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The Church of the Province of South Africa

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The Church of the Province of South Africa has grown into an impressive denomination and is the fourth largest church in South Africa after the Dutch Reformed Churches, the Methodist Church and the Roman Catholic Church. It comprises sixteen (soon to be seventeen) dioceses and it transcends national and political boundaries because three (soon to be four) of its present dioceses are coterminous with the boundaries of three independent countries (Lesotho, Mozambique and Swaziland). Everybody hopes that Namibia will very soon have an independence which is recognized internationally; that would mean yet another Anglican diocese in an independent country.

Our large denomination had very small and unimpressive beginnings when Robert Gray came to the Cape in 1818 as the first Anglican bishop to reside in the territory. Up to this time, the Anglican Church (as it is often more popularly known) was represented only by chaplains serving the garrison personnel at the Cape which was, for a while, regarded as only a halfway station between Europe and the East.

Peter Hinchliff points out, however, that even before the period of the garrison chaplains, Anglican services were held intermittently at the Cape. I am sure he was not being morbid when he pointed out that these were usually burial services for highborn English people who had died on the high seas. (Hinchliff: *The Anglican Church in South Africa*, London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 1963).

I thought at first that we could use statistical evidence to describe the development and growth of the Church of the Province of South Africa, but I changed my mind as the most useful kind of statistics for our study have become unavailable as the Church of the Province of South Africa no longer keeps its statistics according to racial classification.

It should suffice to say that Robert Gray, with his indomitable courage and unflagging enthusiasm and drive, was largely responsible for laying firm and sound foundations for the church we have today. He came as the first bishop and his diocese extended to the Transvaal in the north and Natal in the east: wherever there was a white homestead, there his pastoral rule held sway. By the 1860s Cape Town, Grahamstown, Natal and Bloemfontein were well-established dioceses, and Zululand was being developed as a missionary diocese. Gray struggled against the Erastianism of the established Church in England and wanted the Church in South Africa to have sufficient autonomy to be able to order its life as it saw fit under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. His drive and vision were rewarded and by 1870 he was able to summon the first Provincial Synod of the Church of the Province of South Africa. This Provincial Synod is still the highest legislative body of that church and now meets every three years. It is made up of episcopal, clerical and lay representatives from the different dioceses. Between sessions of the Provincial Synod, the Provincial Standing Committee is responsible for the ordering of the church provincially.

Instead of bare statistics, which can be used to prove anything, I have decided that we should look together at some aspects of the life of the church that I love so dearly. I hope that our examination will enable us to make an assessment of how far our church has failed or succeeded in translating into reality the very high ideals we profess to hold. We want to discover the extent to which the Church of the Province of South Africa has or has not been tainted by the sickness of South African society with its obsession with race, and its determination to entrench the separation of the races as a way of life and to build up barriers which the church has proclaimed have been broken down by Jesus Christ.

From the onset we must place on record that our church, officially in all its pronouncements, has condemned racism (and its peculiar expression in South Africa as apartheid) out of hand as quite inconsistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Hinchliff points out that 'Almost every apartheid measure has, therefore, drawn protest from the Church on the grounds that it is an insult to the dignity of human nature and denies the

value of every human being in the eyes of God.' (1963: 234). That comment is of universal validity in this regard.

White and black priests

The first of these areas which we want to examine is work as done either by white or black personnel. When a person is ordained as a priest, for instance, then in the teaching of my church he is a priest of the church and not a black or white priest. The logical consequence of this is that the Laity of the church should be ready and willing to be ministered to by any priest. The position, however, is otherwise. Theoretically any priest, black or white, can be appointed to any parish having regard to his qualification and suitability. What has, however, obtained in our church is that almost as a matter of course, black priests have been assigned to black parishes to work among black Anglicans whereas until recently white priests were assigned to either white or black parishes. In fact, again until fairly recently, black priests were not appointed to take charge of even black parishes. They were appointed to a Native or African 'mission' to serve as assistants supervised by the white priest, the rector of the town's white 'parish'.

'Most dioceses made this distinction (between African and European work). There were parishes and there were "native missions". But at least it was recognised in theory that no distinction could be made between one Christian and another on the grounds of colour alone.' (Hinchliff, 1963: 194).

