

Fresh look at English churches

**TRAPPED IN APARTHEID:
A SOCIO-THEOLOGICAL HISTORY
OF THE ENGLISH SPEAKING
CHURCHES —
CHARLES VILLA-VICENCIO 1988**

New York, Cape town: Orbis books
and David Philip publishers. Pp 250,
appendices, notes and index.
R31,95 Soft Cover Issue).

The roles of Christianity in general and churches in particular with reference to their South African political context have always been a controversial and much written about subject. Charles Villa-Vicencio's *Trapped in Apartheid* represents a fresh — and one dare say, radical — look at the historical role of the institutionalised English-speaking churches. This book indeed offers naught for your comfort.

As an interdisciplinary study the work excels. Firstly, it realistically views the church as "a microcosm of the larger political macrocosm" (p 91). As a socio-historical study it succeeds as a well-researched critical analysis of the English churches' role in the establishment of colonial, and later, apartheid rule. Secondly, it does not protect the churches from criticism of investment in self-interest regarding economic and political power.

In the first part of the book Villa-Vicencio shows clearly that the mainline English churches did not fundamentally challenge colonial and/or minority rule. On the contrary, they contributed to the estab-

lism and apartheid rule.

It is also illustrated that the church rarely opposed capitalist exploitation and paid very little more than lip service to the struggle against apartheid and minority rule. Villa-Vicencio argues that there is "no evidence to suggest that the socio-economic commitment of the English speaking churches was essentially different from that of the Afrikaans churches" (p 86).

If this is not enough to shock the smug Christian, the argument that the English churches were at the least silent observers, if not co-builders to an authoritarian "Theologised Nationalism" (p 140), will certainly do so!

Apart from this and a social analysis derived from Marx and Weber, another essentially positive aspect of the book (part 2) is the new and radical way in which prayer, piety and spiritual involvement is interpreted. Rather than opting for religion equating pathological domination, Villa-Vicencio suggests a liberating ecclesiology. Here religion becomes a deep and continual liberation and force of social renewal. In a sense the book is pastoral guidance for those who experience (or practise) religion as a pathological one-dimensional projection. It establishes a new liberating imperative.

As prognosis Villa-Vicencio believes in a spiritual praxis ("creative sharing, redeeming grace"), grounded in the liberating ecclesiology not only aimed at the poor, but for the poor. The spiritual and horizontal

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