

The South Africa Collection No.2: Kairos in Question

The South Africa Collection

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The 'KAIROS Document' is one of the most significant contributions to the South African debate to emerge from grassroots theological reflection in the Province. This analytic response exposes some of the logical, theological and psychological fault lines in the document. The serious question is raised as to whether the church's response to apartheid is not in itself a mirror of the same system. A higher level of systems analysis is called for, one which resolves the roots of splitting in the social process rather than simply shifts the pain in conversion reaction from one side of a split to the other.

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KAIROS IN QUESTION

Response to "THE KAIROS DOCUMENT" published by The Catholic Institute for International Relations, London 1986]

"The Kairos Document" is part of a process, an evolving product of catholic reflection, the growing point of black theology, of liberation theology forged in the crucible which is South Africa today. It describes itself as:

"a Christian, biblical and theological comment on the political crisis ... an attempt by concerned Christians ... to reflect on the situation of death ... It is a critique of the current theological models that determine the type of activities the Church engages in to try to resolve the problems of the country. It is an attempt to develop, out of this perplexing situation, an alternative biblical and theological model that will in turn lead to forms of activity that will make a real difference to the future of our country." [p.vii]

This response indicates that the Kairos analysis is fundamentally flawed. Its position is an unwitting mirror of the self same construct it seeks to criticise. The way forward to which it points is a path of convulsive conflict leading to a reversal of the power base and a perseveration of the underlying problem. Effective political solutions will require breakdown of the collusional assumptions of religion and an analysis at a far more radical depth. Such deconstruction is costly, failure will be catastrophic.

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The second chapter is taken up with a penetrating critique of 'state theology', that theologically undergirded ideology which justifies the oppressive apartheid regime in South Africa. In passing, the Kairos theologians highlight a truism of their own and all other theological systems in the words:

"'State Theology' like every other theology needs to have its own concrete symbol of evil. It must be able to symbolise what it regards as godless behaviour and what ideas must be regarded as atheistic. It must have its own version of hell. And so it has invented, or rather taken over, the myth of communism. All evil is communistic and all communist or socialist ideas are atheistic and godless. Threats about hell-fire and eternal damnation are replaced by threats and warnings about the horrors of a tyrannical, totalitarian, atheistic and terrorist communist regime - a kind of hell-on-earth. This is a very convenient way of frightening some people into accepting any kind of domination and exploitation by a capitalist minority." [p.7]

If theology is the reified construct of a paranoid schizoid defence, then such fundamental idealisation between the inside and the outside is inevitably a common characteristic. Here is a product of that fundamental dynamic which gathers up all the repressed negativities of the human psyche and projects them onto the outside of the in-group boundary, then as a secondary measure, reifies that boundary into an armed defence, justifying massive expenditure in order to keep out the threatened invasion of the projected elements. The split can only be maintained by the concomitant repression in the core of the society of the same mirror material. In this sense salvation rules within while damnation rules without. The

ideal good field on the outside is totally annihilated, the ideal bad field on the inside is also totally annihilated and the religious ideology reifies both sides of the construct, it is not simply to do with one side only. And this fundamental denial of the two sides of the coin is one of the most devastating fallacies of the Kairos document. There is a fundamental splitting of the human psyche and a denial of the internal bad parts. The in-group, which in the Kairos construct are the oppressed, the poor, are represented as in no way responsible for the generation of the badness on the outside. There appears to be no awareness of the fundamental projection mechanisms which make society behave the way it does. I find the Kairos document is in massive collusion with the psychotic social defences - one symptom or syndrome of which is the apartheid-driven oppression of certain sectors of that society.

The in-group always claims the endorsement of 'God' for its paranoid construct. The out-group perceives the god of the in-group as an 'antichrist', a demonic force. Conversely, the in-group perceives the god of the out-group as a demonic antichrist. The Kairos document calls for a reversal of 'god' and 'antichrist' which is concomitant with the reversal between in-group and out-group ideology. It is a conversion reaction, not a resolution of the conflict. Within their construct the same fundamental splitting would emerge, it is simply that there would be others in power.

The use of religious assumptions to undergird the political process of the state is very revealing, but perhaps:

"... the most revealing of all is the blasphemous use of God's holy name in the preamble to the new apartheid constitution.

'In humble submission to Almighty God, who controls the destinies of nations and the history of peoples; who gathered our forebears together from many lands and gave them this their own; who has guided them from generation to generation; who has wondrously delivered them from the dangers that beset them.'

"This god is an idol. It is as mischievous, sinister and evil as any of the idols that the prophets of Israel had to contend with. Here we have a god who is historically on the side of the white settlers, who dispossesses black people of their land and who gives the major part of the land to his 'chosen people'.

