Fundamentally such persons declare that man is made in the image of God and so is free and made for freedom. This is what makes him a person, that he is a decision-making animal. And God, who alone has the perfect right to be a totalitarian, respects this characteristic of human personality so much that he had much rather see us go freely to hell than compel us to get to heaven.

We are made in the image of a God who in the Christian view is a community of persons. Consequently, to be personal means to be part and parcel of a community.

"It is not good for man to be alone." A solitary individual is in a sense a contradiction in terms. "No man is an island", said John Donne. And God in the Christian view created man for fellowship, for communion and friendship and harmony with God himself, with his fellowman and with the rest of God's creation.

Something is quite obviously badly wrong because none of us needs to be told that the world is in a mess and one of its greatest needs is reconciliation — at-one-ment.

An at-one-ment, reconciliation, is not a glossing over of injustices and wrongs. That would be a cheap and false reconciliation.

God did not shout down useful advice. He came in his Son, Jesus Christ, to effect reconciliation, and it cost him the death of his Son in order to bring about reconciliation between God and

man, between man and man and within man, and between man and the rest of God's creation.

Reconciliation is a costly business. Jesus Christ died on the Cross to point up the awfulness of sin, of man's inhumanity to man, And he has overcome the enmity which once divided us.

We are told that he has broken down the middle wall of partition which has been separating us into all kinds of different classes, races, sexes, nations, etc. In him the whole universe has found its meaning and its unity. Out of the chaos of hatred and meaninglessness, of bitterness and jealousy, he has brought about a new order, a new humanity. We belong to it.

And to us, who claim to be Christians, has been given this ministry of reconciliation, but real reconciliation between real persons, not carbon copies of others, or sham persons whose humanity has been trampled underfoot by iniquitous laws which uphold something called the sacrosanct South African way of life.

It is a system that dehumanises both the victim and the perpetrator. It enslaves both the oppressed and the oppressor, like the school teacher who thinking to punish an obstreperous class by *detaining them at lunchtime, punishes herself* because she has to look after the delinquents.

That is why we are so deeply committed to Black liberation because it is the absolutely indispensable sine qua non for White liberation. There can be no reconciliation without liberation and justice and equity. This is why it is so imperative for South Africa that the Black consciousness movement should succeed, to help the Black man accept his value as a human person and thus be able to be reconciled as an equal with the White man.

The White man needs to be freed from his shackles too — shackles of guilt, of insecurity, of anxiety and fear. We belong, as the Bible says, to the bundle of life. We belong together. We will survive or perish together.

This is why I started with a disquisition on education and the questioning critical mind. It is really up to you Whites to change the system which you have created. It is up to you to ask the awkward question, "But why such a system?"

The Black man still waits amazingly with his hand outstretched to grasp yours in an unbreakable fellowship. How long must he go on waiting, how long will his hand be outstretched. Please, time is running out — perhaps it has just about run out.

Obituaries

SHEILA FLESCH

WE deeply regret to announce the death on April 24, of our dear friend and chairman, Sheila Flesch.

Sheila was a foundation member of the Sash and had served on Regional Council as well as twice being Branch Chairman and working in the Advice Office.

She leaves us fragrant memories of a cheerful and friendly spirit, and an example of great strength of purpose which persisted against every discouragement in the long struggle towards a more just ordering of our society.

We offer sincere sympathy to her husband and family and renew our dedication to the work she so devotedly served.

ANNE FINSEN, MARY LIVINGSTONE

GLADYS CARTWRIGHT

CAPE Western Region reports with deep regret the death of Gladys Cartwright. Gladys joined the Black Sash in 1955 and for over half of our 21 years, and until her death at the beginning of April, has been in the Chair of the Simonstown Branch.

In spite of her protests that her many other commitments made it impossible for her to do all that a chairman should, she did more than her share of any task or project of the Branch or the Region.

She interviewed local authorities — most of whom she had known all their lives; she walked or stood or worked in all weathers and at all hours. She only began to give up her many obligations early this year when she went into hospital.

Her unique blend of integrity, doggedness, compassion and humility combined with a sharp critical faculty and a lively sense of humour, made her the finest of colleagues and companions.

BARBARA BROCK