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APARTHEID - THE LABORATORY OF RACISM

by

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[This paper was prepared for the Unit on Apartheid by the Rt. Rev. Bishop Crowther.

Bishop Crowther spent almost three years in South Africa where he served as Anglican Bishop of Kimberley and Kuruman. In 1967, he denounced apartheid as a potential cause of war at the Pacem in Terris II conference held in Geneva and after his return to South Africa, he was arrested and served with deportation orders "in the public interest."

He has appeared as a petitioner before the Special Committee on Apartheid on several occasions, most recently on May 8, 1971.

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The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author.]

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APARTHEID - THE LABORATORY OF RACISM

Apartheid in South Africa is the violence of racism in its most rationalized and systematic form. Nowhere in the world does the doctrine of white supremacy excite such fanatical devotion as in the Republic of South Africa. More than any other issue, the existence of apartheid is responsible for the growing together, in what often seems to be its only source of unity, of the non-white world.

A state of war

In embryo, total war between the races, in which there can be no neutrality, already is raging. For wherever racism is found a state of war exists. There is war within the soul of the racist. Wherever racism is found, war is raging within the human spirit. For such spiritual war to become activated in the visible pain of physical conflict, requires factors of which our human history is all too full. What do not usually make the history books are the human tragedies of which apartheid is the cause. Even after several years of constant exposure to the daily violence of apartheid, the story of the woman and her fiance who were driven to suicide because of the Population Registration Act, still shocks. 1/

White - at least in death

In South Africa everyone must have a racial classification. The young woman had tried unsuccessfully to be classified as white. When she became engaged to a white man, although she was white in appearance, it was found that the young woman was officially classified as "Coloured". Finally, she and her fiance committed suicide. They asked that at least in death her body should be regarded as sufficiently white to enable her to be buried with her fiance in a cemetery reserved for white people. This last request was, in fact, granted.

Tourist paradise versus black man's hell

For almost three years, I lived in South Africa - for most of the time as the Anglican Bishop of Kimberley and Kuruman, a large diocese which covered many thousands of square miles of African veldt. My view of apartheid was not that of the typical American tourist who generally looks through the eyes of a white man upon the world which the white man has built for himself in Africa. Indeed, many aspects of whitest Africa are very impressive. The tourist, for instance, will experience the magnificence of the animal world in the beautiful and natural setting of the Kruger National Park. He will delight in the opulence of Johannesburg,

1/ Rand Daily Mail, March 21, 1967.

"the city with the heart of gold," and he will long remember the surflumed coast of the Cape of Good Hope where the Indian and South Atlantic Oceans meet. South Africa is a tourist paradise for those who do not step into the separated hell of the black man's world.

As a bishop, my daily work involved more than a few casual steps into that world. As much as any white man is able to do with, or more often without, the permission of the South African authorities, I tried to enter the non-white world. Most of the people whom I served were not white. They lived in poverty, degradation and, perhaps worst of all, the absence of hope. I lived behind the scenes of South Africa's glittering gold and diamonds. I experienced the violence of her fervant anti-communism, which enshrines in the "European" way of life the "last bastion of white Christian civilization in Africa."

The mine compound

My life in South Africa became, in fact, an extension of my first day in Johannesburg. I was taken to one of the favourite tourist attractions at the Crown Mines, where, every Sunday morning, the "boys" who dig out the gold throughout the week put on their spectacular display of African dancing to the delight mainly of visitors from overseas. The cameras click away to record for the folks back home what African life really is like, and how content the "natives" are. Half way through the show, I wandered over to where the dancers lived in absolute squalour. What I discovered was, for the next three years, to be the frequent setting of my life and work. The men were packed into steaming shacks with corrugated tin roofs; the bunks were piled on top of each other several tiers high. An antiquated cooking stove with a tin chimney stood in the middle of the room. When the dancers took off their plumes and handed back their wooden spears to the white boss, they were herded back where they had come from. They left the outdoor stage and ran into their unseen life through the gate marked "Bantu".

The garden boy

The day after my arrival in Kimberley, which is the home of the De Beers Consolidated Mines, Ltd., I had my first brush with the incredible attitude to non-white people that characterizes even the so-called liberal white South African. The Senior Warden of St. Cyprian's Cathedral was showing me round my living quarters which were extremely comfortable. Outside stood what I took to be a rundown tool shed. The one window was covered with a newspaper; the door was swinging on a broken hinge. "That shed looks as though it could do with some repair," I said. "Oh, Philip is perfectly happy there," Mr. Shuttleworth said.

"Who on earth is Philip?" I asked.

