

Bishop Lamont's Press Conference Speech

The following speech was given at a press conference in Washington DC by Bishop Lamont who was then in exile from Southern Rhodesia. It was given on October 11, 1978, to coincide with a visit to the United States by the then Rhodesian Prime Minister, Mr Ian Smith.

I am Donal Lamont, bishop of Umtali in Southern Rhodesia. I was born in Ireland but have been a Catholic missionary in Southern Rhodesia for just over 31 years. In October of 1976 I was sentenced by a Southern Rhodesia court to 10 years imprisonment with forced labor for allowing some nuns of my jurisdiction to give simple medicines, not drugs, to guerrillas fighting against the racist government. And I was also guilty of advising them for their own safety and for the good reputation of the church, not to report to the state, as the law demanded, the presence of these guerrillas.

On appeal early in 1977 my sentence was reduced to four years imprisonment with three years suspended. While awaiting actual imprisonment I was informed that the regime intended to deprive me of the Rhodesian citizenship which I had acquired, and to deport me, rather than put me in jail. I challenged this decision at a special commission presided over by a Southern Rhodesia judge, and I based my argument on the fact that as I had been appointed by the Holy See to care for the spiritual needs of the people of the Diocese of Umtali, I considered myself in conscience bound to continue to exercise that spiritual jurisdiction until the supreme authority of the church and no other authority relieved me of this responsibility.

My appeal was rejected and after being under house arrest for about a month, I was taken by police, put on a plane and deported to my native Ireland. I have been living in exile from Southern Rhodesia since.

This decision to remove me from Southern Rhodesia had long been expected by many people because of my persistent denunciation of the racist legislation of successive white minority governments. The regime which took action against me welcomed the opportunity to remove me. The present government in Southern Rhodesia, ever since it took office, and particularly since its unilateral declaration of independence from Britain in 1965, has been guilty of such oppression of the majority population and has so flagrantly violated human rights throughout the land, that it must be held responsible for the violence which is now taking place there.

The repressive policies sanctioned by the electorate (a tiny 3 percent of the total adult population) and applied with ruthless severity in recent years, have been publicly proclaimed by the Southern Rhodesia government as being necessary for the preservation of Christianity and Western civilization.

In this respect they have not only provoked widespread guerrilla warfare but have brought Christianity into disrepute and have made the Western world appear hostile to the African people. In that measure they have made Communism attractive to these people and driven the nationalist leaders, against their own instincts, to look for military assistance from both Moscow and Peking.

After more than 31 years as a missionary in Southern Rhodesia I can testify that the present white racist minority regime of Mr. Smith's Rhodesia Front party has done more to promote interest in Communism among the black people of Rhodesia than all the Marxist or Leninist propaganda has ever been able to accomplish. It is also my firm belief that the African people of Southern Rhodesia and their own political leaders do not have any desire to associate with Communism be it the so-called Euro-communism or that of Russia or China. They want to be with the West, with the English-speaking world, and in spite of the repression of almost 100 years of colonial rule, they look to Britain and to the United States of America as most friendly powers with whom they will associate and collaborate in an independent Zimbabwe.

During all my time in Southern Rhodesia I have studiously avoided becoming associated with party politics and I have little personal knowledge of the African leaders. Bishop Muzorewa I have met possibly a dozen times in connection with church matters. The Rev. Sithole I have met twice. Mr. Joshua Nkomo I have met once and Mr. Mugabe I have met twice. Chief Chirau I have never met at all. I believe that all of them desire total independence for their people without delay in a nonracial Zimbabwe. I believe too that they are genuine in their expressed desire to live in harmony with white Rhodesians and have no wish that these should leave voluntarily or be driven out of the country.

