

THE CHRISTIAN AND POLITICAL ISSUES

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1. Our Duty as Christians

THE SUBJECT of this paper bristles with difficulties and contentious issues, particularly in a multi-racial society such as we have in South Africa, where biased considerations of race, nationality and colour dominate and thus prejudice rational judgment.

As Christians we need moral courage re-inforced by love, patience, tolerance, and tact, in educating and persuading fellow-citizens within and without the Church to accept and support the Christian approach to the complex and vital issues that face us.

In the modern pressure-group State it is incumbent upon Christians as individuals or as groups to participate in political activities in order to ensure that political and other national issues are considered and settled in the light of fundamental Christian principles. Through the Church Christians should be the guardians of the ethical principles on which society must be built. Any in-difference on their part in this regard would lay them open to a charge of disloyalty to our Master.

My plea here is that we as Christians should not shirk our responsibility, but should consciously and courageously assert what we believe to be a Christian solution to national questions.

2. Christian Ethical Principles

What are these Christian ethical principles? The late J. H. Hofmeyr dealt fully with them in his 1945 Hoernlé Memorial Lecture on "Christian Principles and Race Relations". For a brief statement, however, we may refer to the summary by Mrs. A. W. Hoernlé in her "Alternatives to Apartheid" (*Race Relations*, Vol. XV, No. 3): "There are certain fundamental principles to which we are committed as Christian democratic people", she says. "It is a basic principle of our Christian ethics, which we have never repudiated, though we have lamentably failed to live up to them, that human beings have an intrinsic value in themselves, that they

have a right to develop, in the measure of their inborn potentialities, their human personality, and that they should not be used by the State itself or by any subordinate group within the State as means to its ends without consideration of their own convictions and justifiable aspirations."

It is readily conceded that the acceptance of these principles as our guide in seeking a solution to our vexed but urgent political issues will not produce overnight a perfect society, but our good intentions would then be clear and we could move forward in faith and not fear; for as J. H. Hofmeyr put it: "The outcome of a policy based on faith may be unpredictable in detail but there is more than a reasonable chance of its leading to success and the Christian approach is the approach not of fear but of faith".

3. Trends of Political Thinking

I do not propose to discuss the merits and demerits of policies such as assimilation, segregation, trusteeship, etc., which are now being sponsored by the different leaders of White public opinion and who offer them as practical attempts to meet the demands of Non-Whites for active participation in the affairs of our common country. I shall concern myself rather with a critical examination of some common trends which seriously prejudice these policies whatever merits their protagonists claim for them.

(a) Claims to Exclusive Ownership of South Africa

The air is full of the cry of the majority of White South Africa that this is a White man's country and should be so preserved at all costs. And apparently this must be so to eternity. It would probably be more correct to say to doomsday, for there is an inevitable doom for South Africa if White domination is promoted at the expense of other and larger sections of the community.

As a reaction to this claim African nationalism, contrary to African tradition, has already announced its counter claim in the slogan "Africa for the Africans".

Christians must make their fellow citizens on both sides of the colour line see the utter futility and wrongness of this exclusive claim on the part of any section of our South African nation. Fortunately some of the leaders of White South Africa see, or are beginning to see, otherwise on this matter even though they do not always act consistently. As an illustration of this broader vision of unity one may refer to the encouraging words of General Smuts made to some members of the Native Representative Council in Cape

Town in 1947: "Providence has put us both here . . . you came from the north by land, we came from the south by sea, and here we both are, and here we shall remain. It is our country, it is your country. We must try and build up a human society that will be happy as far as human beings can be happy."

The spirit of selfish exclusiveness shows itself again in a tendency to regard civilization as the sole possession and production of White people. Hence the plea that Africans must develop along their own lines. This claim ignores the fact that in its historic development western civilization has been indebted to many sources, ancient and modern. The tragedy of the attitude behind this claim is that White South Africa tends to forget its God-given mission to spread civilization and not hoard it, and thus to ensure its survival and growth.

