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EXTRACTS FROM AN ADDRESS BY BISHOP DESMOND TUTU TO CROSSROADS PROTEST MEETING,
UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, SEPTEMBER 19, 1978

I first visited Crossroads a few months ago.

I had thought to find a run down slum with thoroughly depressed inmates, to whom we and others would be going to do good. We would be doing something for them.

You could have knocked me down with a feather, not a baton, after I had experienced Crossroads, because it was indeed an experience.

I can't of course pretend that the outward aspect of Crossroads would give 5 star hotel owners too many sleepless nights dreading competition. The shacks were unattractive from outside. It was after all a slum, looking like a running sore.

But, man, you found something when you entered those shacks. No, not shacks, those homes, because they had been transfigured into homes.

There is a vibrant spirit about the Crossroads women folk. They are a determined breed with a quiet dignity.

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They said in answer to my question "What will you do when Crossroads is demolished?"

"Oh Father," they said, with a touching dignity that covered a steeliness, "we will pick up our belongings and we will set up home in another part of the Peninsula".

You could not come and be a do-gooder with such people.

You were privileged to be a fellow-worker with folk who are determined to lay claim to their inalienable right to a decent and stable family life, to a home where they could be with their husbands and the fathers of their children as ordinary families.

You must note that this is ultimately what the crisis, the scandal of Crossroads is about.

Are people to be deemed their right to a decent and ordinary family life which many others in our beloved land take so much for granted?

Crossroads has an incredible community spirit. It has a school, it has churches, it has Crossroads Management Committees, it has sanitation, water, a health scheme and it is acknowledged that its crime rate is lower than that in the legal black townships.

So, we are not talking about a den of iniquity and corruption, infested with thieves and teeming with prostitutes and drunkards - a place where human life is cheap.

We are talking about a stable community of law abiding and peace-loving persons whose only crime is that they want to lead ordinary unharassed lives as husbands and wives, as mothers and fathers and children.

How can a man be a father without his children? How can a woman be a wife without her husband? How can a man be a husband without his wife?

Many of the women said, "We refuse to be divorced by force".

The authorities in an Alice in Wonderland ability to make words mean what they want them to mean have said it was a crime prevention exercise.

It may be crime prevention but it looks like harassment and worse to most of us.

Let us not delude ourselves that it is happening to blacks. This is God's universe and God will not be mocked. Right and wrong matter to him because they have an autonomy all their own.

Black family life is being seriously undermined by the migratory labour system which the Cape Synod of the DRC long ago described as a cancer in our society.

If black family life is seriously eroded today then it cannot but be that other family life will also one day suffer.

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Is it only an accident that South Africa has one of the highest divorce rates in the world?

You cannot treat some family life as of little consequence and think that that cynical and callous attitude will not spill over to erode family life other than black?

The kind of treatment meted out to blacks in general and that given to the Cross-roadsers in particular must lay up a store of bitterness and indeed hatred which bodes ill for our continued existence as a community made up of black and white.

It means that the fears which whites have of what will happen come that inevitable thing - black liberation - will more and more become self-fulfilling prophecies.

Cry the beloved country for your children black and white. Oh God help us that when the whites have turned to loving the blacks will not have turned to hating.

Cry the beloved country to our rulers. May they hear the deep cry of anguish and desist before it is too late and it does not matter any longer what they do or do not do.

Cry the beloved country - can they hear? And if they can hear can they change course, or has the momentum of events already gone beyond the point of no return when we may no longer be able to choose this or that path; but are now faced inexorably and impotently with the alternative too ghastly to contemplate?

We must not think it is happening only to some insignificant blacks - a set of statistics, 20 000 persons.

For these are people of flesh and blood; they laugh and they cry, they love and they hate, they cuddle babies and bury their aged.

Did you see the picture on the front pages of our newspapers - the fear-filled face of the mother with her weeping babies - that picture will haunt South Africa just as the one of the boy and girl carrying the first fatal casualty of Soweto '76.

No, these are not just statistics - to somebody they are mother, daughter, sister, wife, child, husband, brother, son.

For God, our God, the liberator God of the Exodus, they are of infinite and eternal value. The very hairs of their heads are numbered. For God knows them all by name.

/RESOLUTIONS