They recognize that the African people of Southern Rhodesia have not had the educational opportunities to acquire the academic qualifications or the technical skills which are essential for the running of a modern state. They understand that for some time to come they will need the European presence to assist them in the particularly difficult period of transferring from white minority to majority government. But of this they are also sure: They are not prepared to tolerate any longer an element in their society which claims superiority and which demands to be treated as a privileged class because of the color of its skin. They believe that the professional and technical expertise which they need will be readily available to them from many countries in the world if it cannot be acquired except from a privileged class of white people in Southern Rhodesia

The African people of that country are highly intelligent and peaceful. They have a keen sense of justice and in all their traditions there is enshrined the need to hear both sides of the question before reaching decisions. Force as a first or as an easy means of resolving problems is alien to them. They are patient and they look for reason to prevail in settling disputes. For years they have been patient and waited for due recognition of their position as fellow citizens in their own country. They have no use for mob rule. Their own traditions totally reject it. They believe that an aristocracy of mind and character is to be sought in the various elements of their society, in all their communities, be they in the village, or in the larger extended family, or tribal group. To them every single being is important. To their way of thinking people are uniquely created not mass-produced. They expect to have an effective say in how they should be ruled. They expect that as human beings they should have a real part in decision-making.

All this has been denied them throughout the years of colonial domination. For most of that time they have had no share whatsoever in legislation. Only in recent years have they been admitted to parliament and even then merely as a window-dressing exercise. Although they outnumber the white people by 26 to 1 they have only 8 freely elected seats in parliament while the white minority elected by 3 percent of the total population have 50 representatives. An eminent constitutional lawyer Dr. Claire Paley has estimated that under that system it would take 52 years before the African people could achieve a majority in the legislative assembly. The African population realizes this and is not prepared to wait, especially as it knows that their fellows all over the continent have achieved independence already. Like any other people on earth they demand freedom first and to be treated as human beings enjoying integral development. They believe that what follows is secondary.

In spite of their patience and their many appeals for advancement, they have been studiously denied it since colonial occupation began. What has hurt them more than most things is that they have been driven off their lands, their ancestral lands, and for years have been forced to eke out a subsistence allowance on areas of low rainfall, inferior land, land of sand and rock. Meanwhile, less than 6,000 white farmers have taken 45 million acres of the best land and have farms of the average size of 5,000 acres. The result has been penury for the black man and a cheap labor force for the white farmer or industrialist, as the impoverished African peasant farmer is forced to seek work far away from home.

This is not all. Ever since the coming of the white man the African has been denied the very basic opportunity for development which comes through education. According to the laws of Southern Rhodesia every white child must go to school and consequently the state recognizes a legal obligation to provide education for him. There is no law obliging African children to go to school and so the state does not acknowledge the same responsibility for the black community. Were it not for Christian missionaries of all denominations the African would have had practically no schooling at all available to him.

Thousands of African children never get to school even for a year. Only a fraction of them get a full elementary or grade-school education, and the percentage of those who are lucky enough to get into a few high schools is rigidly controlled by the state. Expenditure on education is blatantly discriminatory: for white schools it is required by law and the expenditure is lavish; for black schools no expenditure is required by law and the amount given is minimal.

Much more could be said on these and other matters of primary concern to the African people. I mention land and education simply because they are basic to the massive discontent which racial discrimination has provoked throughout the land.

The first united protests about this state of affairs, the first notable manifestations of nationalism and desire for independence came after World War II. Britain was the ultimate legal authority and successive Southern Rhodesian governments made slight concessions to the African peoples' demands, but nothing substantive was achieved. The protests grew in strength; when the white government proposed to grant real advancement to the African people the racist political party of Mr. Ian Smith came to power. Mr. Smith's objective was to ensure that the black man would remain where he was and, as the regime proclaimed, Christianity and Western civilization would be preserved!

From the moment of his party's coming to power, government oppression intensified and with it the opposition of the masses of the African people. We have reached a climax now with a guerrilla war that has the support of the vast majority of the people of Zimbabwe who are now convinced that only by force can they hope to achieve independence and enjoy integral development as human beings molding their own destiny.

The guerrilla war has brought about acts of the most savage barbarity which defy description and are unreservedly to be condemned. As a churchman I have denounced not only as barbarous but as demonic the massacre of missionaries of all denominations. The recent horror of murdering survivors of a plane crash leaves one bereft of words to describe its bestiality. All one can do is to wonder at the prolonged injustice which provoked such savagery and such hatred of human beings for one another. As for the murder of those missionaries, without positive proof, one can only assume that these deeds were carried out by monsters made so either by drink or by drugs. The masses of the African people deny that their brothers have been responsible, and have laid the blame on a dare-devil group of the Rhodesia army called the Zealous Scouts. We shall probably never know for certain; what is certain, however, is that the Rhodesian security forces have boasted that they themselves have already infiltrated the ranks of the guerrillas and have black men masquerading as terrorists. It is certain too that any member of the security forces enjoys the protection of The Indemnity and Compensation Act for anything he does "in good faith." Priests of my own diocese who have been tortured by Rhodesian army and police have told me that they were threatened at

gun point by white soldiers with the words "Speak up! One dead missionary is as good as 100 dead terrorists."

