

ANGLICANS AND APARTHEID

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AFTER twenty centuries of Church history, it should not be necessary to define the mission of the Christian Church as stated by its founder. But in a nominally Christian land like South Africa, where most churchmen claim—by their actions if not by their spoken opinions—that apartheid and fellowship are reconcilable, a brief summary of accepted theology appears necessary.

According to the founder of Christianity, the Church exists to pursue one objective: the building, first of all, of close personal relationships between God and men; and then, as a natural consequence, between people themselves. It aims to establish a brotherhood between all men under the paternal care and guidance of God. It is to be a true family, with God as its head and all humanity of all times and places as its dependent children. Millions of sermons have pointed the analogy, justifying it by ample evidence from the New Testament and the patristic writings of the early undivided Church. It follows logically that differences of skin pigmentation, place of residence, race, spiritual condition or cultural and educational development cannot alter the fact that all men and women belong together and are responsible for each other as members of one universal family. Providentially planned differences in appearance, colour or culture must help rather than hinder the attainment of the Kingdom of God by providing that very diversity of gifts, interests and abilities which must make for the greatest possible attainment by the family as a whole. All people are complementary and necessary, like the pieces of a jig-saw puzzle, in the closest juxtaposition to each other. Apartheid . . . the separation of the pieces . . . must frustrate the perfecting of the Kingdom, the master-plan of God Himself for His creation.

In theory the Anglican Church, like other Christian bodies in South Africa, accepts these basic teachings and gives them a wider and more literal interpretation than other Churches, apart from the Roman Catholics. In Anglican social doctrine there is certainly none of the sophistry or rationalization of Dutch Reformed teaching, which claims that people of the various

racial groups are "equal but different"—whatever that may mean! How can there be, when it is freely agreed that the high-priestly prayer of the founder in Gethsemane, "that they all may be one", has been accepted by Christians of all ages as the fundamental justification for the continued existence of the Church.

But in practice a curious and saddening contradiction is at once apparent: what is accepted as theologically indisputable also appears to be dismissed as practically inexpedient, if not impossible. The teaching is not carried into the everyday world of actual relationships, and Christ's plea for family unity remains but a piously held and beautiful philosophy. In spite of the fact that Anglican churchmen hold controlling positions in commerce and industry, including the gold mining houses, and are therefore able to force changes upon the Government in a more Christian direction, hardly any use at all has been made of such opportunities as have arisen. Indeed, on the contrary, it was Anglican business interests in Natal which approached the Government with requests to apply the Group Areas Act in the Union for the first time, to protect them from the competition of Indian traders. Anglican lay opinion, expressed in the various synods through the years of crisis, has been notoriously and obstructively conservative towards any suggested opposition to the Government. Nothing, it seems, must be done which could in any way prejudice business interests. Rather, patience must be exercised in the hope that "something will happen" to unseat the present administration. At times there is evidence for a suspicion, however, that even this is more than a large proportion of Anglican businessmen desire, that they really want a 'strong man' like Verwoerd to remain in power so that unsettling changes will be avoided and business will be permitted to continue as usual. The lay members of the Church have, through their more influential representatives, actually prevented any determined stand or effective counter-measures to unjust legislation which their ecclesiastical leaders might have initiated. They have sold their principles for a mess of dividends. Mammon sits firmly enthroned on the altars of white Anglican churches while God has withdrawn to the locations and reserves. The Government is consequently free to tolerate without any fears the purely verbal opposition of the bishops and their liberal subordinates. It knows that nothing will follow except greater Nationalist solidarity, a louder outcry against the outrageous blasphemy of 'uitlander' parsons and missionaries, the traditional

enemies of 'volk' and 'kerk' since the earliest Dutch settlements at the Cape. So permission is readily given for the indignation meetings, the marches to City Hall steps, the publication of anti-apartheid literature (most South Africans will not bother to read it, anyway). Rude letters may be permitted in the English press; angry sermons and synodical charges may be delivered to congregations who have, after all, been listening to that sort of thing for years. Unconscious confirmation of this appears in the booklet '*Where We Stand*', the collected statements of Archbishop Clayton on the subject of unjust South African race laws. The operative word is 'stand', as no revolt of a practical kind has followed when the verbal stand has proved ineffectual. The professing Christians will listen and be satisfied and then, both uplifted and edified, go home to their roast joint. It is most unlikely that many of them will even agree wholeheartedly with what they have heard. And that is where it will all end. And if it does not, the eccentric or over-zealous 'liberalist' will be dealt with promptly as an example to the others, like Father Nye and Miss Hannah Stanton—detained during the Emergency—whose fate was a salutary lesson to other priests and missionaries.

