

HEALING THE PAST, BUILDING THE FUTURE

Rev. George Daneel, 4th April, 1996

The eyes of the world are fixed on South Africa. Something happened here which shook the world. Without a shot being fired, our country experienced a radical turnabout.

The apartheid government, which ruled and suppressed South Africa for 46 years, agreed, to everyone's amazement, to a one-man, one-vote election. This transformed the country to a democracy, and on top of that, installed a government of national unity. No-one thought that something like this would ever be possible. Yet it happened, and without violence. There is no other explanation, except that it is a miracle from God. This is also how most newspapers described it.

Now what of the future? Allow me to state my personal conviction: I believe that God has started good work in our country and that we can trust Him to continue this in the future. But this does not mean that we can fold our hands and wait for miracles. Hard work lies ahead. The same problems the previous government struggled to solve still exist - violence, crime, corruption, unemployment, broken homes, and particularly division between our people. If we want to play our part in healing the past, and that is what we have gathered here for, then reconciliation is an absolute necessity.

That brings me to say something about MRA, which is responsible for this conference. It was my privilege to meet the founder of MRA, Dr. Frank Buchman, a minister of the Lutheran Church in America, in 1929, when he came to South Africa. The heart of his message was that God has a plan for the world and that everyone has a part in it if he or she is willing to listen to God and to obey Him. He held a series of conferences which were attended by large numbers of people.

The main question in those days was not apartheid, but the animosity between Afrikaners and British. As a result of Dr. Buchman's work, there were many instances of reconciliation. In 1932, to mention but one case, a number of professors from Pretoria University devised a plot to get rid of English professors and lecturers and to make it a pure Afrikaans University. Their leader was Dr. Arthur Norval, whose father had been killed during the Anglo-Boer War. As a result of his meeting with MRA, his life was totally transformed and God removed all the hatred and bitterness from his heart. After he informed his colleagues of the change, he went to Prof. Edgar Brookes, professor of English, to apologise to him for his hatred against him personally and for the plot against him and his English speaking colleagues. They were reconciled, and, shortly afterwards, they addressed a gathering in the packed City Hall of Pretoria and told the story of reconciliation which had taken place between them and in the University of Pretoria.

Later, particularly after the National Party came into power and began to implement its policy of apartheid, it was the division between black and white which came to the fore. It was only in 1953 that MRA was able to have a conference for all races for the first time, in opposition to the policy of the government. Many miracles of reconciliation between black and white took place.

Afrikaners confessed their feelings of arrogance and superiority towards black people and black people were released from their hatred and bitterness against white people. Dr. William Nkomo, a medical doctor from Atteridgeville and a founder member of the revolutionary Youth League of the ANC, came to the conference because four Afrikaner students had invited him. They apologised to him for their attitude of superiority towards black people. He accepted their invitation because, as he put it, he had never imagined that he would hear whites apologise to black people. His life changed radically and he became a powerful instrument for reconciliation. He played a prominent role in the work of Moral Re-Armament, which in spite of opposition from the government, continued with the work of reconciliation and multi-racial meetings.

Without reconciliation, we cannot build the future. For that reason, my wife and I decided to give all our time to the work of Moral Re-Armament. We were aware of the great changes which would have to take place in our country and that the future of South Africa depended on the measure of unity and co-operation which could be brought about between our different population groups. A difficult road lies ahead for us all. It will demand that we put our own interests and the interests of our parties aside for the sake of the interests of our whole nation.

God makes no difference between people. What right do we have to differentiate?