"He's the garden boy," the Cathedral Warden explained. "Like most of the Bantu, you've got to keep an eye on him. You know, never lend him money or leave him unsupervised for very long. But he's a good boy and

has worked for the Cathedral for over a year now."

And so, on my second day in South Africa, Philip, the 25 year old gardener, became my first cause. To have the newspaper replaced with glass triggered my first fight which, I am glad to say, I won!

Apart-hate

South Africa is a white man's world, and, by God, intends to remain so. The problem is, however, that living there are some 16 million non-white people. In the population of almost 20 million, only 3.1/2 million are white, or of "European" origin. Sixty percent of the Europeans are of Dutch ancestry, speaking their own language, and are known as Afrikaners; most of the remaining forty percent are of English descent. Some 2 million people are of mixed racial ancestry and are called in South Africa "Coloured", and another 1/4 million are Asians. The remaining 13.1/2 million citizens of the Republic are black and are known as Bantu and are members of one of the many different tribes or nations of African people.

It is in order to counteract the racial imbalance - which gives the non-whites a five to one majority over the whites - that the doctrine of apartheid evolved. It has become the most clearly defined, legislated and enforced doctrine of white supremacy in the world. Apartheid has its own theology of man, its own economic and political creeds, and is backed by one of the most effective and brutal police systems in existence. In theory, the doctrine of apartheid means the separate and equal development of the constituent races in South Africa. In practice, it means what it says when it is pronounced correctly: apart-hate.

The Mamuthla affair

What happens when men become dehumanized by their fanatical allegiance to the ideology of apartheid is illustrated by the Mamuthla affair. On the morning of December 18, 1965, the headline on the front page of the Kimberley Diamond Fields Advertiser broke the news: "1,500 Africans Dumped in Veldt." The story told of the plight of a large number of people who had been compulsorily moved from their homes of sixty years and, quite literally, dumped in the bush some 65 miles north of Kimberley. I drove to Mamuthla immediately. The heat was terrific so close to the Kalahari desert, and the roads for the most part dusty and corrugated. Peter Beech, my chaplain, and I drove into nowhere. We reached Mamuthla, where, for several years, a small number of people had lived, eking out a living as labourers on the scattered white-owned farms nearby. We received a detailed account of the new situation from a local storekeeper who described the condition of the people moved during the previous day and night as "terrible".

One of the savage facts of life in South Africa is that black Africans cannot own land outside of the 13 percent of the land area of the entire Republic set aside for African reservations or "Bantustans" as they are

officially called. Under the Group Areas Act, a foundation stone of apartheid which determines where different racial groups can live, the Africans had been moved to Mamuthla.

Throughout the day and into the night, trucks containing people and their pathetic belongings had rumbled up the hill dominated by one of our small mission churches to disgorge their cargoes in the open veldt leaving them to their own devices. The sight was quite unbelievable. Everywhere people were sorting out piled up bed frames, old doors, clothing and battered cooking utensils. For one family, a table served as their only roof, with pieces of paper pinned to the sides to act as some sort of protection against the swirling dust. In this sort of paper privacy, a family lived.

Wherever I went, the story and the sights were the same - no work, no sanitation, inadequate and tainted water available more than a mile away, no food, and everywhere children crying. For the first time in my life a small child ran away from me as I approached. "She thinks you are another policeman coming to take her away," her mother said. I felt ashamed of my whiteness which thus characterized me, a statement which evoked howls of fury from the Afrikaner press when it was reported the next day.

On my return to Kimberley I made a public appeal for food. Photographs which I had taken to support the appeal were released. The story caught the public imagination and reporters from national newspapers began to arrive in Kimberley. Mamuthla was news - Christmas news. A creche was erected outside the Cathedral in Kimberley where children could place one of their own Christmas presents for the dispossessed children of Mamuthla. On Christmas Eve, despite a ban placed upon my presence in Mamuthla by the Department of Interior in Pretoria, several truckloads of food had been distributed.

Official reaction was loud and filled with indignation. "A deliberate attempt to embarrass the South African Government overseas," was the typical comment of government-slanted newspapers. Other newspapers saw more ominous and sinister motives in my feeding scheme. "A Communist plot," trumpeted one spokesman. Meanwhile, in Parliament, the existence of the Mamuthla situation was denied. Which probably explains why, having been arrested by the police while distributing food to the dispossessed, I was not charged with any crime. After all, it would have been extremely difficult, even for South African authorities, to sustain an indictment issued in a place which was not supposed to exist!