Referring to such questions Alaf Paton observes: 'This was one of the things that Clayton learned quickly - that the Church of the Province of South Africa was deeply corrupted by the colour bar' (Apartheid and the Archbishop. David Philip, 1973: 59).

He remarks further: 'Rouse (an Archdeacon in the Diocese of Johannesburg in the early days) was used to the paternalism of the Karney regime (the then Bishop of Johannesburg who was by no means its creator) under which the white priest was automatically the superior of the black priest.' (1973: 60).

In 1955 Provincial Synod removed the distinction between parish and mission, regarding both as pastoral charges and in nearly all our dioceses today these pastoral charges are called parishes and are normally

headed by rectors. But it is sadly still the case, by and large, that blacks minister to blacks and whites to whites and also to blacks. Because of residential segregation and language problems, we have racially segregated parishes and churches.

And yet even when the parishes are contiguous, very few of the white laity are as yet ready to be ministered to by the black priest from the nearby 'location'. They would much rather have a white priest come from the next white parish a 100 miles away and suffer from infrequent priestly ministrations than be served by a black priest. Some bishops are taking action in this regard and trying to help educate their flock that in our church colour is irrelevant.

I must add quickly that blacks (other than bishops) have sometimes been appointed to positions where they had white subordinates, and so far as I can see the sky has not fallen. For instance, the Dean of Johannesburg is black having succeeded another black. He has a multi-racial staff. Nearly all the dioceses have appointed black archdeacons where their archdeaconries have included white parishes. This has meant a black archdeacon could carry out a visitation to such parishes which amounts to an inspection of the parish. In one or two dioceses black curates have been appointed to serve as assistants in white parishes. I know of only one instance, however, where the reverse has happened. There were no traumatic consequences at all.

Multiracial services

In many of the dioceses within the Republic of South Africa, nearly all the parishes are uniraical. Multi-racial services have usually been the order of the day only on great diocesan occasions, such as at Diocesan Synods, and ordinations. In some white parishes people of another race would feel distinctly unwelcome; whereas other parishes have gone out of their way to develop relationships with black parishes, exchanging visits, attending one another's parochial council meetings and doing as much as they can to demonstrate their oneness in Christ.

Most of our cathedral parishes are multiracial and I want to declare that in the context of South Africa today, it is a truly wonderful sight to see people of all colours walking up to the communion rail to partake of

the one bread and drink from the same cup, particularly as all of this happens unselfconsciously. I confess that when I was part of such a congregation I was often moved to tears of joy that this was indeed taking place. Many of the parishioners of such churches have tried to take their fellowship beyond the confines of the church-building - and all have felt enriched by their experiences.

It would be less than honest to pretend that there have been no tensions - and yet I believe that there have usually been creative tensions. Outside some of our cathedrals you are apt to find notices proclaiming to all the world that people of all races are welcome to all services. It is a tremendous witness in a fragmented society.

Personnel

Until recently the principals of all three of the Provincial Theological Colleges (St. Peter's in Pietermaritzburg, St. Bede's in Umtata and St. Paul's in Grahamstown) have been white, despite the fact that at St. Peter's and St. Bede's only blacks, (until very recently) were being trained. St. Paul's has been training mainly white ordinands. The councils of St. Peter's and St. Bede's were multiracial and that of St. Paul's entirely white until 1970 when the first black was appointed to it. Since 1978 the principals at St. Peter's and St. Bede's have become black and all three colleges are now taking ordinands of all races.

Of sixteen diocesan bishops only four are black and these are to be found in what might be termed black dioceses (i.e. not in the industrialised parts of the Republic, so-called white South Africa) in Swaziland, Lesotho, Mozambique and Zululand. But this represents an enormous step forward because until 1960 there was no black bishop at all in the Church of the Province of South Africa until Alpheus Zulu was appointed Suffragan Bishop of St. John's (Transkei). He was later to become the first black to be elected diocesan in the Church of the Province of South Africa as Bishop of Zululand in 1966. At the time of writing, the House of Bishops numbers 24 bishops (the probable full complement is 26). Of this number, nine are black. This is heartening because the complexion of the House of Bishops is changing. This is important as the Church of the Province of South Africa is an episcopal church.

Stipends ..

