

On To The New South Africa (English version of 'L'impossible est arrivé')
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For years now the words South Africa have conjured up thoughts of racism, oppression, violence, suffering and misery. The system of Apartheid a legalised systematic structure of social engineering based on the idea of the necessary separation of ethnic groups resulted in the systemising of white privilege and the ongoing destruction of black rights and empowerment. What made the system worse was that it was promulgated in the name of Christianity as a Christian moral solution to the "problem" of different cultures of people living in the same country. In fact Apartheid led to a division within Christianity with Christians of all denominations justifying a "pro" or "anti" apartheid stand in the name of their faith. The Catholic Bishop's Conference was the first Christian body to declare the sinfulness of apartheid when in its 1957 "statement on Apartheid" it declared the system to be "intrinsicly evil". In fact one of the effects of Apartheid was to all but destroy the Church's missionary efforts over the preceding fifty years by promulgating policies which led to the closure of more than 90% of the Church's mission schools. The mission school had been up to then at the forefront of the Church's evangelization efforts. These schools were replaced by the far inferior Bantu Education system which had as its aim to prepare blacks to be servants of whites in the New South Africa they then envisaged.

In the event the New South Africa is something far different. 1994 has seen the ushering in of a multiparty democratic system in this country based on universal franchise and an entrenched constitution guaranteeing human rights. The violence which had become endemic leading to the

death of thousands of people every year has all but disappeared and black and white are sighing a collective sigh of relief that the nightmare appears to be over and the dawn is finally emerging. What happened? Well first of all South Africans, whatever their background are actually very good people. They are warm hearted, friendly, respectful, emotional and deeply committed to their country. The years of strife and struggle have shown us that one idea, one group and one way of seeing things cannot prevail or dictate over others that was the sin of apartheid. The solution is in negotiation, conflict resolution management, spending time with one another to get to know one another and in this way facing and destroying the demons that were destroying this land. The negotiation process was a long one. It actually began as early as 1985 as the government and its agents initiated a clandestine program of contact and discussion both with political prisoners in the country as well as with outlawed organisations in exile. The process came out into the open with the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the liberation movements. It was formalised in the 1991/1992 CODESA (Convention for a Democratic South Africa) meetings which ultimately failed and it achieved success in the unnamed "Multiparty Negotiation Process which deliberated in 1992 and 1993 and which led to the emergence of the Transitional Executive Council which together with the last White government of De Klerk prepared the way for the 1994 election.

The new government wishes to continue this process of negotiation and consensus in decision making. A workable formula is not lightly discarded. So the new Government is a government of National Unity including all parties who received more than 5% of the vote in the April election. The cabinet is also multiparty in Nature comprising ministers from the three major parties (the ANC of Nelson Mandela, the National Party of F.W. de Klerk and the IFP of Mangosuthu

Buthelezi).

South Africa has been a country where the Holy Spirit has been working powerfully over the last few years. We Christians know that it is through the power of God that the changes have been wrought. Already in 1985 the Kairos document announced that a 'Kairos' - a particular moment of truth - has arrived for South Africa. The Kairos document named the sins and evils of the time as Apartheid and the ideologies including the religious ones which were supporting it. It also denounced the inaction of the Christian community in the face of such evil. In this way it was both a call to conversion and to action. The 1980's were a time of struggle and violence as apartheid struggled to survive and like a wounded animal lashed out at all in its path. But even as many were imprisoned, violated and executed the end was in sight. It was the working of the Spirit which opened the way to negotiation and to where we find ourselves today. The task of the Church in those years was often prophetic. To stand with the people in protest, to march and to be imprisoned as well. Now the Church's role is changing. It is the time for reconstruction and for development. It is also the time for healing. The sin of Apartheid caused much sickness. This sickness has manifested itself on the social, political, cultural, psychological and organic levels. As a result of this many churches have grown up in the country which claim to offer healing of one type or another. Indeed between 1980 and 1990 the so called mainline churches have declined in numbers by about 25% (according to the census figures). In the same period the churches offering healing have increased by 23%. Collectively these churches count for about 35% of all Christians and 55% of black Christians. We should not be surprised by such figures since a sick people will always search for ways to be healed. Indeed healing on all levels is a fundamental pastoral task that the Church needs be involved in.

Today the hope that was promised is beginning to be felt in the lives of the people here. We are still in the "honeymoon" period and there are many difficulties which will arise. But now there is a feeling that the people its leaders and the power of God are moving in the same direction. So there is great potential. In the articles which make up this issue, we want to show something of the positive that is already going on in South Africa. There is already much good news being witnessed in small and simple ways which manifest the care and love of Christians in our Country.

In the article on the people of emabheleni we report on how cooperation between a religious congregation and the local people in the use of land and in the pooling of resources is helping to improve the quality of life of the people there both by providing work and in empowering people through education and skills development.

Also on the level of social ministry we report on the growth of Community Resource centres in Black Urban areas of Durban which are helping people both to know their rights and to get their rights when dealing with bureaucracy and employers. These centres have been developed through social action programmes of the churches and have become centres of hope for many newly urbanised people who are often overwhelmed by the complexity of life in the big city. Already several million Rands in benefits have been obtained for people as a result of the work of these centres.

One of the signs of God's favour upon us is the tremendous growth in vocations to the religious

life and priesthood. This is particularly noticeable amongst the Oblates and so we have asked the Superior of the Oblate Scholasticate and a scholastic to share with us on this life. The vocations growth is somehow a sign that the Lord is preparing labourers for the vast harvest that he wishes to reap here.

But in fact the main life of the Church goes on in the parishes. So we have asked two Priests to respond to how they are meeting the challenge of the New South Africa. Fr. Allan Moss's parish of Wentworth is in an Urban area amongst people of mixed race (coloured's) in the language of the Old South Africa. They face many of the problems of working class Urban people in many parts of the world so what is happening will find an echo amongst many Canadian readers. The article of Fr. Emile Moteaphala is special to the South African reality as he contemplates the future in the tiny homeland of Qwaqwa to which people were only recently moved and which is far away from any other Urban centres.

South Africa is living in a graced time and South Africans give thanks to God for what he has done for them. Now it is time to take the future in our hands to build the Kingdom of God in our land. We know that he is with us for we have seen the signs of his presence carrying us along the journey thus far. Pray that we will respond to his grace so that we can heal, reconcile and build in the New South Africa.