

significantly in the 1970's. (Newscheck – 20/3/1970). There is no evidence yet to indicate which prediction is likely to be the most accurate.

3. A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa – 1969 – page 88.

4. South African Financial Gazette – 21/2/1969.

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8. Africa Diary 1965 – page 2295.

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12. A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa – 1968 – page 64.

13. March 1970.

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CHURCHES AND CHANGE

by Jeremy Hurley.

The churches in South Africa have great potential as agents for change but at the moment they show little signs of realising this potential. I am going to discuss ways in which I think the Churches may be got off their backsides and actually become the force for good that they were intended to be, and what will happen if they don't. I will talk about the English churches mainly, and more particularly the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church is run by the hierarchy of bishops, archbishops and a cardinal. Official policy is determined by them, and they speak on behalf of all Catholics in South Africa (by a God given, and not a democratic right). The hierarchy (with one or two exceptions) is white, male and intellectual. Yet it "represents" a people that is 80% Black, over 50% female and largely uneducated. The hierarchy is without exception well enough off to live in large houses in often select suburbs. Yet it represents a people that is largely living below the poverty datum line. The hierarchy have one and all condemned the grant given by the WCC to the Freedom Fighters in Africa for their humanitarian needs, because, they say, a Christian cannot support violence. Yet this same hierarchy has never once urged those of its people liable for Military Service to be Conscientious Objectors, in the name of the same Christ.

CONTRASTS

I want to enlarge on these contrasts, and the hypocrisies implicit in them, and also to include in them the majority of us Whites who profess to be Christians.

1) The Church hierarchy reflects the racialistic beliefs of its people in the make up of the hierarchy, as I have already said. It is however, the peoples' racialism that I am going to focus on. This racialism is found in Church-goers, where the Blacks are expected to sit at the back of the church and receive Communion after their White

'madams'. It is found in everyday life when Blacks are called every name under the sun by church-goers, if they happen to offend the Whites. It is found when a Black servant is not allowed to have visitors to her room (if she is living in), because "we don't want any skelms around scaring the children". It is found when a woman is not allowed to have her family living with her in the town, and when she can go home on holiday only once a year. It is found when men are transported from the Homelands to the cities to work, because there is not nearly enough work in the Transkei or Zululand, and yet are not allowed to take their families and buy land to live on. All these things are allowed by White Christians and not only allowed but actually supported by them as well.

Many Christians vote for the Nationalist Party and subsequently support the policy of 80% of the people being squashed into less than 20% of the land. More English speaking Christians vote United Party, and support a policy that has entrenched in it the idea of the inferiority of the Blacks en masse – "not capable of being Members of Parliament, and will only have representatives". A few Christians vote Progressive Party and support a system in which Christ would not have the vote, because he did not have the required high standard of our Western education, and was not interested in making more money than he needed to live on. Do we never remember, and why are we so

seldom reminded by the preachers, that Christ said "Whatever you do to one of my brothers you do to me" and that the most important Commandment in the Bible is said to be "Love God and your neighbour as yourself".? How can this type of racialism be condoned, let alone supported by Christians?

INFERIOR

The Churches treat women as inferior to men. They cannot become priests. Nunneries suit only certain types of women. Very few people like living with one type of person all their life (especially with a group of purely-women or purely-men); and vowing obedience to a superior who you may think is an absolute idiot is a terrifying thought for anyone brought up to be responsible for her own actions.

Not allowing women to become priests is not where this discrimination ends, however. In the Anglican Cathedral, Johannesburg, the male used to (and now, a year later, probably still does) process down the aisle at evensong, while the unworthy women scuttled into their pew from a back door.

These lay women are kept busy by their priests. They are pushed into knitting circles, women's leagues, 'Bantu sewing groups', and other (to me) equally horrifying organizations, and there they accept passively the status of "useful for a street collection" (let alone any other position). Some women enjoy this, as no doubt some men would if they were honest enough to admit it. But the idea horrifies many women as much as it horrifies me. They drop out because sewing isn't their particular thing, and where else can they fit into the present Church structures? (No, teaching Sunday schools does *not* answer this problem.)

A certain standard of learning is demanded before a man is allowed to become a priest. This includes usually a six year (at least) course in philosophy, theology and rhubarb, rhubarb. Who set these standards? Christ? Christ chose ignorant peasants to set up his Church. Even considered on a purely practical level, who best gets the message across to illiterates on a mission? This intellectual, or someone closer to their understanding?

A RICH MAN

2) "If you wish to be perfect, go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have pleasure in Heaven" (Matt 19:24)

"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the Kingdom of heaven"

The Church hierarchy and its members profess a belief in these two quotations. The Church hierarchy its members deal in stocks and shares, own houses, motor cars, swimming pools, jewels, art treasures, chandeliers and wall to wall carpets. We possess these things while half of the people in this country, White as well as Black, live below the scientifically determined poverty datum line. We spend R9,000-00 in Pietermaritzburg on mending a Church organ when local welfare organisations can't come out on the money they get. How on earth do we justify these actions? I am not as guilty as many people are in these respects, because so far I just don't have that sort of money. But what will I be like in a few years time when

I am earning my privileged wage? God only knows, but the Catholic Church certainly won't try and stop me from being exactly the same.