In this matter of safe-guarding civilization Non-Whites should also realize that, notwithstanding any disadvantages they may be labouring under, it is their part as individuals and as community groups to strive to attain recognized standards of civilization to fit them to receive and enjoy the privileges of civilization, including that of common citizenship.

(b) *The Spirit of Domination and Superiority*

A recurring note in much thinking on racial questions is that of the assumed right of White to dominate Black. Even the advocates of the policy of Christian Trusteeship, with its emphasis on development, are generally silent on the question of making provision for the granting of common citizenship to those Non-Whites who possess the necessary qualifications. Admirable though it might otherwise be, Trusteeship is thus open to the charge of assuming a perpetual tutelage of the ward, as though all men of colour, by virtue of that fact, required a guardian, while the White man, by virtue of his whiteness, was automatically fitted for guardianship.

In a word, the cardinal weakness in the various racial policies offered us is that they are so vitiated by the perpetual lordship of White over Black that they give no place to service and co-operation.

(c) *Shelving the Question of Citizenship Rights*

Provision should be made for the full development of Non-Whites, yet often well-meaning White champions of this cause will counsel the abandonment of the insistence on full citizenship rights in the name of a sounder strategy in the face of the uncom-

promising opposition of the majority of White South Africans. Such advice overlooks, first, the fact that development must be symmetrical, embracing all human activities, social, economic, political, and religious, otherwise full development of the personality is impossible. Secondly, it ignores the practical consideration that in a democratic system the possession of some political power provides the means for facilitating development in other spheres of life.

General Smuts, in his Rhodes Memorial Lectures given at Oxford in 1929, after praising Lord Lugard's statement on the matter of equal rights in relation to colour, says: "But you notice once more the silence about political rights". He then proceeds to give his own views: "I do not think that there can be . . . among those who have given the subject serious attention, any doubt that in the supreme legislature of a country with a mixed population all classes and colours should be represented. It is repugnant to our civilized European ideas that the weaker in a community should not be heard or should go without representation by themselves or through European spokesmen where their interest is concerned. There can be but one sovereign body in a country, and that body should represent the weaker no less than the stronger. To that extent there should be agreement."

Unfortunately, our White rulers are not willing to be guided by this broad vision. We move backward instead of forward, and this in spite of the past handling of franchise rights by Africans at the Cape for years and the political wisdom Africans have shown in the type of Europeans they have elected to represent them under the 1936 Natives Representation Act.

(d) *Discounting Co-operation*

One barrier to the promotion of the progress of Non-Whites is the lack of co-operation between White and Black in the interest of the country as a whole. The initiative in this should come from White South Africa, including the Government. As it is, Non-Whites are generally expected to accept without comment or demur the crumbs that fall from their master's table. This ignores the natural tendency in man to appreciate the more what he has helped to create. Yet even so elementary a matter as consultation is frowned upon, and where required by law is done grudgingly and in a nigardly fashion, as, for example, in the treatment meted out to the Natives Representative Council. As General Smuts himself admitted in 1947, as Prime Minister, the Council's complaint in this regard is justified.

It should be noted that the present advisory bodies, including the Natives Representative Council, are merely consultative bodies and not instruments for facilitating co-operation. Is it any wonder that this discounting of co-operation by most Whites is fast producing non-co-operationists among Non-Whites?

Christians on both sides of the colour line must work hard for the realization of co-operation in spite of the strong tide against it. And let it be recognized that full co-operation can only exist where all sections of the community are given an opportunity, according to their individual capacity, to share in the legislative as well as the executive and administrative activities of the country.

(c) *Non-recognition of Individual Attainment*

The stress on the progress of the mass of a backward people, while admirable in itself, often becomes an excuse for denying to individuals the privileges and responsibilities of civilization when they are fitted for them. This attitude completely ignores the historical fact that, in the providence of God, progress has come through individuals and will in all probability continue to do so.

4. *Can Christians Agree on a Political Policy for Non-Whites?*

I feel this paper would lack stability and purpose if I did not end by trying to set down a practical alternative to the attitudes we have been considering, and one that would be an expression of the Christian spirit.