It is only fair, at this point, to remember that this failure of Anglicans in South Africa to apply principles or follow up solemn pronouncements is equalled outside the country by other professed and often more vociferous enemies of racialism, and with less excuse to offer. In South Africa there is the real danger of punishment, persecution and ruin. No such penalties hang over those in Britain, for example, who have been rightly loud in their denunciation of the Sharpeville murders and yet have betrayed a strange reluctance to translate this into positive action, whether it be boycotts or agitation for governmental diplomatic measures against the offenders. Or rather, it is mysterious until it is remembered that Great Britain has nine hundred million pounds invested in the Union and that the British people have never "had it so good", thanks at least in part to the soiled profits wrung from exploited South African non-white labourers. Verbal protests and wringings of the hands cost nothing, satisfy public opinion and are soon forgiven and forgotten by those against whom they are directed. No dividends will be lost, no markets imperilled and the overall economic structure of the country, so precariously balanced, will not be touched. So the only power on earth able to end racial discrimination in South Africa without bloodshed, through its

virtual control over the delinquent's purse strings, fails to lift a finger to implement the rulings of its own national conscience.

Within the Church itself, the bishops in South Africa find themselves opposed and frustrated over and over again by their adherents in the parishes. The year before last, for example, the Diocesan Synod of Kimberley and Kuruman accepted a motion sponsored by the Bishop over the admission of non-white members to churches in white residential areas. Delegates were briefed with episcopal authority to instruct the councils in the parishes to erect notices outside their churches inviting people of all races to attend services. This had been done at Cape Town Cathedral in the Mother Diocese for some two years, so it was hardly a novel idea and had been proved a useful one. The reaction on the 'platteland' was, however, exactly what the synod representatives had expected: the instruction was disregarded, and a threatening attitude towards the Bishop developed. In the parish of De Aar, the council unanimously agreed to "have none of it", while certain members of the congregation threatened to join the Dutch Reformed or Methodist Church if the notice was erected. The minister of the parish, a Cambridge graduate conditioned by many years of work in predominantly Afrikaner areas, found himself "in complete sympathy" with his white flock's attitude. Needless to say, therefore, the notice did not go up. Perhaps there is no connection between this matter and the subsequent resignation of the Bishop of Kimberley and Kuruman, but there is an inevitable and justifiable suspicion in many minds that he has realized the hopelessness of continuing the struggle on his own while most of his army is repeatedly going over to the side of the enemy. Those who call on the South African bishops to continue the struggle against injustice in the country should realize that the few diocesans who possess the courage and conviction to do so are rendered virtually powerless by the desertion of their own clergy and people at times when action rather than words is required. They experience, in fact, the abandonment and loneliness which was the lot of their Lord and Master on the first Good Friday, when the disciples "forsook him and fled".

But although there are those like ex-Bishop Reeves and the ex-Bishop of Kimberley and Kuruman, most bishops accept the fact of separate worship or else rationalize it in highly exaggerated terms of linguistic difficulties or the need to cater for the difficult working hours of African and Coloured members.

Another anomaly which has caused loss of confidence is the apparent ease with which most dioceses have accepted and perpetuated different rates of pay for their white and non-white clergy and lay workers. The fact that most non-whites cannot afford the high fees of the Church schools is accepted with relief by white Anglicans; while the prospect of educational integration in the European government primary School of Maseru, capital of the British Protectorate of Basutoland, has sent many Church members, some of them government employees, scurrying across the border to find places for their children in the Nationalist Government schools of South Africa. Some such Christians are even attempting to find employment outside the territory, in the Republic itself or in the two more backward Protectorates.