The "Immorality Act"

The story of one of my early encounters with the tragic effects on the life of ordinary people of the infamous Immorality Act illustrates one of the lesser known pieces of apartheid legislation. An extremely talented young man who, even by standards applied in South Africa, could hardly be recognized as being "Coloured", which was his official classification, fell in love with an equally attractive young woman who happened to be white. In South Africa,

interracial relationships between members of different races are prohibited and carry a stiff sentence if discovered. The Immorality Act has little to do with sexual morality. The Act, for instance, does not apply to a sexual relationship between members of the same race. The penalties of the Act have been held to apply to men and women of different races even where no evidence of a sexual act having taken place is presented. Thus, to be caught merely in a situation which might evidence intention to commit such an act has produced prison sentences. Many have been the smashed lives caused by circumstances which would be ludicrous if not so tragic.

In the case of the young man and woman for whom, as their bishop, I appeared in court, the vice squad, having hidden in the young woman's bedroom closet until the crucial moment at which photographs were taken and later leaked to the press, had irrefutable evidence of what in South Africa is the crime of crimes. I attempted to explain to the court that the greatest immorality was the existence of the Immorality Act itself; that in any civilized society the young couple, had they so desired, could have been married and furthermore, that any immorality involved in their relationship was the moral responsibility of the State which had made a normal relationship in marriage a legal impossibility.

In a most unusual break with precedent, the court agreed to put both the man and the woman on three years' probation and so they were saved from what might have been a long prison sentence. The career of each, however, was wrecked, and there were many wounds which probably will never heal. Such is the violence of apartheid.

The roots of apartheid

White South Africans feel no more foreigners in Africa than white Americans do in the United States. As any visitor to South Africa hears repeatedly from white people, "We have nowhere else to go. We were born here; this is our land." To have some idea of how threatened white South Africans feel and, therefore, why apartheid has developed partly as a reaction to fear, it might be helpful to envisage the situation in America if the indigenous Indians and the descendents of miscellaneous races imported here numbered over four times the total white population. Furthermore, if the whole of South America consisted of independent Indians who were intent upon destroying the white minority which had built up wealth and power for over three hundred years, it is not difficult to understand how such a hypothetical situation would affect the methods which the white minority would rationalize in order to retain power.

Apartheid in South Africa, then, is in part a desperate attempt to retain and strengthen white minority power. But this analysis is by no means complete. Opponents of apartheid make a big mistake in seeking its defeat solely at the political and economic levels. Apartheid is more than just a political and economic creed of white racism, a legislated and brutal rationalization of the status quo in South Africa. Behind the incredibly complicated structure of apartheid which affects every department

of life in the daily activity of every citizen, stands a dogmatic theology which is enshrined in the beliefs of the most powerful church in South Africa. The Dutch Reformed Church is the archetype of the dour austerity of the voortrekkers, whose Calvinistic faith enabled them to strike out on their own, to survive and prosper against Africans, Britishers and veldt alike. In their own eyes, the Afrikaners, the descendants of the early Dutch inhabitants of South Africa, had a divine mission to retain the purity of their beliefs, their way of life and their race, against all which to them constitutes the world, the flesh and the devil.

Sandra Laing

The lengths to which the idea of racial purity are taken is illustrated by the incredible story of little Sandra Laing, an eleven year old schoolgirl living in the town of Piet Retief in the eastern Transvaal.

Sandra, the daughter of a white couple, following complaints over a period of two years by parents of children who attended school with her, that she appeared to be increasingly "Coloured", was expelled from her all-white school. The bewildered child was taken from the hostel where she had boarded for four years to her parents' home thirty miles away by the school principal, the vice principal and a policeman. Her 18 year old brother, who was classified as white, remained behind at the school. The parents were told by the principal: "I am sorry but she can't remain at the school. She has been classified Coloured."

Newspaper reports, which caused quite a stir in South Africa at the time, quote the agonized father of the child as saying, "There are no Coloureds in either my own or my wife's family. Nor do we know of any forbears who were Coloured. If there is Coloured blood somewhere in our background that we do not know about, then this could happen to a great many South Africans. We were simply told out of the blue that our daughter, who had been born white into a white environment and culture, and who knows no other life than that of a white - is a Coloured." 2/ The trauma of the Laing family was not yet complete. It is forbidden by South African law for members of different racial groups to inhabit the same house. The only way that the child could continue to live with her family was to register her as a servant and for separate accommodation to be provided for her.

As in so many cases where the pain caused by the violence of apartheid is greater than any human being can bear, the Laing family emigrated to England.

Theology of white supremacy

The Afrikaners have always regarded themselves as a maligned and misunderstood people, alone in a hostile world. Despite a small minority of Dutch Reformed Church ministers who, since 1961 have been increasingly critical of the race policies of South Africa, their Church has remained staunch in support of the principles of apartheid. In the extraordinary South African

2/ Rand Daily Mail, December 10, 1966.

theology of white supremacy, the blacks are the descendants of the Old Testament children of Ham. As such, they are the hewers of wood and the drawers of water. In the sight of God, while white and black are equal, on earth, each must go his separate way. When, as in a multi-racial state like South Africa, this is impossible, then provision for the complete separation of the races must be made.