Such has been the brutality of the present racist regime that words can scarcely describe it. Church people know the situation at first hand. They have a very special knowledge of what is taking place and of what is being concealed by the totally controlled government media. Missionaries enjoy the confidence of the people. They live close to them both in their townships and in the tribal trust areas. Especially in recent years, the Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Church has received from the African people, investigated thoroughly, and published internationally the fullest details of the barbarities perpetrated by the racist regime on the African people of Southern Rhodesia. These documents are available and were published in defiance of the Southern Rhodesia government. We sought to challenge the government either to investigate the allegations or to prove they were false. The Southern Rhodesian government did not dare challenge the facts revealed, but had its revenge by deporting those responsible for the publication of the documents. But the work of revealing such barbarous acts of the Southern Rhodesia government security forces was not exclusively the accomplishment of missionaries. Other reputable authorities have been compelled to reveal the atrocities as well. For example, Amnesty International has published its own damning indictment of the regime, and there is an even more detailed denunciation contained in the splendid report of the International Commission of Jurists. One would have thought that the world would have paid attention and shown some concern for this monstrous behavior by a regime which tells the world that it is defending Christianity and Western civilization. But no! Such is the powerful and purposeful control exercised by the Southern Rhodesia Information Office, that the truth is concealed, the media are manacled, newsmen are denied freedom of movement and only permitted to publish censored versions of their stories. So restricted are they in the exercise of their profession that the world is persuaded that all acts of brutality are the work of the African liberation movement.

This is not all the suppression of truth. Even religious broadcasts are censored. The script of any sermon must be submitted to the state for approval beforehand. No live broadcasts are permitted to the clergy. One Anglican bishop had his text sent back to him and was told to correct it to correspond to what the government considered a true version of Christianity! Here again in the eyes of the African people, the West stands condemned for its refusal to investigate and denounce the daily massacre of black people shot down like vermin for being out after curfew and with no names given and no postmortems carried out. There is no publicity given either to the acts of the army when innocent women and children are burnt alive in their simple grass-roofed huts; when these are machine gunned and sprayed with frantam, the Rhodesian form of napalm. No wonder that one African leader while denouncing the murder of the occupants of the crashed passenger plane some weeks ago, complained that the world press and the media generally were silent about the hundreds of black men and women and children who were slaughtered by the Rhodesia Front security forces. Has there been any publicity given to this side of the story at all?

And yet representatives of the government responsible for all this are received here in this country and treated as if they were perfectly normal representatives of a legitimate democratic government. Actions which recall the early chapters of the modern novel *Roots* have been perpetrated in Southern Rhodesia for years.

How many people know for instance that so many Africans were being executed by hanging by the Southern Rhodesia government that it became embarrassing to have the names appear in the press? How many people know this? So embarrassing did it become that a government regulation was published which no longer requires the state to reveal the names of any one whom it has murdered in this way for a political or politically motivated offense! This is only one symptom of the repressive system. Again, what would the world think if in this country, for instance, in the United States, someone could be picked up off the street, tried in secret, put on the electric chair and done away with in secret and no name given? This has been done in Southern Rhodesia and there is no indication that it has stopped in that country whose political head is welcomed here.

Would you like to hear the comment of the then Southern Rhodesia foreign minister, Mr. Van Der Byl, when asked at a news conference, why the names of Africans executed by his government were not revealed? I quote from *The Rhodesia Herald*, the national newspaper of the country, published on Oct. 30, 1976:

“A Salisbury journalist, Mr. Michael Holman, asked why the government did not release the names of people who had been sentenced to death and hanged. Mr. Van Der Byl said he did not know if this was the case, adding ‘anyway it is academic because they are normally dead after it.’”

Can you imagine anything so callous and crude from a foreign minister of a country defending Christianity and Western civilization?