Mrs. A. W. Hoernlé, in her paper on "Alternatives to Apartheid" makes a plea for a policy of integration which would involve accepting civilization and common citizenship as a heritage for all men who possessed certain qualifications. Such a programme would allow for a process of cultural assimilation and for economic integration in industry and other occupations. Socially the programme would provide for a wide use of parallel institutions, as at present, and separate areas of residence in any community in the interests of the preservation of racial integrity. This limited parallelism would be on a strict basis of "separate but equal" and would be based on mutual agreement. On the political side the programme would allow for a common citizenship with enrolment on a common electoral roll for all who could meet the stipulated requirements of a loaded franchise.

Pleading for a liberal attitude on the part of White South Africa Mrs. Hoernlé says: "The idea of White domination, of Herren-volk, must go. It simply is not true that all White men are better

than all Non-Whites . . . I have always maintained that the White man has a justifiable right to ask for guarantees from men of different cultures whom he admits to full citizenship of the State. The barrier can be made high, the Non-Whites are perfectly prepared for it to be high, but they claim that the aspiration to full citizenship cannot be permanently withheld . . . Provision for full participation in the process of government will have to be provided, nothing less, in the long run, will satisfy the Non-Whites or indeed the Whites themselves imbued with the fundamental ideals of our civilization. This way alone guarantees respect of each for all, guarantees the security and maintenance of our civilization in the Union and offers the best and indeed the only real prospect for the preservation of the White races who brought it here."

May one dare to hope that the energy and money White South Africa is spending to separate races may be diverted to facilitate the working out of a partnership of racial groups?

Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia, Kenya and Tanganyika, are taking their courage in their hands and plotting out, each in their own way, a progressive democratic course which will include in the citizenship pattern Africans who meet stipulated citizenship requirements. Could not South Africa follow some similar course in faith? Let us remind ourselves again of Mr. Hofmeyr's words: "The outcome of a policy based on faith may be unpredictable in detail, but there is more than a reasonable chance of its leading to success; and the Christian approach is the approach not of fear but of faith."

POINTS FROM DISCUSSION

A spiritual desert is encroaching on present-day life because of a mindless society.

The Church must face the present structure of society in the recognition that there is a relationship between that structure and the moral attainment of the people.

There are different levels of life, levels of "nature" of "grace", and politics belongs to the former. "The Church is the guardian of order before she is the guardian of morals."

Christianity is concerned with things as they are, i.e. she has to state what is their true nature.

It is the task of the Church both to face and to help to remove the fear poisoning race relationships in South Africa to-day.

CONFERENCE FINDINGS

14. We consider that in principle adult persons of all races should share in the responsibility of the government of the country. This implies the exercise of the franchise. We recognize that at present many such persons are not ready for this responsibility. We therefore agree to a qualified franchise.
15. We urge all Christians to take an active part in the many social institutions of the community and to exercise their Christian influence while doing so.
16. We deprecate false conceptions of nationalism by which any one section of the community, European or Non-European, claims the exclusive right to control national affairs. True nationalism will find its expression in the service of the community as a whole.

QUESTIONS

1. Should Christians take an active part in public affairs? What may they hope to achieve by so doing?
2. "The Church should not formulate nor sponsor any particular political or economic system but should be content with the right of criticism and the propagation of the Christian Faith and Ethic by which any system may be judged." Do you agree? Give your reasons for agreeing or disagreeing.
3. How would a Christian regard the following statements:
 - (a) "South Africa is a White man's country and must remain so."
 - (b) "Africa for Africans."
 - (c) "We must maintain western civilization at all costs"?

4. What, as a Christian, do you think of the proposal that full citizenship rights be extended to Non-Europeans?
5. "The real need of South Africa is not 'Apartheid' but 'Eendrag'." What is meant by this? Do you agree with it?
6. Why does fear dominate race relationships in South Africa? How should a Christian react to it?
7. What is a "liberal thinker" in the realm of race relationships? Is such necessarily a Christian? If not, how do you distinguish?