"It is the god of superior weapons who conquered those who were armed with nothing but spears. It is the god of the casspirs and hippos, the god of teargas, rubber bullets, sjamboks, prison cells and death sentences. Here is a god who exalts the proud and humbles the poor - the very opposite of the God of the Bible who 'scatters the proud of heart, pulls down the mighty from their thrones and exalts the humble' (Lk 1: 51-52). From a theological point of view the opposite side of the God of the Bible is the devil, Satan. The god of the South African State is not merely an idol or false god, it is the devil disguised as Almighty God - the antichrist." [p.7f.]

There is very little to choose between basic Jewish nationalism, reified into the construct of the theocracy, or Islamic fundamentalism, or the laager deity of the Boers. The problem is, of course, that the protests of the Canaanites could well have been couched in the language of black theology. The great god of Israel, Yahweh himself, apparently required the racial extermination of the indigenous population so that the land could be given to His people. It is the same problem.

The point at issue here surely is not that one god is the idol and another god is right, but that both sides of the projection are precisely that, psychotically reified projections. It is this

systemic characteristic of the reification of paranoid dynamic into ideological construct, which then justifies precisely the behaviour which has given rise to it, that lies at the heart of the problem. Both sides have the same idolatrous, i.e. psychotic, ideology. It is just that one side had the guns and the other side did not. One side has the power of economic exploitation and the other side is impotent. In a society in which aggrandisement of the subsystem at the expense of the whole system is the rule of the day, the most powerful subsystem dominates. If the power balance had been the other way round then the plea would have been reversed and the oppressed would have been the other group. Where the balance is fairly equal in terms of armaments, there is an uneasy truce, with each side calling the other demonic, as in Northern Ireland. If the Catholics were black and unarmed and the Protestants were white and well armed, we would have a South African situation in Northern Ireland. It is no answer simply to reify the god of the out-group into God Almighty and to denigrate the god of the in-group into the Antichrist and then to set out so to generate an ideological conversion reaction that shifts power from one to the other. That may be good revolutionary ideology, it is utterly inadequate in terms of the solution of human problems.

Moving on to a critique of 'church theology' the document examines the concept of 'reconciliation':

"The fallacy here is that 'reconciliation' has been made into an absolute principle that must be applied in all cases of conflict or dissension. But not all cases of conflict are the same. We can imagine a private quarrel between two people or two groups whose differences are based upon misunderstandings. In such cases it would be appropriate to talk and negotiate to sort out the misunderstandings and to reconcile the two sides. But there are other conflicts in which one side is right and the other wrong. There are conflicts where one side is a fully armed and violent oppressor while the other side is defenceless and oppressed. There are conflicts that can only be described as the struggle between justice and injustice, good and evil, God and the devil. To speak of reconciling these two is not only a mistaken application of the Christian idea of reconciliation, it is a total betrayal of all that Christian faith has ever meant. Nowhere in the Bible or in Christian tradition has it ever been suggested that we ought to try to reconcile good and evil, God and the devil. We are supposed to do away with evil, injustice oppression and sin - not come to terms with it. We are supposed to oppose, confront and reject the devil and not try to sup with the devil. " [p .10]

I think we need to study the three words of 'reconciliation', 'synthesis' and 'integration'. In Hegelian terms, we are faced with a thesis and antithesis, a mutually exclusive opposition. The emergent solution is the synthesis of the two which then becomes the thesis for the next generation of conflict. In developed Marxist ideology, however, the thesis is faced with the oppressed antithesis, which then takes over power, so overthrowing the thesis and generating a revolutionary conversion reaction in which the antithesis takes up the position of being the thesis. Similarly, the domination of the new thesis generates a new antithesis, which in turn has to go through some kind of revolutionary process or reversal of the power balance, and so on. In such revolutionary ideology society progresses through a series of conversion reactions in which white is called black, is called white, is called black, is called white, is called black.

