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SECTION V : DOCUMENTATION

ARCHBISHOP BURNETT PUTS THE RECORD STRAIGHT ...

It would be tragic for South Africa if the fragile unity between white and black in the Church of the Province of Southern Africa were to be destroyed by mischievous ploys, said the Archbishop of Cape Town, the Most Rev Bill Burnett, commenting on what he called "three reckless attacks on the CPSA since Provincial Synod.

"I have watched with great interest over the months following Provincial Synod an unfolding pattern of events and may be forgiven for thinking that there may well be a distinct relationship between the attacks that have been made upon the Church since that time", said the Archbishop.

"I can only suppose that those who informed the Minister of Police furnished him with a resolution to which he referred in the House of Assembly, which was in fact rejected by well over a two-thirds majority of the Synod.

"The reason for the rejection was precisely that it asked the Church to accept the principle of guilt by association for all members of the Security Police.

"It is absurd therefore for the Minister to speak as though the CPSA does not believe in the need for State security. It is ironical, moreover, that I should have been withdrawn to a quiet retreat in the country to spend three or four days with CPSA permanent force chaplains for a time of spiritual renewal when reports of the Minister's speech appeared.

"I believe the Minister must surely have been misinformed because the resolution which was passed cannot in any sense bear the construction he has put upon it. In it the Church simply makes it clear that security police are like the rest of humanity, capable of sin. In view of the fact, however, that they appear to be given a role in society in which opportunity to misuse power exists, and because a disturbing number of persons have died in detention and under interrogation, and that torture has been alleged, Anglicans in the security forces are asked to examine their consciences lest they dishonour their Lord. In like manner, security police, and anyone else who may be known to have acted in ways grossly inconsistent with the Christian faith, should not be elected to office in the Church. The Church has a proper responsibility to exercise discipline among its own members.

"It should be borne in mind, moreover, that a very few years ago one of our Church youth workers died in disturbing circumstances in the custody of security police.

"The Minister of Police is, of all men, in a position to receive a vast amount of information. Either he chose to misuse that which he received about the CPSA Synod, which is unthinkable, or he was badly informed.

"Banning without trial is bad enough, but it would be insupportable if a similar inadequacy of information has led to the banning of the Rev David Russell or others

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"The second source of accusation and attack has been Die Burger, which for the second time, has grossly misrepresented me. The press was free to send representatives to the Synod, or to have asked to see the resolution on security police, and any other matter before misleading its readers with a report of what the Synod was supposed to have said and producing a particularly offensive cartoon which conveyed a wholly false accusation. Why did this happen? Was it fortuitous?

"The third attack was made in the context of some wildly inaccurate reporting of what occurred at the Synod. Bishop Bradley of the Church of England in South Africa on this hearsay evidence, and without troubling to find out what the Synod had said, and in spite of the existence of a Liaison Committee with the CPSA, created for that purpose, leapt into print with a statement which was given coverage in certain newspapers and over SABC-TV. In it he implied that, unlike his church, the CPSA supported terrorism, and that we were apparently also guilty of this by association because the CPSA, along with the N G Kerk in Afrika and the N G Sendingkerk, and others, continues to belong to the South African Council of Churches.

"In reporting Bishop Bradley's statement fairly extensively, SABC-TV news described the Church of England in South Africa as the smaller of the two Anglican churches. If what is described as the smaller of the two Anglican churches goes out of its way to disclaim support of terrorism, the implication is that it needs to dissociate itself from someone else who does. This accusation is false and a study of the World Council of Churches will clearly demonstrate its falsehood.

"That is not the only falsehood, however. The fact is that there is only one Church in South Africa which belongs to the worldwide Anglican Communion and which is in communion therefore with the See of Canterbury. That Church is the Church of the Province of South Africa. No other Church in South Africa is recognised as part of the Anglican Communion by that body itself. One cannot become part of an association without being accepted by that association. The SABC-TV should be more certain about its facts. If it doubts the veracity of what I say, it might well make contact with the Anglican Executive Officer in London or the Office of the Archbishop of Canterbury.