

ANGLICAN BISHOPS AND RACIAL CONFLICTS

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AMONGST the five Committees into which the Lambeth Conference was divided for two out of the five weeks of its private Session was one set to deal with *the reconciling* of conflicts between and within nations. The Chairman of this Committee was the Archbishop of Cape Town (The Most Rev. Joost de Blank D.D.). The Committee divided itself into three Sections and the author of the following article was Chairman of the one which concerned itself with *conflicts* within nations, giving special attention to racial, industrial, and political conflicts.

The Committee of Bishops which presented the Report on *the Reconciling of Conflicts between and within Nations* was composed of 42 Bishops drawn from England, U.S.A., Canada, India, Ceylon, New Zealand, South Africa, West Indies, Japan, Hong Kong, West, Central and East Africa, Madagascar, Korea, and Argentina. The secretary of the section which dealt with racial conflicts was the Bishop of Arkansas (The Rt. Rev. R. R. Brown, D.D.) in whose Diocese Little Rock is situated. This is but one example of the fact that the Report represents the views of Bishops who have considerable first-hand knowledge of the subjects under discussion. The writer spent three years in South Africa before going to Accra early in 1956.

This Committee's Report deals at some length with the causes of conflict and includes a fine statement on the work of reconciliation which is of the very essence of the Church's life and witness in the world. It continues, in a section on *conflicts between nations*, to remind its readers of the essential unity of mankind and that 'irrespective of race or colour, all men are equally the object of God's love . . . though born into a particular family, and through it into a larger community of the nation'. Nations, it says, like individuals, are members one of another, increasingly inter-dependent.

Then follows a sober yet challenging section on *thermo-nuclear warfare* in which the familiar points are forcefully made. It is interesting that, like so many other assemblies, the full Conference could not agree upon any form of unilateral abolition of, or even refusal to test or use, thermo-nuclear weapons.

The section on *conflicts within nations* opens with a reminder

that the seeds of racial tensions are bound to be present where members of different races meet, 'not least in those territories into which the white man has penetrated'. Yet, it says, tensions can be fruitful for good, especially if man lives by the at-onement wrought by Christ.

A section on *Areas of Unrest* includes some vivid comments upon situations in the U.S.A., Israel and the Arab World, India, Pakistan, Burma, Ceylon, the Far East, Australia, Great Britain, and Africa. We must limit ourselves here to comment and quotation concerning the first and last of these.

It is noted that, in the U.S.A., the Protestant Episcopal Church, through its General Convention, has declared that it would

"consistently oppose and combat discrimination based upon colour or race of every form, both within the Church and without, in this country and internationally, while its National Council has passed a separate Resolution regarding the Supreme Court's decision as 'just, right, and necessary'".

It was significant that all three U.S.A. Bishops who chose to serve on this sectional committee came from Southern America (Arkansas, S.W. Virginia, and Georgia).

Every word of the section headed *the Awakening of Africa* was carefully weighed. Opening with a brief description of the present situation in West Africa, where Ghana's newly-won independence has set the pace for her neighbours and for many other African communities, the Report notes that:

"the white man is welcomed if he comes as a cooperator to help the African through trade, through technical assistance of every kind, and through other channels, on terms now being fixed by the African." (Note those final words.)

Of East Africa the Report only mentions Kenya and, in a very concise statement, summarises the common features of the 'movements of regression' of the past few years. It adds

"The Church must demonstrate beyond all doubt that it is the Family of God into the fullness of whose membership all may come without distinction or difference. There, in Christ, they will find strength and grace both to face the baffling bewilderment of rapid social change unafraid, and also to contribute actively towards the solution in society of the problems which society has itself created."

The brief paragraph on Central Africa pulls no punches and says:

“The Committee believes that, if true partnership is to be achieved, there must quickly be an end to many of the old ideas associated with patronage or even paternalism, and that the African should be allowed and encouraged to take a fair and just share in the government of the Federation and its constituent parts—not only a just share but one seen to be just. Here, as elsewhere, the African can only become a responsible person by having responsibility. It is clear that considerable sacrifices will have to be made by both partners, and we would urge that nothing should be done by the British Government which would have the effect of enhancing the already powerful advantages of the White settlers over the Africans.”

But, as might be expected, the largest section is devoted to the Union of South Africa. A brief objective summary of the present situation, in which it is noted that “the White South African is as much an African as a Black or Coloured South African”, recognizes without comment the fact that the White man seeks to maintain his supremacy and the means he has devised to do so, adding pertinently, “yet his whole economy depends upon the presence of a contented non-White population”.

The Report, however, shows no sympathy whatever with the present policy of *apartheid*, and notes that ‘the Church of the Province . . . fights bravely to keep open the lines of communication between the races, and protests vigorously against injustice’. Later it shows that the Committee is unanimously behind the Bishops in the Union in their condemnation of ‘the injustices perpetrated against non-White men and women in South Africa under the policy of *apartheid*’. Then follow some strong words: “It holds that every citizen of South Africa of whatever race should have equal rights before the law; and that the non-White should be given a fair and just share in the government of the nation of his birth and citizenship. It believes that, if the present pattern of multi-racial community is to continue, any form of *apartheid* is less just and righteous than a gradual and mutually enriching growth into responsible interdependence of all the races which now share this fertile and beautiful land.”

These sentiments were confirmed by a resolution adopted by the full Conference quoted later. But before the text of that Resolution is given it is worth while to quote parts of a section

headed *Freedom of Opportunity*, an impressive footnote to the Africa section.

“Year by year the desire of the African (Christian and non-Christian alike) is deepened, and his determination strengthened, to manage his own affairs and to call Africa his own—one African people throughout the whole continent. His White fellow-African must become wise and humble enough to come to terms with him while there is yet time to do so peaceably and justly . . .”

Opinions expressed in the Report only carry the *imprimatur* of the Committee from which they come. But it will be seen that everything of importance which came from this Committee was confirmed by the full Conference in a Resolution adopted in the following terms:

“The Conference affirms its belief in the natural dignity and value of every man, of whatever colour or race, as created in the image of God. In the light of this belief the Conference affirms that neither race nor colour is in itself a barrier to any aspect of that life in family and community for which God created all men. It therefore condemns discrimination of any kind on the grounds of race or colour alone.

The Conference would urge that in multi-racial societies members of all races shall be allowed:

- a. a fair and just share in the government of their country;
- b. a fair and just share in the control, development and rewards of the natural resources of their country, including advancement to the highest level of attainment;
- c. the right to associate freely in worship, in education, in industry, in recreation, and in all other departments of the common life.”

In this connection it is worth while to quote from the section of the Report headed *Political Conflicts* which asks very pertinently

“Do the existing democratic governments truly represent the clear convictions of the majority of their citizens?”

and further

“Are there countries where governments, though acknowledging democratic forms, have in fact come to power, and perhaps remained in power, by undemocratic means? And when, if ever, is such procedure morally justified?”

or again

“If a government stays in power against the wishes of the majority of its citizens, what are the resisting citizens to do?”

The same section includes this statement which may not be without interest to readers of *Africa South*:

"It is laid down as a principle of the United Nations that no member nation shall interfere in the internal affairs of another; but how can a nation which has accepted the Declaration on Human Rights stand idly by while that Declaration is being openly defied by one or more of its neighbours?"

The Report ends with these words and they may fittingly conclude this article:

"Its urgent prayer is that, throughout the world, men of goodwill may continue to work unceasingly in the cause of peace as the fruit of reconciliation—peace between nations, and peace within nations. This peace remains the will of God, and the hope and inspiration of all men everywhere."

