

# OUT OF THE FELLOWSHIP

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THE extension of *apartheid* to the universities by the South African government has deeply disturbed academic circles in Britain. The universities of the world, except those which have retired behind the intellectual ramparts of communism, are, in some aspects, a community. The higher human minds attain in their search for truth the more they can reach out to meet other minds across the barriers, which are all too high in our world of to-day, of language, nationality and race. If any member of the community of universities becomes weak or diseased or, worse still, inflicts injury upon itself, it falls out of the community and both the community and its lost member are impoverished.

These statements are truisms which are so well understood that they seldom need to be said. The South African policy of University apartheid demands their repetition. They are, moreover, especially real to me because of two special experiences which I have been able to add to my own University work. I have for many years, indeed from the beginning of the enterprise, been concerned as a member of the Executive of the Inter-University Council for Higher Education in the Colonies (the last six words have recently, for obvious reasons, been removed from the title). During the last fifteen years this body has, in partnership with local energies, created University Colleges in the West Indies, the Gold Coast, Nigeria, the Sudan, East Africa and Malaya and has assisted in the founding of the Central African College. I have referred to this partly to explain my personal approach and, more importantly, to show the large and energetic part which British universities have been playing in the extension of higher education amongst colonial and especially African peoples. Thus South Africa is moving backwards in the very sphere in which we have been trying to advance and in which we have gained some experience.

A Nationalist might retort that, in fostering Colleges for Africans, Britain has been doing no more than the Union Government intends to do. It is, of course, true that, in West Africa especially, the future Universities will be mainly for

Africans. But in East Africa, Makerere College is open to all races and some Europeans have already entered it. In Rhodesia, British influence, associating with liberal elements in Central Africa, has helped to make the new College fully inter-racial. In Nairobi, the new Royal Technical College, brought into being with the help of an organization in Britain parallel to the Inter-University Council, is fully inter-racial. The beautifully sited University College of the West Indies in Jamaica, which is residential, is one of the happiest expressions of inter-racial co-operation upon a basis of absolute equality that can be found in the Commonwealth. More than this, the Asquith Commission, which laid down the policy, insisted that the new Colleges should in every way be modelled upon the best which Britain had to offer in traditions, in standards and in staff, and that they should be chartered bodies, independent of state control. Staff and students mix freely socially as well as professionally and as local members of staff increase, they are fully integrated with their white colleagues.

Our Nationalist critic might still contend that it is all very well for Britain to be liberal at a distance, but that those with close experience of dealing with Africans know that they are fundamentally different and are denied by nature from entering into the heritage of Western civilization. It is upon the basis of this belief which is, of course, to label the African as inherently inferior, that attempts are being made to revive what is called Bantu culture and to piece together the shell of tribalism which the white man, in pursuit of his own economic interests, has so completely shattered. My reply to this is based upon the second experience I have had. For some twenty-five years I have been able to number Africans among my students. In recent years, as Fellow of a Graduate College, these have been post-graduates. There can be few closer associations of mind with mind than this between teacher and pupil, sometimes extending over two or even three years, carried on through the medium of the weekly individual tutorial, and often supplemented by close social contact outside the study. No doctrinaire illusions about racial equality could survive this process, even if it did not have to culminate in the stern test of an examination of exacting standard.

What then has been the lesson of this experience? It is neither less nor more than the teaching of all reputable scientists, that there is no inherent difference between the intellectual capacity

of the Negro and the European. It is not at all difficult in the intimate academic relationship of the tutorial system to distinguish the differences of nurture from those of nature; to recognize the struggle of the intellect to overcome the series of obstacles which history and geography have set between the African pupil and the proof of his equality. He has come out of one cultural world in order to assimilate another. His early environment and even his earlier education may have done little to help him to jump the chasm. He works in a foreign language in a foreign land. He may be short of money, cold and lonely; his health is often poor. His life is one long effort of adjustment in small things and great. His arrival at this level of education is often partly the result of accident; he is not, as for Western students, the product carefully sifted out of a whole population through the grid of an all-embracing educational system. Is it not remarkable that so many African students reach the middle standards of our own relatively favoured youth and that some even reach the upper classes of the examination list? This result reveals character as well as intellect, perseverance, self-control and great powers of adaptation. And if our critic intervenes to say that the result is often a lack of balance, even a distortion of character, the answer is that of course members of the first and second generations of pioneers in this severe test do sometimes warp under the psychological and physical strain and that they need every help and encouragement during the period. The conclusion from this is very relevant. It is that in a University with small residential colleges such as Oxford, the non-European students are greatly helped, both socially and intellectually, by mixing fully and freely in a community with their European fellow-students.

