

A "WHITE" REACTION TO "BLACK VIEWPOINT"

KOBUS KRUGER

In South Africa the day has come when the black man has discovered himself. Now we are embarking on a new stage in our political, cultural and church history.

In principle the time has passed when the power of determining the future of South Africa rested in the hands of the whites alone. In future our co-existence in this country will progressively be the co-existence of equal partners in thinking and doing. I could go even further and dare to say that at the moment the initiative as far as thinking about the future of South Africa is concerned, has been grasped by the new generation of black intellectuals. The whites are called upon to react to their action, which is quite unique in our recent history.

Contemporary white thinking about the future of our country does not excel in creative ideas. One sector of white thinking is merely digging in its heels, taking part in a tug-of-war with the future. Another sector is sharing the uncertainty, but is willing to submit to a mere acceptance of a new situation. Thus we could continue analysing white attitudes, but we would not find anything similar to the youthful burst of aggressive energy amongst the blacks.

Appreciation of Black Initiative

Let us be honest: the first reaction of the white man who has really been confronted by the new black thinking, is a certain *embarrassment*. He contemplates this phenomenon from the outside, and feels himself excluded. The easiest "answer" to this would be simply to (try to) ignore it. There is also another possible way of reacting: the embarrassment of the white man could be a bridge towards an *understanding of the pathos of black consciousness*. The adjective "black" in black theology, consciousness, power etc., is only an indication of the situation of being humiliated and *excluded*. For a long time we have been excluding the black man. Now we experience something of this ourselves.

The Afrikaners especially ought to have an understanding of the black viewpoint. Have they forgotten the pain and the joy of their own birth as a people, when they too had to define their own identity vis-a-vis a power over them? Can we not say that, *mutatis*

mutandis, men like S.J. du Toit and J.B.M. Hertzog worked from a "black" viewpoint? Is it not true that the atmosphere is reminiscent of the upsurge of feeling amongst Afrikaners round about 1938?

There are more reasons why I, as a white man, can look at this phenomenon, not only as an outsider and onlooker, but - in some sense - also as an insider and participant: these black men hopefully envisage a *future synthesis*, including black and white. We must take hold of this rope *today*, lest white and black drift apart irrevocably - which is not beyond the bounds of possibility.

All men, black and white, share essentially the same humanity, the same longings and common needs. And does the Christian faith have any meaning at all if it does not create a bond of solidarity across the chasms that separate us?

An Evaluation of 'Nationalism'

Accepting Khoapa's invitation to the white man to feel free to *aid* black liberation in some ways (although not free to *join* that struggle or to *lead* it), I make the following remarks concerning the role of *nationalism*



Dr. Kobus Kruger is 'n lektor by die universiteit van Suid-Afrika en 'n leraar van die Ned. Geref. Kerk.

FOOTNOTE

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and the role of *politics* in this black viewpoint, hoping that it will be received as it is offered: as an effort at constructive criticism.

Black consciousness is a form of nationalism, and nationalism is always Janus-faced. It unites people - and thus excludes other people, sometimes even in an absolute sense. It can be the cradle of creativity - and the grave of creativity. It can mean freedom and tyranny. It can be open towards humanity - it can be petty, of no account.

In some form or other it probably is an ineradicable element of all human society. It is better to ride this tiger than to jump off. In the first case you might (with difficulty!) control it, in the second case it surely will devour you. Merely to state that all nationalism and all group-consciousness is sin, is too easy, and really amounts to abandoning responsibility. It must be recognized and controlled.

Especially a too ready warning by *whites* concerning the pitfalls of all nationalistic thinking, is suspect and not morally warranted. Black nationalism is essentially a *contra-nationalism*, begotten by white group-egoism. As a reaction to severe provocation black nationalism is a normal, healthy outlet.

And yet the white man has knowledge of the almost irreversible spiral of escalation hidden under any kind of nationalism. It can develop into a monster, creating the enemies it needs to feed upon. In the U.S.A. black nationalism has already evoked a white "new ethnicity", and in South Africa it is already being used as justification for a hermetically sealed white nationalism. Of both black and white, patience and power will be required to work towards a reconciliation, a synthesis of poles which, together, may create a magnetic field: the South African community.

These black leaders know what many white liberals do not yet know: a soft inter-personal love is not enough. The social *structures*, that are both "personal" (in the sense that, after all, they are created, maintained, adapted or replaced by *man*) and "im-personal" (in the sense that they easily become the masters of man) must be tackled.

I admire the courage with which these men demythologize the traditional ways of life. Ndebele for instance is averse to the maintenance of Bantu traditions simply because they happen to be old or Bantu. He is prepared to sift the whole of tradition with the sieve of the imperative to humanize (which is a Christian imperative).

With the same acumen is the body of *apartheid* dissected (adherents of the present system in South Africa should read this!); the social situation of the black man analysed; the helplessness of liberal paternalism exposed. It would be an over-simplification to regard the problem of the black man as being due to the racial or colour prejudice of the white man alone, but that the authors penetrate to the subterranean rock-bottom of

the *economic system* underlying the liberal sandy soil and the shale of conservative attitudes.

The other side of this critical analysis, is the dynamic urge to build something new. Both belong together, because only he who has the courage to demolish, can have the power to build. In the latter respect I see extremely difficult work ahead. What would an alternative, a truly democratic, system look like: a system that is, in its conception, inspiring and, in its practicability, attainable? A mere passion for change is not enough - it *can* be empty, and frustration is the shadow of every dream.

An Assessment of Political Nationalism

Am I mistaken, or is the germ of anti-christianity active in this political nationalism too? The remark of even a moderate man like Ndamsé "that the blacks came out better Christians" (than the whites) would serve as a danger signal - not because it may offend white Christians, but because of the danger that Christianity can once more become merely the embellishment of one more nationalism. If Khoapa says that "love is irrelevant" and that "history is a struggle, not an orgy", it is an understandable reaction against a weak softness, trying to parade as Christian, but: is it not a *dangerous* misunderstanding of the character of love and of history? What political ethos does it imply? To turn to Ndebele: is it not possible that the Christian faith is also here once more turned into the hand-maiden of culture, in this case: black culture? ("Religion is a very important and highly effective form of social control" - to be used in the interests of the black community). Will black Christians be capable of withstanding this temptation by *not* following the example of many white Christians? May the black viewpoint remain open to the transcendence of God above it, and open to the other groups and nations beside it.

The stream of black consciousness will not be stopped. It has the power of a waterfall. If uncontrolled, it can be destructive. If guided and controlled, it will surely be a source of tremendous constructive energy in South Africa. ★

UNSELFISHNESS

A man has made at least a start on discovering the meaning of life when he plants shade trees under which he knows he will never sit.

Elton Trueblood

—The Lutheran Standard