It is bewildering and saddening to the non-white and liberal white in South Africa to find the outside world looking to the Anglican Church for a positive and determined resistance to the Government's racial policies. Would that it could be so, but Trevor Huddleston published the sad and sobering truth about the matter in his *'Naught for your Comfort'* as far back as 1956. Since then the demands of the Sharpeville crisis in particular have highlighted the Church's inability or unwillingness to act. The supreme challenge which those March days constituted for all professing Christians was met by a pitifully small group of bishops and priests led by the Archbishop of Cape Town and Bishop Reeves, in the teeth of widespread disapproval by clergy and laymen alike. One of the Archdeacons of the Church even declared publicly that Joost de Blank had proved himself unfitted to occupy the Archbishop's chair, and that Bishop Reeves would be doing the Church in South Africa a signal service if he stayed in England permanently. Indeed, throughout the early days of the Emergency, the Johannesburg English newspapers published scores of letters from indignant Anglicans demanding the resignation of their bishop. A few months later, Canon Bryan Green, who was on a mission visit to two South African dioceses from his home parish of Birmingham, condemned the anti-Government slant, as he put it, given to South African news by most British newspapers, assuring his listeners that responsible people in the United Kingdom had nothing but sympathy for the misrepresented white people of South Africa. In all parts of the country the detention of Father Nye, Miss Stanton and hundreds of other Christians, without charge or trial, was accepted

and almost ignored by the great majority of their white co-religionists, while it is on record that the clergy of one city actually refused to visit detainees in jail when given the opportunity to do so. The whole sad story of Christian failure can, however, be exemplified and summed up by the Anglican Church councillor of one of the Pretoria parishes who went to his rector and said: "I am sorry, padre, but my wife and I have given the matter serious thought and have decided to transfer to the Methodist Church. Please do not take the matter as personal in any way, but you must admit that it is embarrassing to be Anglicans these days, not to mention the business consequences. It has not been an easy decision to make after our long association with the Church; you will remember that my wife's grandfather was a bishop in Scotland. But what would happen to our children, padre, if Scott, Reeves and Huddleston got their way?" Yes, indeed, what would happen if they got their way? And what would have happened if Jesus had got his way in opposing the shallow hypocrisy of his own co-religionists? And what would have happened to the Christian Church if he had abandoned the cause as our councillor was prepared to do? One might answer with the further question: what will happen if they do *not* get their way and African nationalism has to 'go it alone' or look to other agencies for support? And what will happen to the children, anyway, when they have to face their judge and answer, together with their parents and grandparents, for the crimes and the suffering of continued racial discrimination and selfishness? They have forgotten, or they do not care, who it was who once said: "I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat . . . in prison, and ye visited me not. Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these, ye did it not to me".

The failure of Anglicans to face firmly the demands of the racial situation has been principally the result of economic factors. Unlike his Dutch Reformed contemporary, the English-speaking Christian is not very interested in theological or philosophical argument. He is almost exclusively a materialist. The Archbishop and others who advocate positive anti-Government action are seen as the challengers of white privilege. If they get their way, a levelling of material conditions between black and white is seen as a consequence, with an enormous sacrifice in living standards by the whites. And as it is precisely the high wages, the cheap servants, the good dividends, the quiet untroubled sundowners in the evening and an early retire-