“They are normally dead after we hang them,” so there is no need to publish names. Do those members of the Congress of the United States who have invited Mr. Smith here know this is the sort of situation they have to deal with? Do they approve of this kind of regime? Are they prepared to return to their constituencies and say that they didn’t know about this thing until now? Or are they so irresponsible as to invite people to the country without first investigating their role of tyrannical oppression? This is the regime some people seem to think should be given an opportunity of stating its case. Not much wonder that Africans ask, “Why not give the same opportunities to the heads of other states in Africa which are noted for their scant regard for human life and have been guilty of mass murder?”

Of course this matter of hanging Africans is nothing new. Shortly after UDI (Unilateral Declaration of Independence), three African prisoners who had been condemned to death in

Southern Rhodesia, appealed to their sovereign Queen Elizabeth in London and were granted a reprieve. In spite of this the present regime hanged them. Life, the black man's life, is cheap in Southern Rhodesia in the opinion of its present government.

And what would the people of the United States think if you were to pass a law indemnifying from prosecution any member of your armed forces or your police force for anything he might do in "the preservation of law and order or the suppression of terrorism" as long as he did it "in good faith?" Would that be considered consonant with either democracy, Christianity, or Western civilization? Yet this is what in Southern Rhodesia the Indemnity and Compensation Act of 1975 provides. And to make sure that the cover-up would be complete, and that it would not be necessary to investigate the allegations of brutality made by the Catholic Church, the act was carefully made retroactive for three years. At that time, Sir Robert Tredgold, a born Rhodesian, distinguished lawyer, former Lord Chief Justice of the Federation of Central Africa, spoke from retirement to denounce this legislation as the most iniquitous prostitution of law that he had ever known in all his life. Yet those who promoted this mockery of law are here, invited here to this democracy to be given full opportunity of stating their case. One would hope that they would state this publicly too.

Is it any wonder that the African people of Southern Rhodesia say, "Well if this kind of oppression be Christianity and Western civilization, what's wrong with Communism?" Is it any wonder that in desperation they have been driven to seek arms of war from Moscow or Peking? The West, in its unexampled duplicity in the matter of economic sanctions, has shown the African people throughout the whole continent that it is not to be trusted, that it will ratify the most solemn international covenants, and as soon as it suits its purpose, or as soon as it is necessary to support its white kith and kin, it will forget ordinary humanity and close its ears to the cries of human beings who are black, and its eyes to the irrefutable evidence of barbarity practiced by its white brothers. This incredible sensitivity, this total separation of morality from civic life, this convenient prostitution of conscience, now no longer a guide, but an accomplice in crime, all this behavior, seemingly approved of by the great Western powers, has served to confirm the racist regime in Southern Rhodesia in its stand and is providing a marvelous opportunity for Marxism to triumph throughout the whole vast continent of Africa. How the leaders of the Kremlin and Peking must be rubbing their hands in satisfaction as they see the representatives of racist repression being given a hearing in this country!

I may be told, perhaps, that the visit of these men is not really welcome, that it is merely tolerated in the hope of forcing the regime to realize that its day is done, that the game is up, and that the civilized world will tolerate it no longer. If that be so, then for that the present administration of the United States may be given credit, but it can be the *only* reason for tolerating the presence here of the Southern Rhodesian regime's representation if the West is to maintain any credibility at all in the whole of Africa and in the Third World.

There must be no hesitation in examining the alternatives. If any further encouragement be given to the regime, a bloody civil war in Southern Rhodesia must be inevitable and the internationalization of the conflict and the intervention of other powers inimical to the West will be hard to avoid.

Notice that I say no further encouragement must be given to the regime, that is, to the Rhodesia Front regime of Mr. Ian Smith. Elementary analysis of his proposals for a settlement clearly demonstrate that all the concessions he is alleged to have made in the internal settlement are simply nugatory. Control will remain essentially in the hands of his white racist party. This has been amply illustrated in papers on the terms of the settlement prepared by legal authorities. His associates in the executive council seem not to have noticed (one must assume their good faith) how astutely they have been deceived. The first aim of the agreement was to bring an end to economic sanctions and to the armed conflict. We now know that the sanctions have been surreptitiously violated by parties in the West. Moreover, there has been no cessation of hostilities. Three-quarters of the area of Southern Rhodesia is today effectively in the hands of the guerrillas. The members of the executive council know that full well. What may not be so clearly recognized by some of the members of the executive council is that in the settlement proposals there is no mention of setting up true democracy, nor is there a notable commitment to promoting justice and ending racial discrimination. The excellent critique of the internal settlement which has been prepared by the Catholic Institute for International Relations in London shows that in the text of the Salisbury Agreement peace in the form of a cease-fire takes second place to the restoring of an economic prosperity.