On the other hand reconciliation involves the recognition of wrongs on both sides, of fears and anger on both sides, of resentment, greed and retaliatory rage on both sides. If we press below the surface of the confrontation in South Africa we do find precisely that situation. The difference is one of economic and military power, which has given to one side of the confrontation the actual physical edge over the other, but in no way has that accident of history generated one party innocent and the other party guilty. Surely even within the terms of Christian theology the totality of the system is seen as under judgement and in need of

salvation, grace, repentance, conversion, call it what you will. Historically, if the Zulu impis were in a position to annihilate and massacre a beleaguered laager, or an overwhelmed encampment of British forces, they did so. The Kairos document's analysis is too superficial. It represents an intensification of the idealisation process and an attempt to annihilate one pole of the split, as if that is somehow a solution to the problem. In so doing, the dynamic endorsed within this document is precisely the dynamic endorsed under Hitler and under the most fundamentalist of the apartheid supporters. You cannot propose a solution in this situation by dehumanising one side. Again, even within the terms of Christian theology itself, one has to generate a critique of the Kairos document at precisely this point. Reconciliation does not come from blurring issues but it does come from the bearing of suffering, the re-internalising of the projection, the absorption of the poison from the other, without counter-transference, without retaliation, but with all the utter costliness of loving and courageous interpretation of what is going on. Christian theology has no room for the words 'do away with', 'oppose', 'confront', 'reject', 'split off from'.

Pressing deeper behind the mandala of split forms in the here and now we move to the psychodynamic roots of the psychotic construct. We may call the process centration, or regression/integration/egression, or even, using the terms of Catastrophe Theory, as a movement back off the split surface, in order to move up level. The task is not to move from one side of the split to the other, so reversing the supposed injustice in the here and now. The task is to unpick the social proclivity for splitting in the first place. It is not instinctive, it is learned. It is not an inevitable concomitant of human civilisation. It is a collusionally maintained systemic psychosis from which it is possible to recover. We now face the point at which the costliness of the recovery is preferable to the catastrophe of its perseveration. In that I believe are the seeds of realistic hope, but most certainly not in the task of construct conversion.

The starting point for the integration of human psychosis requires regression to the arche of human being, and the reworking of psychic development. However, the starting point for the Kairos document remains in the cross-section, the presenting topology of the here and now. So as the authors begin to expound the basis of prophetic theology they say:

"... the starting point for prophetic theology will be our experience of the present KAIROS."
[p.17]

The approach is paralleled by the work of Carl Jung. The starting point is the experienced here and now of split off parts. However in Jungian therapy the task is not the conversion reaction from the self to the shadow, but the raising to consciousness of the shadow and the enabling of both parts to relate to each other. The Kairos document appears to prefer a reversal of light and shade, self and shadow. It is simply that the light has condemned itself and shown itself to be darkness, while from the light's perspective that which was dark is now affirming that it itself is light. The battle is, as always, between light and dark. However the problem is that both sides assume themselves to be 'light' and in the 'right' and the other to be 'dark' and in the 'wrong'. The Kairos document is a mirror image of the ideology of apartheid. There is no solution when the starting point is limited to the here and now. There can be uneasy truce and increased communication between split off parts, as in a Jungian approach, but there cannot be resolution. The topology doesn't change. What is required is an analysis and a proaction that shifts the level of systemic variable back to the point at which-we can enclose within the whole system the parameters which generate the topology of the presenting surface. The temporal sub-system is inadequate in that it does not contain

within itself the parameters which are generating causally the surface which is being experienced. We have to add to the experience of the present the breadth of historical development and the depth of psychodynamic generation.

The authors very accurately describe the process of increased idealisation to the point of catastrophe within a social system. Idealisation subjected to intense feedback loops can split apart into psychotic acting out. So they describe:

".. the present impasse. As the oppressed majority becomes more insistent and puts more and more pressure on the tyrant by means of boycotts, strikes, uprisings, burnings and even armed struggle, the more tyrannical will this regime become. On the one hand it will use repressive measures: detentions, trials, killings, torture, bannings, propaganda, states of emergency and other desperate and tyrannical methods. And on the other hand it will introduce reforms that will always be unacceptable to the majority because all its reforms must ensure that the white minority remains on top." [p.24]

In so far as the impasse is set up between the opposed forces of crushing constriction and survival drive met in the birth canal and repressed and denied behind the common social defences ever since, just in so far as this common impasse found to be supremely unresolvable. The dark side of the human unconscious remains whatever the solution adopted, unless the psychodynamic roots of the construct are themselves laid bare and resolved. That solution, however, inevitably leads to the deconstruction of the church, the deconstruction of prophetic theology, as well as the deconstruction of the Afrikaner ideology embedded in the state theology of apartheid. If South Africa moves to this point of resolution, then the world will have to move this way, and it is important to the world to preserve its psychotic defences, even at the expense of catastrophic destruction of one sector of its society. It may even prefer racial suicide to this level of the recovery of psychosocial wholeness.

Just in passing the images of primal impasse are writ large in the words and symbols on both sides of the divide. Each in-group sees the out-group as the omnipotently persecutory cervix and seeks to arm itself in order to get through, to survive, to drive across into life. The terrified heart at the centre of the laager is mirrored in the terrified heart of the encircled township. It is hardly surprising that the Voortrekker Monument is a symbolic mirror of the ka'aba.