ment from toil and responsibility to the coast, which make life in South Africa seem so worth-while, such clerical liberalism simply cannot be tolerated. Besides, there is the uneasy suspicion that equal competition between men from different racial groups for the good things of life would reduce many whites to a position of naked inferiority. Many realize only too well the relative deficiency of themselves and their progeny in intellect and manual skills to welcome the abolition of privilege and protection. It is inevitable that such considerations should overflow from the secular into the religious thinking of the master race. The Church must, therefore, recognize itself as one of the supporting pillars of the social edifice in which it finds itself and must use religion to confirm or rationalize the so-necessary prejudices. If the Bible seems to teach contrary ideas, it must be re-interpreted or at least soft-pedalled. The parable of the Good Samaritan must be given a 'spiritual' rather than a 'literal' meaning. And above all, the eternal dichotomy between religion and politics must be perpetuated: the individual soul must be encouraged to occupy an ivory tower of personal morality and holiness, unscathed by the problems of the greater society to which it belongs. Social matters are the concern of the Government because God has willed it that way. Men like ex-Bishop Reeves are usurping the responsibilities of the politician and social worker, who have derived them by direct delegation from God Himself. Worse than that, they are threatening by their talk of equality the privileged stipends and working conditions of their brother-clergy and the security and prosperity of their wives and families. Even in the centre of the most enlightened Christian society, the only liberals deemed worthy of support are those who, like the leaders of the Progressive Party, offer material security through the backing of such agencies as the Anglo-American Corporation, and a guarantee that "our traditional way of life" will be perpetuated and hence our childrens' future assured. This is a natural enough wish, of course, except when it involves, in the honouring, the denial of all real promise to the vast majority of other South Africans simply because they possess a differently coloured skin.

On May 31st, 1960, the Union of South Africa celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. Speeches of Cabinet Ministers often refer to a much longer period of South African history, however: the three hundred years of European Christian influence and beneficence on the sub-continent. "Much has been done", it is

claimed, "in a very short time". Perhaps the period referred to, whether it be fifty or three hundred years, is a short enough time if you have enough to eat, comfort at home and golf on Wednesdays and at the week-ends to hasten it along. Otherwise it can assume the feel of eternity itself, an unending and unchanging hell which may be the same in another fifty or three hundred years time. The Church in South Africa has, in fact, had more than long enough to work out a Christian solution to the racial problem. But does the Church really want a Christian solution? Clergy and laymen find acquiescence both safe and comfortable. The Church schools demonstrate the position perfectly; they could not continue to function as they are, as a training ground for an economic aristocracy, outside the framework of apartheid. At one such school in the Orange Free State, most servants receive the princely wage of five pounds and ten shillings monthly, while old Timothy—who started his career in the institution as a shoe-black and fire-lighter forty years ago—now receives seven pounds and ten shillings each month and pedals his way to his work each morning and back in the evening to the African location four miles away. The Africans who live on the premises must eat their food squatting in a corner of the yard which surrounds their squalid tenement rooms, in order that the Church may turn out another generation of Christian gentlemen who have learned English and Arithmetic and the art of keeping their hands clean and leaving all manual work to the blacks. No change is deemed possible as it would involve higher fees for the already over-burdened parents, smaller salaries for the teachers who would certainly transfer their energies to government institutions immediately, or a general lowering of the living standards in the schools, putting them out of step with the real South African world outside. Just as the devout Roman Catholics of the once Belgian Congo must be blamed for failing to face up to avarice and selfishness in the eighty years of their colonial responsibility, so must the Christians of South Africa, in particular those who have known better, be blamed for tolerating the retarded growth and economic malnutrition of the non-white for three centuries—offering nothing more than sporadic verbal protests, while enjoying all the richness of living themselves.

The refusal of the Russian Church during the nineteenth century to identify itself with the struggle of the masses for their freedom, the refusal to recognize the sufferings and disabilities of the 'dark people' as a challenge, a contradiction of every New

Testament teaching, led inevitably to the atheism and persecutions of the post-revolutionary period. With frightening similarity the Church in South Africa has turned its back upon the stretching towards freedom of those imprisoned in the colour of their skins. Preoccupied with the pursuit of respectability and material security, its silence as much as its spoken criticism has ranged it against African liberation throughout the continent, and on the side of the racial reply.

Little if any time remains for a change to take place. Yet it is surely no exaggeration to predict that unless such a change does take place immediately, unless there is a general discovery and acceptance of the spirit of the Anglican prophets of this generation and a willingness to witness, suffer and even die for the truths enunciated by clergymen like Huddleston and Michael Scott, the future for the Church is bleak indeed. The full fury of African disillusionment may destroy it for ever as an effective force on the sub-continent.