The source of the state's authority is God. To have a voice in government, is a privilege which belongs only to those who have attained political and spiritual maturity and are able, for example, to vote so as to reflect the will of God for His people. Government is thus clothed with the sacred responsibility to express the sovereignty of God throughout the temporal order; and so the idea of a universal franchise is not only impracticable but potentially dangerous and heretical. Africans do not fulfil the essential requirements of maturity or of responsibility to enable them to have a voice in government. They are undeveloped as a people and so should be protected by a benevolent authority, just as a child is entitled to the protection and authority of its parents. So proclaims the oracle of apartheid.

Thus, "It was inhuman for a non-white nurse to nurse a white person," Miss I.E. Botha, the head of the Sante Nursing Institute in Johannesburg, told a Government Commission of Inquiry into nursing. She had nevertheless personally seen the nursing of whites performed by a non-white. "The authorities," she proclaimed, "must ensure at all costs that no integration takes place between white and black nurses. "The psychological needs and conditions of the two races are poles apart."

The Afrikaners see themselves as God's chosen people predestined to establish and preserve white Christian civilization in Africa. It is easy to see how such a theology, when proclaimed by a politically powerful church which claims the allegiance of the majority of white South Africans, has shaped both the doctrine of white supremacy and the sense of national isolation in which the doctrine flourished. The offspring of the marriage between the theology of providential white supremacy and the practice of arrogant nationalism is the dogma of apartheid. Since 1948, when the Nationalist Party of the Afrikaner came into power, apartheid has grown up, become very sophisticated, increasingly self-confident and sees a promising life ahead - if only South Africa can be left alone to develop its own life style.

Pain and revolution

I can speak of the suffering of black and Coloured people in South Africa because I have seen and experienced what apartheid does to its victims. The practice of white supremacy, whether it be in the Portuguese colonies of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea, or in the minority rule of white racists in South Africa or its ideological satellite, Rhodesia, kills a man from the inside. It produces a hopelessness which kills dreams. Apartheid paralyzes minds which are not allowed to grow, it demasculates men who cannot support

and raise the children whom they have produced. Apartheid breaks up families whose men must leave their homes for up to a year under the contract labour system of the gold, diamond and uranium mines. It humiliates and degrades a man by insisting that he accept himself as inferior to the white man who oppresses him. Apartheid kills freedom and entraps in a nightmare world the oppressor and oppressed together, in a great and tortured agony.

The pain of apartheid transmits many messages, the loudest of which is communicated by revolution. A bloodbath in southern Africa is inevitable unless the whole world listens and acts on what is heard. For in the converging causes of history, the issues of race and power are more clearly defined than ever before. There are some areas of pain which become intolerable not only to those who immediately suffer but to those who understand that every symptom has its cause; whose diagnosis is that of a universal disease, which must be eradicated if the pain of racism is to cease. South Africa might well show up how universal man looks when in extremis, a condition in which either the disease or the victim must die.

One of the supreme ironies of history

With surgery thus in mind, on December 3, 1967, there occurred the most strangely integrating event of all time. In Cape Town's Groote Shuur Hospital, Dr. Christiaan Barnard successfully performed the first transplant of a human heart. The irony is that Clive Haupt, the donor, was a Coloured man. The recipient of his heart was Dr. Philip Blaiberg, a white dentist. Only in death could the lives of these two men have become so intimately shared. In life, they could not have sat together on the same park bench; they could not have lived on the same street or eaten together in the same restaurant. Their children could not have attended the same school, or played together on the same Cape Town beach. At their local post office, Mr. Haupt and Dr. Blaiberg would have been served from different counters marked either "Whites" or "Non-Whites". Even on the way to their segregated sections of the Groote Shuur Hospital, they must have travelled in separate ambulances. In death, although irrevocably united, each man was buried in a graveyard reserved for his race.

The achievement in South Africa of the world's first successful heart transplant in order to save a human life must be one of the supreme ironies of history. South Africa, the land of the total physical separation of its peoples, willing to sacrifice their lives on the altars of apartheid, becomes the birthplace of the biological integration of the races. In the midst of life there is death indeed. The two states of man are so very interchangeable. But unity in life is an available option to mankind which will require more, much more than merely physical surgery. What will be required is a transcendental transplant, not of a new heart for an old one, but of a new and living conscience for one that seems to be at the point of death. Potential recipients are scattered throughout time and space. The big problem is to find a donor.