

CIVIL



RIGHTS



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News Letter

A Reminder

Our twentieth anniversary and annual general meeting is to be held in the Claremont Civic Centre at 8 p.m. on Monday, October 14. The speaker will be Dr Alan Paton. We need not, therefore, urge all who can to come and to bring their friends.

Conscience, criticism and Mr Vorster

Recently our Prime Minister has been using Nationalist Party Provincial congresses as platforms to issue stern warnings to two groups of people - parsons who "preach politics" from their pulpits and students who used their freedom of expression on the campus to "disrupt the order of things".

This is not surprising. A régime which stands or falls by such a rigid doctrine as apartheid, and which has for twenty years managed increasingly to suppress any really effective criticism of the doctrine and of itself, must fear two things above all others: the awakening of its people's minds, and of their consciences. We can, therefore, well understand Mr Vorster's attitude to "politics" in the pulpit.

Says David Jenkins in the "Cape Times": "Political parsons are a nuisance. They always have been, and their names have gone down in history." He instances Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos and Ezekiel, who in Old Testament times felt it their right "to gate-crash the palace and tell the king what they thought God's will was".

Ds. I.J. Theron of Huguenot, writing to the "Cape Times", says: "I feel the Church has lost its venturesomeness. Its aggressiveness against social injustices has somewhat subsided. It has become timid, compromising and cautious, and as a result weak. The time has come for the Church to do some brave thinking and plain talking. It is imperative that the Church should speak out against the ideology of apartheid which now rules supreme in this country ..."

Mr Vorster's attack seems to be a result of the publication by the Theological Commission of the South African Council of

Churches of "A Message to the People of South Africa". We quote from the official summary which has appeared widely in the press.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ, says the statement, "offers hope and security for the whole life of man, not just in man's spiritual and ecclesiastic relationships, but for human existence in its entirety. Consequently, we are called to witness to the meaning of the Gospel in the particular circumstances of time and place in which we find ourselves. In South Africa, at this time, we find ourselves in a situation where a policy of racial separation is being deliberately effected with increasing rigidity. The doctrine of racial separation is being seen by many not merely as a temporary political policy but as a necessary and permanent expression of the will of God, and as the genuine form of Christian obedience for this country... It is presenting the separate development of our race-groups as the way for the people of South Africa to save themselves. And this claim is being made to us in the name of Christianity. We believe that this doctrine of separation is a false faith, a novel gospel; it inevitably is in conflict with the Gospel of Jesus Christ ... therefore it is the Church's duty to enable our people to distinguish between the demands of the South African State and the demands of Christian discipleship... The Christian Gospel requires us to assert the truth proclaimed by the first Christians, who discovered that God was creating a new community in which differences of race, language, nation, culture, and tradition no longer had power to separate man from man. The most important features of a man are not the details of his racial group, but the nature which he has in common with all men and also the gifts and abilities which are given to him as a unique individual by the grace of God ...

But, in South Africa, everyone is expected to believe that a man's racial identity is the most important thing about him ... Those whose racial classification is in doubt are tragically insecure and helpless. Without racial identity, it seems, we can do nothing ... This belief in the supreme importance of racial identity amounts to a denial of the central statement of the Christian Gospel. In practice, it severely restricts the ability of Christian brothers to serve and know each other ...

Where different groups of people are hostile to each other, this is due to human sin, not to the plan of the Creator... A policy of separation is a demonstration of unbelief

in the power of the Gospel; any demonstration of the reality of reconciliation would endanger this policy. Therefore, the advocates of this policy inevitably find themselves opposed to the Church if it seeks to live according to the Gospel and to show that God's grace has overcome our hostilities. A thorough policy of racial separation must ultimately require that the Church should cease to be the Church...

"Apartheid is a view of life and of man which insists that we find our identity in dissociation and distinction from each other; it rejects as undesirable the reconciliation which God is giving us by his Son; it reinforces distinctions which the Holy Spirit is calling the people of God to overcome; it calls good evil ...

"God judges us, not by our loyalty to a sectional group but by our willingness to be made new in the community of Christ. Christ is inevitably a threat to much that is called 'the South African way of life'; many features of our social order will have to pass away if the lordship of Christ is to be truly acknowledged and if the peace of Christ is to be revealed as the destroyer of our fear... If the Church fails to witness to the true Gospel of Jesus Christ it will find itself witnessing to a false gospel. If we seek to reconcile Christianity with the so-called 'South African way of life' we shall find that we have allowed an idol to take the place of Christ. Where the Church abandons its obedience to Jesus Christ, it ceases to be the Church; it breaks the links between itself and the Kingdom of God. The task of the Church is to enable people to see the power of God at work, changing hostility into love of the brethren, and to express God's reconciliation here and now...

"And so, we wish to put to every Christian person in the country the question which we ourselves face each day:

to whom, or to what, are you giving your first loyalty, your primary commitment?

Is it to a subsection of mankind, an ethnic group, a human tradition, a political idea:

or to Christ?

"May God enable us to be faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to be committed to Christ alone!"

It is worthy of note that the Theological Commission of the S.A. Council of Churches which drew up this challenging statement represented the following denominations: Anglican, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Lutheran and Baptist; and also former and present members of the Nederduitse Gerefor-

meerde Kerk and the Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk of Africa.

A call to action

At its recent General Assembly in Port Elizabeth the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa decided to ask the Dutch Reformed Church (N.G. Kerk) to take part in a joint protest to the Government on migrant labour. In a report it was stated: "If this policy were meted out to White people in South Africa, there would be something close to civil war; but because it is meted out to the African who has no vote, nothing is done."

The Assembly decided to ask the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development to "freeze immediately" the removal of Africans from White areas to areas where there is malnutrition and unemployment; and to carry out no further removals till the Africans can be housed adequately and employed by border industries already operating.

The Church also decided to take action on the three Acts passed this year removing existing political rights of Coloured people and preventing political co-operation across the colour line; the fact that African children do not receive free school books on the same basis as Coloured and White children; and the proposed legislation against homosexuals. It has also designated Sunday, October 27 as a day of reflection on the hardships of those suffering from racial discrimination, and for ministers to call their congregations to repentance "because Christians themselves have so seldom protested against injustice".

Passports and protest

Mr Raphael Kaplinsky, one of the leaders of the recent student sit-in at U.C.T., has been deprived of the passport he intended to use for study overseas. Says the "Cape Times": "The fact that the sit-in was aimed at gross Government interference in a university appointment gives the impression that it was taken just because he opposed the Government. This is, of course, no crime. Or is it, Mr Muller?(Minister of the Interior)"

Receipts

We apologise to any members who have not received receipts for recently paid subs. Our receipt book is with the Auditor in preparation for the Annual General Meeting.

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