Dependency and metaphysical mythology become the only ground of hope, since the ultimate ground of hope has been buried behind the defence construct of the ideology. So the document speaks of peace and hope:

"True peace and true reconciliation are not only desirable, they are assured and guaranteed. This is our faith and hope. We believe in and hope for the resurrection.

"Nothing could be more relevant and more necessary at this moment of crisis in South Africa than the Christian message of hope. As the crisis deepens day by day, what both the oppressor and the oppressed can legitimately demand of the Churches is a message of hope." [p.26]

The dim foetal recollection of a paradise lost in the trauma of birth is projected in reversed time beyond death, beyond the physical realities of the here and now, into some metaphysical space. This schizoid displacement of the idealised womb world is then epitomised as a goal towards which we move, rather than a distortion of the past from which we have come.

Regression to idealised space becomes the order of the day and in that psychotic reversal lies the attenuation of the species. It is the myth of the phoenix. It is the myth of Osiris. In so far as the church, in this crisis, offers this sign of hope it is proclaiming a sentence of death, for when this paradise is reached for the in-group, the out-group is precisely in hell and that situation makes the context of apartheid look like a Sunday school picnic. The church in this context is called to provide the promise of a future in which the present is reversed while at the same time reinforcing and sustaining the fundamental defences of the human psyche in such a way that the possibility of human wholeness is fundamentally denied. It can only be reached over the dead body of God.

Within the Kairos document hope is schizophrenic:

"There is hope. There is hope for all of us. But the road to that hope is going to be very hard and very painful. The conflict and the struggle will intensify in the months and years ahead. That is now inevitable - because of the intransigence of the oppressor. But God is with us. We can only learn to become instruments of his peace even unto death. We must participate in the cross of Christ if we are to have the hope of participating in his resurrection." [p.27]

There is a difference between realistic hope and the future of an illusion. Let us look at the grammar of the structure here. 'All of us' is the phrase that is used. But does that include every person in the society, or does it refer to the oppressed only? Initially one's reading is drawn to the thought that it may refer to both sides of the problem. However the wording later on would appear to make it very clear that 'us' is exclusive. That here is a counter-apartheid in which 'they' - the out-group - are now the oppressors and 'we' - the in-group - are the oppressed. There is no hope for the oppressor in the construct and in that sense there is no hope for systemic wholeness. Apparently 'God is with us' not with the oppressor. The oppressed is the righteous remnant to press through the boundaries of oppression into God's peace. Armageddon is made of this. I suggest that realistic hope, as distinct from psychotic illusion, lies in the direction of the unpicking, the deconstruction of all theology, all the 'ologies', as we come to realise that they are reified constructs of the human unconscious and as we come to the point in human history at which we acknowledge that the human species can no longer afford its defences.

The myth of death and resurrection may serve to sedate psychotic anxiety in the face of apparently intolerable despair. As a concrete programme of political process it is catastrophic. It drives towards total conflagration in the delusion that new life rises, phoenix-like, beyond the ashes. We need the courage to face the fear of death, to withdraw the anxiety construct of resurrection, and to face the realities of human mortality and ultimate responsibility. Such "real-isation" requires the deconstruction of the foetal unconscious, the withdrawal of the reified birth trauma from the boundary of death, from the boundary of the group, the boundary of the race, the boundary of the nation and above all from the boundary of time.

Inevitably, the document looks towards church unity, not in the terms of the coming together of disparate parties, but of the annihilation of one part and its removal across the boundary into the opposing camp.

"As far as the present crisis is concerned, there is only one way forward to Church unity and that is for those Christians who find themselves on the side of the oppressor or sitting on the fence, to cross over to the other side to be united in faith and action with those who are

oppressed. Unity and reconciliation within the Church itself is only possible around God and Jesus Christ who are to be found on the side of the poor and the oppressed." [p.28]

So thesis and antithesis are opposed. The task is to overwhelm the antithesis and to remove its content into the thesis. So in the defence structure we have the idealisation into good and bad, the attempt to deny and overwhelm the bad and to convert it into a completely good pole. The intensification of denial leads to an intensification of projection and displacement, and a dynamic acting out of the bad material into the boundary structures of the society. It does not lead to the annealing of the splitting which sets up the problem in the first place. Deconstruction of systemic defence is a fundamentally different approach from the intensification of the process of idealisation, joined to a conversion reaction and a reversal of the balance of power. I am sadly driven to the conclusion that the way forward suggested in the Kairos document is a dead end, in every meaning of that term.

David Wasdell,
20th March, 1987