It follows from this experience, which many Europeans in South Africa who have taught Africans must share, that separation in Higher Education is an indefensible evil. We cannot accept the Nationalist plea that the Africans will be given equality of education in separation. It is not so much that we cannot believe that a government which in every way treats Africans as both different and inferior will find the staff and the money to provide colleges of equal standards with those of the Europeans. The separation is in itself a betrayal of the knowledge and the values we have inherited and by which, not so long ago in the historical record, we were ourselves lifted out of tribalism and enabled to develop our present wealth and culture. It is

of the nature of this inheritance that it must be kept in movement, in the full light and air of the international forum, tested by criticism and enriched by exchange. It goes bad if it is locked up in a national strong-room, above all in that of a small and isolated nation. And it will be only a small portion of this endangered culture that the Nationalist government will break off and give to the poor and hungry African majority, telling them to go off and nourish themselves upon it in isolation, an isolation, moreover, which close state control will turn into something like a prison.

It is the more tragic that many members of the Dutch Reformed Church—there are important exceptions—should be ready to twist and darken the central, golden strand in our bundle of civilized values, that of our religion. Text is bandied against text in the effort to force Christianity into a confirmation of the doctrine of racial superiority. The whole spirit of Christ's teaching and its extension by St. Paul and St. John is utterly contrary to such a terrible judgment upon our fellow-men and such a Pharasaic claim for ourselves as that enshrined in *apartheid*. This truth must apply at all levels of human life but few can be so conscious of its meaning as Christian university teachers who are trying to share with others the most difficult enterprises of the human mind and spirit. The Christian respect for the individual personality has been grafted upon the freer claim for the liberty of the intellect: to deny both of these is to contract out of the fellowship of Western civilization.

In a recent discussion I had with a leading Nationalist, I was told that no nation which is not endangered by a black majority has any understanding of South Africa's problem or any right to pronounce upon it.

On this second point, national policies and trends cannot be judged by blemishes and mistakes but upon the policies of governments and the more dominant national ideas upon which they are based. On the first point there is, I believe, among informed people in Britain to-day a very sincere attempt to understand the unique colour problem of South Africa. But, however great the difficulties, in this closely integrated world it is impossible for any nation to be wholly a law unto itself. We may last out, in our present context, the political bond of the Commonwealth, the links of neighbourhood on the African Continent, Britain's connection with the High Commission Territories and the embarrassing votes that have to be taken at U.N.O. There

still remains the issue of our many-sided relationships with a group of Universities which may be forced into a position of outlawry from the academic citizenship. And the cause of it would be a matter of such fundamental principle that no appreciation of South Africa's special difficulties could allow compromise. We know from our experience in Kenya and elsewhere that for a period that may be long it would be unreasonable to expect a premature fusion of education between tribal and ex-tribal negroes and Europeans at the lower or even, for a time, at the middle grades of education. But these adjustments of convenience and timing and language fall away at the highest level, and nothing remains but to face the issues of principle which have been stated.

This principle is being magnificently maintained by many of our colleagues in South Africa. For them it is a matter of professional life and death and they are staking everything upon the issue while we can only watch and applaud. It will not be easy for us to decide what we can do to help and it will not be easy for them to advise us. At this eleventh hour we can still hope that the South African government will not take those final steps backwards from the position from which almost all the rest of the world is still advancing, and divorce the races at the one point where they could now meet in full equality and understanding and so perhaps save the Union from a division which may one day destroy it.

There are wider interests at stake even than those of South Africa. The very need of the Africans is their chief claim upon us. It was through no fault of theirs that their inner continent was left out of the world until this latest age. Their own past has moulded them and some of its traditions and habits may long stay with them. But for the most part they must find a new culture, a new religion and form of society. At present, they are asking for a share in ours, but they will only take it if it is given without reserve and with faith in their capacity to take and develop it. Refused, or even grudging, they will turn elsewhere and there are other offers. There is hardly time in South Africa to permit this turning away. The issue is a test of the Western peoples' faith in their own civilization and in the values which prompt them to give or to take risks. The rejection of opportunity in South Africa may well affect the whole Continent, with results that will reach Europe and further weaken our imperilled civilization.