

# Part of an Address given by Ian Thompson, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy of the University of the Witwatersrand to the Transvaal Roman Catholic Commission of Justice and Peace given on October 31, 1971

Let us all consider prayerfully what it means to stand under the Judgement of God, the Judgement of the God of Justice and Peace. These are frightening words and they are directed at us all, to our whole society, to the religious and political authorities. The Eternal Word of God, is addressed to us in the person of Christ, Our Judge and the Prince of Peace. What false securities do we place our trust in — for He says they will fall? With what self-deceptions and dishonest rationalizations do we defend injustice and violence — for they will be exposed in the searing Light of His presence?

We pray each day: "Thy kingdom come and they will be done *in earth* as it is in heaven". This conference can but begin — not in a spirit of self-righteousness, but in a spirit of honest self-examination and humble penitence. Do we really care for the Peace and Justice which Christ taught us to work for and pray for? Or are we more concerned about our own security, prestige and status? Do we really want the radical transformation of ourselves and our society, which we so glibly pray for, and which is necessarily entailed in the realization of the Peace and Justice which Christ offers us if we are obedient to His will, obedient even unto death? "He who would save his life shall lose it, and he who would lose his life for My sake and the Gospels', the same will save it".

We are obsessed with security, our own security and the security of the State. Even our so-called Security Police tell us what we must put up with all sorts of indignities and injustices "for the security of the state", for the "preservation of law and order". The notes which I originally prepared for this address were lying on my desk when our home was raided by the Security Police at a quarter past four last Sunday morning. Rest secure, therefore, as these notes were thoroughly scanned by the Security Police then; so, you have the benefit of hearing an address which has been previously censored by the upholders of law and order! (However, I am not sure how relevant what I have to say is, in the light of the events of the past week).

One question we have to ask ourselves is, what do we think we are really doing calmly meeting here to discuss the formation of a Diocesan Association for Justice and Peace when these things are happening around us? What ought the primary concerns of such an association to be, when we have a Terrorism Trial going on in Pietermaritzburg, when we await judgement in the trial of the Anglican Dean of Johannesburg, when thousands of people rot in re-settlement camps, when an undisclosed number of people are detained in solitary confinement under our Security Laws, when people are banned and house-arrested without fair trial, when scores of people are

raided and searched in their homes, when an undisclosed number of people were arrested this week, when 17 people have died in detention in mysterious circumstances in the last few years, when the evidence suggests that people are not only being interrogated but probably tortured in our prisons at the moment, when Mr. Essop lies in hospital in a conditions which suggests that he has suffered extreme brutality, when Mr. Timol is dead "having fallen from the 10th floor window of John Vorster Square in *this city, this week*"?

### Church in South Africa

One thing is clear — there is no Justice and there is no true Peace in South Africa today. Certainly not Justice or Peace as Christ understood it, nor as the Church understands it. "As a human person (a man) is entitled to the legal protection of his rights, and such protection must be effective, unbiased, and strictly just." To quote again Pope Pius XII: "In consequence of that juridical order willed by God, man has his own inalienable right to judicial security. To him is assigned a certain well-defined sphere of law, immune from arbitrary attack." ("Pacem in Terris" 27.) Let us then, in the light of the Church's teaching and in the light of the recent call from the Synod of Bishops in Rome, seriously consider what we can do to combat injustice and eradicate racism in our society.

We have not only to see South African society as standing under the Judgement of God and condemned in the light of the teaching of the Church: the teaching of the Council, the great Social Encyclicals and Pope Paul's New Year Message on Peace; but we have to consider very seriously the position of the Church in South Africa.

The Catholic philosopher, Jacques Maritain, has remarked that heresy and apostasy in the twentieth century does not so much take the form of the denials of articles of faith, so much as disobedience to the moral teaching of the Church, a kind of moral apostasy. The Catholic Church in South Africa is not immune from the danger of falling into such apostasy — the great pastoral letters of the Catholic Bishops' Conference notwithstanding.

- a) It may be asked whether the South African Bishops are not in error in not having done more to implement what they have taught. (After all, Our Lord said: "Not they that say Lord, Lord, but they that do the will of my Father will know the doctrine" Matt 7:21. Jn 7:16-17.)
- b) There are two opposite heresies which Catholics are likely to resort to in such a situation. (i) Either to escape into a pious otherworldly spirituality which implicitly denies the Incarnational basis of our faith and allows them to opt out of any serious social involvement (a sort of Manichaeism in politics). (ii) Or to surrender completely the eschatological hope, the super-natural foundation of the Kingdom of God and to opt for social welfare and purely secular politicking.

### Revolutionary Message of Christ

The danger facing all the churches in South Africa, as I see it, is that as Christians disengage from politics and refuse to accept social and civic responsibility and then rationalize this withdrawal by adopting a pietistic, moralistic, subjective and other-worldly theology, those who are seriously concerned about Peace and Justice (Africans particularly and intellectuals) write off the Church as irrelevant (which it is in the circumstances) and opt for purely secular utopias (failing to grasp the truly revolutionary message of the Gospel which undercuts the divisions between Sacred and Secular, healing the divisions of Spirit and Flesh, realising the Kingdom of God on earth).

### Corrupt Social Order

- \* "Peace" and "Justice" are among those words "which need healing before they can be used for the healing of men.
- \* The confusion about Justice and Peace are not just conceptual or semantic. The problem goes much deeper. Our experience of justice and peace is embedded in a social order which is sinful, corrupt, subject to structural distortion through the presence of the demonic in the Civitas Terrena.

\* Pope Paul said in his New Year Message in 1969: "When we speak of Peace, friends, we do not put before you a state of repressive, selfish inertia. Peace is not enjoyed: it is created. Peace is not a level that we have now reached: it is a higher level, to which each and every one of us must ever aspire. It is not a philosophy that lulls us to sleep; it is a philosophy of action, which makes us all responsible for the common good, and obliges us to dedicate all our efforts to its cause — the true cause of mankind."

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## Chairman's Report to Cape Western Regional Conference 1st November, 1971

Note:— I must point out that it is with the deepest repugnance that I have had, so often, to compartmentalise the people of our country. However, since the laws differ for the different race groups I have been forced, for the sake of clarity, also to differentiate. The sooner this state of affairs is brought to an end the better.

Parliament ended not with a bang but with a prolonged whimper of pain, brought on by the Angliotti affair.

Now, if our masters wish to spend public money with such lavish abandon why cannot they do so on projects for the community — the *whole* community — instead of on some 300 hectares of bare veld?

But is the whole community and its needs the primary consideration of the Government? Of course it always lays its hand on its heart and declares that indeed it is, and that anyone who dares criticise it is un-South African and unpatriotic and should go somewhere else if he or she doesn't like it here. And look at the lovely shiny white opera house — no detergent could ever make it whiter — that

the kindly Provincial Administration of the Cape has created out of, Provincial taxes, for a mere R11 million, for shiny white people. Have we no sense of gratitude?

I do not consider it unpatriotic or un-South African to suggest one or two ways in which public money could be better spent. Free and compulsory education for African children, and those Coloured and Indian children who do not have it for one thing — and if that had been introduced to celebrate 10 years of the Republic how wonderful it would have been. Homes for the homeless and the unhoused (there are now some 30 000 Coloured families in the Peninsula on the waiting list), a crash programme to combat the sinister and disgraceful spectre of malnutrition and infant