KILL

3) "Thou shalt not kill"

The Church has never believed in this commandment. The Pope blessed troops going to both World Wars, the Churches all (with the very notable exception of the Jehovahs Witnesses) implicitly support the S.A. Defence Force by appointing chaplains to it who have never yet urged trainees to refuse to be taught how to kill.

The Churches cannot therefore be called Pacifists, or believers in that Commandment. Certain members may, but the Churches as organisations cannot. How then is it that every single prominent Church man in this country that I have heard of, has condemned the action of the World Council of Churches? On Christian grounds? The WCC earmarked a few thousands of rands for the humanitarian needs of the Freedom Fighters in Africa, who are fighting against what they believe is an oppressive political system. The Churches in South Africa condemned them because they say that Christ taught us Peace. Surely this is gross hypocrisy when we take into account the actions of the Churches in South Africa, or rather inactions as regards our compulsory military service?

So if the Churches are not pacifist they must believe in the 'Just War' theory. For instance, I can accept it when they said in the Second World War: "The Germans were evil, oppressing the Allies, and we fought to protect our freedom". But take this in the South African context. "The Blacks are evil, oppressing the Whites, and we have to protect our freedom" Ho-Ho-Ho-Ho.

This is another case of the Churches hypocrisy. — the hypocrisy of the hierarchy and the hypocrisy of especially the White people.

ACTION

It is for these reasons mainly, and because the Church hierarchy shows, as a whole, absolutely no inclination to budge even an inch itself, or to cause its members to even think of budging, that action is necessary.

Priests are dissatisfied with the Church, along with thousands of young people who see very little relevance in it at all. Almost all of these people, of all ages and races, are concerned with society and the Church as the way of life in which they were brought up. They would like to see the Church serving a much more useful role in society, as a relevant, concrete path towards a new society. As far as I can see they have three ways open to them. They can stay in the Church and behave like the three monkeys. They can plunge into the Church and wallow in as many organizations as possible, or they can form their own groups still inside the Church structure.

I would like to discuss the last two possibilities further — the first one being unworthy of comment. The Catholic Church (as do other Churches) has lay bodies that have a small amount of influence — usually only on the Parish Priest, but sometimes on the hierarchy. The amount of influence depends almost totally on the sympathies of the local Bishop (Archbishop Hurley being in my biased

view among the most open and alive to new ideas). This is a long and frustrating process, and I think it needless to add that not being allowed any voting rights on important matters is enough to put any red-blooded person under thirty (I'll even give the under forties the benefit of the doubt) off for good. Another fact to be taken into consideration is that Committees in general have little sympathy for long-hair-and-sandals, because these Committees are already part of the structure. This long-hair-and-sandals-type can have an extremely loud and effective influence when its action is channeled along the final way that I suggested – of constantly confronting Church structures.

RADICAL

The groups that these people would form would without doubt have to be radical to hold any sort of hope redirecting present structures. (Once hope disappears, even radical groups such as this become useless – as I will mention later.) The presence of a radical group is important to the present Church society, for three reasons. (They do however need an important qualifying question: Can a society – be it Church or political – be changed through a structure put there by that society, when the change needed is so vast and complete?)

The first reason is that a radical group such as this would have very clear ideas on what it thinks is Christian, and would try to act out this basic love-message. It would be held up as an ideal situation by fairly similar thinking people, in much the same way that the Liberal Party seems to have been held up as a Utopia for liberal thinking people who thought it wiser to work along more conservative lines. It could however become a conscience-salve for more conservative people, and this would be bad.

The second reason for the importance of a radical element in any society is because it makes a less way-out group appear respectable in the eyes of our incredibly conservative, pig-headed society. This happens in much the same way as the Progressive Party is gaining a little bit of respectability (for good or bad) by the exodus from its ranks of many students and other young people. This means that a movement towards a more fluid situation is more or less guaranteed.

The third and possibly main reason for a radical group like this to exist is for it, by its actions, to pressurise the main body of the Church, through confrontation. Confrontation – leading on to dialogue – can be very valuable. In this case actions like forcibly taking over the microphone during a Church service and putting your views across, handing out pamphlets during the service, daubing the church with slogans, shouting out comments during a particularly irrelevant sermon, kidnapping the bishop and holding him to a ransom of so many rands worth of equipment for a local mission hospital, all have the effect of making the people concerned take sides. Once sides are taken fruitful dialogue almost always takes place.

SHORTCOMING

In the South African situation, particularly, a shortcoming of confrontation can be seen in relation to the very conservative Churches (the Afrikaans especially, though not exclusively). Here the gap between the radical and conservative philosophies is too great to narrow by any sort of dialogue.

Student

Perspectives on

South Africa

edited by

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