Another index of the situation in the Church of the Province of South Africa with regard to human relations between the races is the question of stipends. For a long time, until perhaps the sixth decade of this century, the practice of the church in the matter of stipends paid to its clergy was decidedly discriminatory. It was common for a black priest after ten years of service to receive the same stipend as that paid to a white deacon in his first year of service. It was therefore wellnigh impossible for Anglicans to rebut the taunts of their critics who said that 'the English church does not live up to its principles consistently'. (Kerkbode 13.12.50 quoted by Paton, 1973: 199).

Feeble arguments were used to justify the disparity in clergy stipends such as the apparently lower cost of living of blacks or that it would be wrong for a priest to live above his people. Blacks and others used to point out that, for example, a pound of sugar cost a black just as much as it did a white. And the argument about priests living above the general level of their people was strangely not applied to white priests who served congregations even when they lived among their black congregations. I am happy to report that this disparity is almost a thing of the past. All the dioceses have committed themselves to parity of stipends and indeed the church is moving towards a common provincial stipend which would mean that priests could be transferred from a wealthy diocese to a poorer one without losing too much in the move. This undoubtedly will help in the efficient deployment of manpower. But one can just imagine the bitterness that earlier disparity must have caused to those who were its victims.

Church schools

The late Mr Eric Louw used to delight in taunting the Anglicans with the fact that whilst they criticised the government for its segregationist policy, it practised discrimination in the case of admitting blacks to its white church schools. This is still a vexed matter since the church has very little control over these so-called church schools. I believe that earnest attempts are being made within the constraints of the law to open these schools to all races.

Whilst all races are represented in most of the

church's higher councils such as provincial and diocesan synods, it is true to say that effective power still resides firmly in white hands because the representation is still very lopsided and does not adequately reflect the racial composition of the church. It does still seem to be a case of all being equal, but of some being more equal than others. It is still very much the case that:

'Africans, finding themselves under considerable political and social disabilities, receiving the benefits of education but deprived of a full and responsible position' have come to 'resent the fact that most of the churches were "white" and governed by white officials.' (Hinchliff, 1963: 201).

And yet we must record that to its credit the church has not been complacent. In 1970 Provincial Synod launched a programme of Human Relations and Justice setting up Provincial and Diocesan Challenge Groups to challenge the church at all levels to try to root out racism and aim to live more nearly as it professed.

Proud record

I will conclude with a few quotations, but before I do I might be permitted one or two observations. Our church has a record of which we can be justly proud in its witness against racism and other evils that beset our society. Its synods and our leaders, the bishops, have often spoken up courageously against any evil that has been condemned as inconsistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Many of its servants have suffered grievously for this courageous stand. Whilst it might be contended by some that churches tend to appear as maintainers of the status quo, it would be true also to say that often our church has been prophetic in its witness.

For instance, the bishops headed by Archbishop Clayton informed the prime minister of the day that they were unable to obey the provisions of the infamous church clause which declares that mixed church gatherings either for worship or counsel would take place only with the permission of the Minister of Bantu Affairs and that they could not ask their people to obey it either. Archbishop Clayton died after writing the letter to the prime minister on behalf of the bishops.

And our church has tried to help foster healthy relations between the races as a mandate of the Gospel and in obedience to the command of Christ. It has shown that

it is possible for people of different races and culture to belong together in one fellowship where each counted as being of infinite value in the sight of God, a value which was not contingent on such irrelevant factors as the accidents of birth and colour. It has tried to be a kind of first fruits of the Kingdom of God - a Kingdom of justice, peace and love.

Conduct falls short

And yet we must confess to a sadness at the fact that over too wide a field and over too, too long a period we have been shamed because our conduct has fallen far short of our profession in the matter of human relations. Paton's comments are as apt today as they ever were when he wrote in 1973:

'In synods all over South Africa it frequently happened that when discriminatory laws were debated a majority of the white clergy and a minority of the white laity would join with the overwhelming majority of black clergy and laity in condemning them. One can only suppose that many of the white laity had different values, different interests and felt that they had more to lose.' (Paton, 1973: 131).

The church has sometimes been too much of the world and yet it has also tried to repent and to witness to the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I pay tribute to those of its members who have been stalwarts in this witness. We have been bidden to speak the truth in love and I hope I have spoken charitably as a devoted son of this church.