In view of all this, it is my considered opinion that Rhodesia's internal settlement must be rejected. It is totally unacceptable to the will of the African population as a whole because it does not ensure African majority rule and genuine independence in a nonracial Zimbabwe. It appears on thorough analysis to be little more than a carefully contrived arrangement to give a semblance of African control in the new state but with little essential difference from the white racist regime which the nationalist movement has taken up arms to destroy. The changes which it professes to achieve are not fundamental, and there is no guarantee that they may not be reversed. The white minority representation in the legislative assembly will still be capable of preventing substantive changes in the existing laws which determine the living conditions and relationships between the races. The judiciary, which has notably dishonored the high principles of the legal profession, is guaranteed security of tenure. The Public Services Board, at present totally white controlled and responsible for the appointments, promotions, and discharges in the service, has been given security tenure. A further entrenched clause of the new constitution deals with the protection of property and will mean in practice that the basic need of the African people, the immediate redistribution of land, cannot possibly be met. Moreover, there is adequate protection for minority white property rights, but none for African property held, or wantonly destroyed by the regime. There seems no possibility in practice of providing educational opportunity for the African child who has

had no legal right even to elementary schooling ever since the white man occupied his country.

Even from this brief examination, it should be clear beyond dispute that with such restrictions built into the Constitution racism will remain in Southern Rhodesia and will forever be a source of disorder. As the CIIR analysis of the internal settlement proposals put it: "There are no specific clauses in the new constitution which address the breaking down of the structures of Rhodesia's white dominated society. The new constitution does not remove privilege, but on the contrary, it entrenches certain privileges directly or by implication."

Crucial to the whole matter in the eyes of the African people is the question of the security forces. They are no longer, as I have said, in effective control of most of the country. They cannot remain anywhere in permanent safety for any length of time in the Tribal Trust Lands. All they can do is to continue their savage punitive raids and return to a base near a town serving up for the ready acceptance by the world media of communications their own prejudiced accounts of their destruction of so-called terrorists. In actual fact, the security forces, already protected by the Indemnity and Compensation Act of 1975, are regarded by the African population as the real terrorists, agents of a regime which has held on to power through its terrorist laws and actions since 1965.

In both the transitional period and under the proposed new Constitution, there are no guarantees that any of this will change. Hence, it is easy to understand why guerilla leaders are so reluctant to accept in its present state the existing government *forces*. The internal settlement plans have not yet and cannot ever bring an end to hostilities. If the West supports these plans, it will further exacerbate the growing antipathy between the races, not only in Southern Rhodesia, but in the whole of Southern Africa. It will further alienate the other black states in the whole African continent. It will certainly appear to the Third World that the so-called democracies of the West are not to be trusted and it will thereby provide that the propaganda of Moscow and Peking will find ready acceptance. One thing is certain: it will promote in Southern Rhodesia itself a prolonged civil war.

It is clear to anyone who knows that country and its people and who is kept informed of events and of the day-to-day reactions of the African majority, that the internal settlement, for all its ingenuity and persuasive propaganda, is merely a superficial palliative that provides no permanent solution to the problem. It is clear that the people, the African people, have massively rejected it and that the nationalist forces to whom they give their confidence are headed for complete victory in the struggle for independence.

Now I ask myself what about the aftermath? There have been rumors of the retribution which is likely to follow when the day of triumph comes. As a friend of the African people, indeed of all the people of Zimbabwe, as a Christian leader, may I even now appeal for peace, for pardon, (in spite of all the temptation to revenge), and for a mighty demonstration to the

world at large, of the nobility and generosity of soul that a great black nation can show to those who have oppressed it. Let there be no Nuremberg, no further loss of life. Who will benefit from it? No one. Who will benefit from clemency, mercy, forgiveness? The whole nation of Zimbabwe which the one true God will reward with those things that the people so sorely need to carry them for ages to come. I have said already that I have avoided becoming involved in party politics. My justification for being involved in this whole matter throughout the years is found in a directive of my own church which says: Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world must be considered a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel and of the liberation of man from every oppressive condition.