

DARK THOUGHTS

by Vortex

and most of the white NGK delegates voted on one side, and the other delegates, led by the "sister" or "daughter" churches of the NGK, voted on the other. How can such a thing happen? Are the dividing issues racial, or are they theological? It is interesting that the majority of white delegates thought they were theological, and that the others thought they were racial.

Some of those at the conference—the peacemakers I suppose—thought that the two sides agreed in their basic theology, and differed only in the practical application. Mr Bax rejects entirely this face-saving supposition. He writes "we really disagreed so much on the practical issues because we disagreed so deeply in theology". But he does not stop there. He says that the two sides were "inspired by two quite different spirits". I interpret him to be saying in fact that the roots of the separation policies are not primarily intellectual, but are deeply emotional.

I shall give only one example of this. The NGK 1975 Report on Human Relations . . . in the Light of Scripture, quotes the statement of the World Reformed Ecumenical Synod on mixed marriages. It says

Holy scripture does not give a judgement about racially mixed marriages; contracting a marriage is primarily a personal and family concern. Church and State should refrain from prohibiting racially mixed marriages, because they have no right to limit the free choice of the marriage partner.

The NGK Report rejected this as a "one-sided . . . oversimplification" which omitted important social, religious, and politico-juridical considerations. If the government is convinced that public order is threatened by mixed marriages, then it has a right to forbid them.

The fact is that the Nationalist Afrikaner objection to mixed marriages is deeply emotional. To him they are abhorrent and they threaten his racial identity. The emotional reasons have strong racial and historical elements. However he is also a religious man and therefore he sets his theologians the task of finding justification in Scripture for his abhorrence

and his fear. But his fellow-Christians of the "daughter" churches do not share his abhorrence and his fear; therefore they interpret Scripture differently.

It is very human to try to convert one's emotional reasons into intellectual ones, and if one is a Christian, into theological ones. But it is one of the great claims of Christians that Christ has liberated them from the bondage of their abhorrences and their fears and their prejudices. Professor Ben Marais once posed the question: "Will my Christian beliefs be determined by my nationalism, or will my nationalism be fashioned (or we may add, negated) by my Christian beliefs?"

Mr Bax's small book is so meaty and closely argued that it should be reviewed at length, which REALITY cannot do. Mr Bax regards the doctrines of racial separation as mortally dangerous for the peace and unity of South Africa. He regards them as repugnant to the Gospel. Especially does he regard the doctrine of the separation of Christians as repugnant to the teaching of Christ, who prayed that all his followers should be one. It was at one time argued by Dutch Reformed theologians that this did not mean a "visible unity", but they are reeling a little under the onslaught of the "daughter" churches.

Mr Bax's deep concern is not only for the Church but also for South Africa. He closes his little book with a grave question.

South Africa stands on the edge of a political disaster "too ghastly to contemplate". It is a false theology and a false ideology, as well as the greed and the fears of both Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking Whites, that have dragged her people there. The urgent question is: is it too late for us to repent and turn back from the abyss?

One does not know the answer to that question. But Douglas Bax has certainly played his part in urging white South Africa to repent and turn. □

1. One looks around, desperately, in self-defence (not that it helps), for images of the National Party, the great incubus, the vast unprovidence, which lies so heavily, so crushingly, on us all.
2. Was Vorster sincere when he asked for six months? Was P. W. Botha sincere when he made certain large promises? We don't know; and it hardly matters. Little men, they were both promptly dragged back to the static centre, the status quo, by the might Inertia which rules all Nationalist Prime Ministers.
3. What will roll back the great stone which blocks the entrance to the tomb, which prevents the resurrection of humanity in South Africa? Maybe only rockets. But it will be a long process. And an ugly one.
4. Most wars can be described properly only when they are over. The South African civil war (which has of course been going on for some time) can be analysed right now.
5. The Zimbabwe election showed that South Africa has real power in the sub-continent: by its enthusiastic

support of Muzorewa it helped to destroy him as a candidate.

6. Similarly in Namibia. All the actions that the South African Government has taken in relation to SWAPO—denunciation, refusal to talk, prophecies that it will lose the election—ensure an even clearer electoral victory for their enemy, whom they thus neatly present to the world as, indeed, the authentic representative of the people of Namibia.
7. In their conquest of Southern Africa the whites demonstrated the power of the gun. The guerillas have now learned this lesson.
8. We are waiting, largely, on Providence; but it is not enough to wait. One must pray too—pray that new possibilities emerge in this hopeless situation, miraculous bubbles of light and air in this sea of tar. □