



SERMON DELIVERED ON THE 16TH JUNE 1986

SOUTH AFRICAN YOUTH DAY AT THE CATHEDRAL OF THE HOLY CROSS, LUSAKA ZAMBIA

Your Excellency Cde Dr Kenneth Kaunda,
The Honourable members of the free and democratic Republic of Zambia,
The leadership of both the ANC and SWAPO;
Fellow christians, comrades and friends gathered here today.

Allow me to read from the Holy Bible as the basis for our message, a passage from the Book of Rev. 7: 9-13.

"After this I looked, and there was an enormous crowd - no one could count all the people! They were from every race, tribe, nation and language and they stood in front of the throne and of the Lamb dressed in white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. They called out in a loud voice: "Salvation comes from our God!" All the Angels stood round the throne, the elders and the four living creatures. Then they threw themselves face downwards in front of the throne and worshipped God, saying "Amen! Praise Glory, Wisdom thanksgiving, honour, power, and might belong to our God for ever and ever, Amen". One of the elders asked me "Who are these people dressed in white robes, and where do they come from?"

Many theologians agree that the Book of Revelation was written for a specific Church community against a background of political persecution. The language used by the author is richly symbolic and very difficult to comprehend. It is written in a hidden language that could only be understood by those who shared a common experience and common faith.

What influenced the author to adopt such an unusual style of writing? Fellow christians, friends and comrades, for a few minutes I beseech you to come with me as I attempt to decode this important vision.

Many centuries ago, in Asia Minor, there once lived christian communities which loved, feared and worshipped the living GOD. This was the time when the practice of worshipping idols was very rife. The Pagan rulers of the time expected their subjects to worship them as gods. Christians as part of such communities were expected to do likewise. Those who resisted were persecuted and many lost their heads. Consequently, fear swept throughout the church. Some were ready to compromise their christian principles. They were ready to renounce their Lord and Saviour. Yes! they were ready to crucify Jesus Christ.

"In times of severe persecution, suffering and death, the heart of the faithful long passionately for the signs of the power of God and for Gods intervention in history for the sake of justice and liberation."

As God of love and power; as God who remains God even though that love and power seem to disappear under the wave of blind rage of persecution. He heard their cry and intervened in history on their behalf.

Within the oppressed; within the persecuted; within the church God raised His own divine earthly instrument of proclaim the Good News of freedom to the persecuted and Gods divine judgement

upon the oppressors who like to play gods in the lives of others. This raving prophet was simply known as John, the author of this book.

John feared God and walked with God. He was a servant of a special type, set apart by God for God. The chosen one.

When John's message of liberation began to give hope in a once helpless situation, the pagan rulers felt politically threatened. He became a political threat to the so-called law and order and was branded a dangerous "Communist". He was consequently exiled to that infamous Patmos Island.

His banishment was designed to brake him down spiritually. It was hoped that he would be isolated firstly from his God and subsequently from his people i.e. the church. Thus rendering Gods ultimate divine plan of liberating His children from the yoke of oppression a futile exercise.

However, contrary to the wishes of the powers that be John as never before became closer to his God. Day and night he experienced the warm presence and the power of the living God. In God he found an ideal sanctuary.

What the agents of doom sought to use as a weapon of suppression, God turned into an ideal centre of resist-

It was during this close relationship with God in Exile, in about AD 95 (As some theologians claim) that John was charged by the Holy Spirit to write to the Seven Churches in Asia Minor.

The question arises: How did John's letters from exile managed to reach his intended



audience? Many answers to this question could be easily advanced but there is only one that is practical and sound. John was able to execute and accomplish his divine mission through the use of a well organised underground network. This is surely the political strategy that broke down the walls of banishment which temporarily separated him from the church.

Central to John's underground letters to the persecuted was a message of hope. He beseeched them to push on — not to lose faith — because their suffering was short — lived. The God of history was and is still in full control.

For John's fellow christians, the price was high but the end was near. They were called to be steadfast to their call. Those who remained faithful would surely share in the victory of the Lamb.

As in other times, John's Book has much to say to our own times and especially to those of us who, like the churches in John's time, must live under political repression.

Once again as people on a divine march we are drawn into struggle between God and the bunch of murderers. Once again we are forced to take a stand against Botha and his generals.

The modern gods of racism, gods of militarism, gods of oppressive political and exploitative economic systems confront us with fearsome reality demanding obedience, loyalty and submission.

A constructive critical attitude is quickly declared 'a communist total onslaught'. It becomes a threat to the so-called law and order.

So, John speaks from exile to the church today. He confronts us with two choices "obedience to God or subjugation to Ceaser who calls himself God". We must choose. Either we are on our

way to the new non-racial and democratic South Africa or we perish with the racist white Babylon.

In S.A. the evil beast portrayed by John has again taken shape. It is embodied in the racist white minority regime which has gone a step further in its barbarism by maiming, killing and putting in its jails thousands of small children — the flowers of our maturing national democratic struggle. The barbaric racist soldiers and police simply go in a shooting spree in the streets of white Babylon killing even 3 year olds like Mita Ngobeni-'justified homicide' they argue. Yes! they simply go into the houses of the oppressed in the name of protecting Western Christian Values and dig out small children hiding under beds, in cupboards, and even under their mothers dresses. Some of these children are still in detention while others are untraceable. Yes! they are dead, they have paid the ultimate price as true disciples of the Living God.

"Who are these people dressed in White robes and where do they come from?"

Friends and comrades, let us cast our minds back to the 16th June, 19 and consider the type of question that was asked then:

"Who are these people dressed in white robes of blood with gaping wounds on their bodies?"

These, the answer might have been, are the heroes of the maturing revolution of our beloved mother land, S.A. These the answer might have been are those who have decided to lay down their lives for the true liberation of mankind who choose to die for peace and freedom. These young ones — the immortal flowers of our national democratic struggle-died that year and are still dying even now for the supreme ideal — the

liberation of mankind.

Looking on the flip side of the coin we must consider what the question of the day might have been regarding the messengers of death:

"Who are these who have taken the lives of so young patriots?"

These are, the answer might have been, those who have dedicated themselves to the perpetual oppression of the majority of the S.African nation. These are, those who claiming to be christian, defending western values, have destroyed God's supreme creation, man. These are those who, claiming to be christians, discriminated against man, God's wonderful creation. these are those who have gone into Africa to kill and maim to destroy and destabilise. Yes! these are the racist rulers of the condemned white great Babylon, South Africa.

But, let us pause to consider another situation. In Africa, as elsewhere in the world, there are progressive nations and leaders, and the question must be asked:

Which are these nations in Africa, which are prepared to go hungry, which are prepared to die in support, of the struggle of the people of S.A. and Namibia?

Who are these leaders, who keep on exhorting their people to pay the supreme sacrifice for the liberation of the people of S.A. and Namibia?

These are the leaders who understand that the freedom of S.A. and the freedom of Namibia is freedom of Africa.

Fellow christians and comrades we need to pay, in the name of God, tribute and homage to the people of the free non-racial and democratic Republics of Zambia, Angola, and Zimbabwe and their able leaders, their Excellencies Dr K.D. Kaunda, Dos Santos and Robert Mugabe for their solid-



Hector Peterson – first victim of police bullets at Soweto, 16 June 1976.

city and unadulterated contribution to the struggle of S.A and Namibia.

To these Nations and their leaders, we must ask in pay-

ing tribute:

“Who are these people dresses in white robes, and where do they come from? Behold!

“These are the people who have come safely through the terrible persecution. They have washed their robes and made them white with the blood of the Lamb (Rev.146)

Reverend F.F. Gqiba