

# Confronting the Beast

## Some Tough Questions About by CEDRIC MAYSON *Apartheid*

### *Apartheid: The System*

Twenty thousand Methodists signed a petition last year when I was banned, detained and charged with high treason for seeking liberation from apartheid. When I fled to this land with my wife and children to continue the struggle people were interested.

But the real burdens and battles of apartheid are carried by millions of whom you have not heard, so let me tell you something of them.

Three million have been forcibly removed from their homes at least once in the past two decades to 'clean up the white areas.' Many live in tents or shanties, queue for a communal too, and have a tap for water within a few hundred yards. Some walk a mile or more for every drop of water they will use in their lives. Doctors, teachers, ministers, lawyers, new clothes, books, sweets, telephones, television, proper houses, newspapers and fathers are seldom seen. Food is minimal; avoidable infectious diseases claim deaths daily.

Eleven million are crowded into these impoverished homelands, a labour reserve if required, but mostly surplus people, unnecessary for the whites' money-making machines. Without consultation, they are forced to be foreigners.

Most of all I think of the younger people. Oppression has made them more aware, better informed, more civilized, more motivated than their white counterparts. They are the poor and oppressed in whom God is producing the liberating elements of life by which the world is saved.

They may be working, studying, or unemployed; dancing, drinking or dynamiting; loving, marrying, having children; living in housing, hotels, or training camps. Just ordinary people, but united by a common conviction that the apartheid system in which they are trapped, like all evil, will be utterly destroyed. Their throats may be wide with laughter and their voices filled with song, but there is a determination in their eyes that reveals hearts totally committed to a new era of liberation.

They are not racist; they are not vicious; they are not Communists; they are not anti-Christ: Just determined. And because the tears have run down their cheeks and the blood has run down their backs, these young people of South Africa have a quality of life that is unbeatable.

APARTHEID is evil. It is no sin which can result in repentance and forgiveness but evil which must be destroyed. This is a thought for those who advocate programmes of reform, constructive engagement, or peaceful change.

### *Civic Religion "Churchianity"*

Civic religions have made the word of God of none effect, teaching as doctrines the precepts them from proclaiming the reality of the living God in the experience or imagination of the poor; and their refusal to promote this revolution in theology crumbles their churches into redundancy.

A civic religion becomes identified with the attitudes and objectives of the ruling authorities. In South Africa, this is clear in the Afrikaans-speaking churches who support apartheid and deliberately establish themselves on racial lines, manipulating the (black) 'daughter churches' into positions of dependency.

It is less clear and more dangerous in the English-speaking churches, whose structure and outlook is also conditioned by the western hierarchical and materialistic ethic of which apartheid is such an obnoxious off-spring. Charges have certainly taken place in the English-speaking churches in recent decades but only after years of battling against those who equate affluence and privilege

with Christianity, and in many cases the conclusion has been to permit blacks to identify themselves with the status quo of the civic religion, rather than to equate the church with the priorities of blacks.

### *Radical Christianity*

There is no doubt from the pronouncements of the church that it believes apartheid to be incompatible with the Gospel, but so often these interminable resolutions cloak an irresolution of action.

The scriptures indicate an economic system which distributes power and wealth into shared ownership rather than the hands of a few; gives priority to the eradication of poverty, ignorance and disease; promotes human sized enterprises; seeks co-operative patterns of work and leisure, motivated by need rather than profit; and conducts its social engineering from the insights of the poor and oppressed. Jesus called people to commit themselves to a new community, bound into small groups of disciples which gave up many of their former rules of social behavior, changed their religious practices, established new rules, shared their wealth, faced life together, found a new justice, joy and love, and produced a new theology out of their own experience.

The insistence upon analyzing human problems in terms of individual sin, rather than in the structures of society, is a complete denial of the emphasis of Jesus. Jesus' message was centered on the renewal of society on Earth, what he called 'Kingdom of God', and all his concern for individuals was within that Kingdom. It means fundamental changes in the society we live in, but the churches have become so dependent upon the concept of white western Christian civilization - which is neither

For 50 years the African National Congress sought to bring change by peaceful means. Its leader, Chief Albert Lutuli received the Nobel Peace prize. The ANC was banned in 1960 as a passive resistance organization. Only after all peaceful means were closed to it, in 1962, did it adopt a military wing.

South Africa has declared war on peaceful change. Anyone who ignores this is guilty of complicity in deceit, and thus a cynical contempt is the usual African response to Western calls for peaceful change. The violence comes from the South African government, which is supported by Western governments and investors, and all the protestations of Western people are suspect until they stop making money out of apartheid.

What apartheid is all about: South Africa is a society in which blacks are not recognized as citizens. They have no vote, no decision-making power at almost any level of society. They suffer untold hardship and misery because of government policies. The system is designed to keep them powerless, while whites who comprise only 16% of the population own and occupy 87% of the land. Whites take home 75% of the wealth of the country while at least 80% of blacks live below the poverty datum line. The Bantustans (euphemistically called Homelands) are areas of deprivation, destitution, and desperation. South African whites are amongst the most prosperous in the world, but this has been achieved through the systematic denial of political rights and the economic exploitation of the vast black majority.

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