

Where violence and religion

By DENISE ACKERMAN

SHOTS IN THE STREET: VIOLENCE AND RELIGION IN SOUTH AFRICA by David Chidester, Oxford University Press 1992. (240 pages) R34,99

IT IS difficult to find words to describe the endemic violence which is shredding our society into fragments of despair, fear and need. Any attempt to reflect on this violence, its causes and the mechanisms which maintain it, is to be welcomed. In this book David Chidester, Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town, seeks to explore the ambivalent relationship between violence and religion.

Drawing on sociologist C. Wright Mills definition – "all politics is a struggle for power; the ultimate kind of power is violence" – Chidester contends that domination and resistance are not only forcefully negotiated with weapons, but that our religious symbols are a vital part of such negotiations. In the author's words: "This book examines the role of religion in the violent contests over meaning and power that have been conducted in South Africa"

At the outset the question "what is violence?" is addressed and Chidester finds that no simple definition suffices as the context, relationships and the connection between power and fundamental interests all play a part in a variety of violent situations.

He settles for four definitions of violence: direct physical harm; the violation of humanity; illegitimate force; and legitimate liberation, noting that fundamental to understanding violence lies the question of what it

SHOTS

IN THE STREETS



Violence and Religion in South Africa

David Chidester

religious power and inherent violence of Afrikaner nationalism is ultimately found in the blood sacrifice to the white God in the chilling event of November 1988 in Pretoria.

Next the killing of young municipal policeman Lucas Sethwala in Paballelo in 1985 is understood as a ritual killing in which the violence which permeates a community is deflected onto a single sacrificial surrogate victim.

CHAPTER Three concludes the exploration of ritual killing by examining

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Out of anger, something new

By LESLIE LIDDELL

WOMEN HOLD UP HALF THE SKY: WOMEN IN THE CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA edited by Denise Ackerman, Jonathan A. Draper and Emma Mashinini, Cluster Publications, 1992. (397 pages) R35

THIS unusual title, drawn from a Japanese saying, expresses two aspirations of the book. Firstly a need to "re-image the feminist aspect of God, where Christians have traditionally developed theology on the basis of Old and New Testament masculine images", and secondly to "draw attention to the usually unrecorded role which women have played and continue to play in the history and struggle for justice in Southern Africa."

While the editors admit that the book was "conceived out of hurt and anger" at the Church of the Province of Southern Africa's rejection of the motion to ordain women to the priesthood in July 1988, the book addresses deeper issues about women.

A list of explanatory notes has been included to clarify terminology unfamiliar to Southern African readers. Throughout the book previously unfamiliar terminology is explained, a helpful aid to readers which

could be a cue for other authors and editors.

The 35 male and female contributors have varied life experiences and socio-cultural backgrounds but share "a passionate commitment to the liberation of women personally and socially in the light of their Christian faith and experiences."

The book is divided into six diverse but equally important sections. Part one "Women and the Bible: a Hermeneutical Problem" consists of six widely differing contributions which range from a biblical exegesis on Luke to practical commentary on the oppressive use of moral instruction in the New Testament Letters and the Old Testament. In the latter essay it is argued that while teachings from the Letters are no longer used to justify slavery, moral instruction lending itself to the oppression of women is constantly upheld.

In an article entitled, "The Bible in the Midst of Women" Rev Courtney Sampson argues for a pastoral approach to feminist hermeneutics, maintaining that oppressed women read the Bible uncritically and have an oppressive relationship with religious symbols.

The article by Renate Cochrane, entitled "Equal Discipleship of Women and Men", in contradiction to the preceding author, Gertrude Wittenberg, states that Luke often

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