

"LET NO MAN PUT ASUNDER"

FOREWORD

By THE REV. ERIC RICHARDSON

THE WORDS CHOSEN for the overall title of the Forum on Migrant Labour recently arranged by the Black Sash are obviously recognizable as the latter half of the dominical injunction upon which is based the Christian view of the indissolubility of marriage. It is not to be imagined, however, that the experts who contributed their opinions necessarily approached their subjects with any specifically religious bias. All that may be claimed is that, confirming the religious connection in this matter, they would appear to accept the importance of the family as a basic unit of our culture, and consider that it is important for the preservation of society that its stability be not impaired.

From the Christian point of view, there is not likely to be much disagreement with the resolution of the 1958 Lambeth Conference "that the idea of the human family is rooted in the Godhead". From their unanimously high conception of the family and from their knowledge of the Scriptural sanctions upholding it, there can be little surprise that the Conference should have passed a further resolution in which they declared that, recognizing the family as the God-given unit of human life and society, they condemned "those systems of migratory labour that break up family life by enforcing the unjustified residential separation of man and wife or parents and children". It is difficult to conceive that Christians should be unable to appreciate that, by condoning circumstances operating against the family unit, they are both assenting to what is manifestly against the will of God and also prejudicing one of the declared aims of a stable family life — that of bringing up children in the fear and nurture of the Lord.

But it is not only the Church that is concerned with the stability of the family. The State has an obvious need to ensure that the nurseries of future citizens are such as will best produce integrated and stable personalities. Since for this is required strong family life created by the dual influence of a father and a mother figure, we might expect the State to do all in its power to assist and not hinder the firm establishment of such.

Again, all those concerned with the maintenance of an efficient labour force know from long experience that the wise employer will be particularly interested in securing a stable family environment for his employees, since nothing can so inhibit a man's labour potential than uncertainty and insecurity in his private and family life. And welfare workers, who have hardly yet finished clearing up the wreckage caused by the family separations of the last war, know well that the merely physical withdrawal of the father for lengthy periods can have serious effects on the emotional security of the children. The absence of a father for all but three weeks in a year makes nonsense of "fatherhood", and makes the long-term effects on future generations not a matter of anxious conjecture, but an evil which will in time bring its own nemesis.

There are, of course, two points of view from which callousness with regard to the African family might understandably arise. One is the view that children should be taken from their parents anyway, and brought up by the State. The other is that the Africans — that section of the population most affected by the legislation under discussion — are less than human beings, and that therefore humanitarian considerations may justifiably be ignored. A further argument, similar to the Marxist justification of a period of oppression before the ideal society is achieved, is the contention that gross interference with the basic human unit of the family has to be accepted as the cost of securing the benefits of the fulfilment of the ideology of those in power.

Certainly for a Christian these arguments are repugnant, and it is highly probable that they do not represent the views of the majority of citizens.

If, therefore, it is clearly evident, from your study of the problem, that the legislation under discussion does have the effect of prejudicing the family life of the majority of the nation, then it is surely the concern of all who uphold the family to do all in their power to persuade the legislature (who are in theory responsible to them) to reconsider the methods they are using in carrying out the policy to which the Government considers itself committed.