

## **South Africa (5)**

### **The Apartheid Policy**

When the British travel-writer H.V.Morton visited South Africa in 1948, he saw a crowd of white and black South Africans on the platform of a railway station. They were on the same platform, but on different parts of it. The blacks had collected at the far end, near the locomotive, where they knew the "natives only" coaches would be. The Europeans were together elsewhere. There were station benches and lavatories labelled for black or white. Morton said, "thus I learned again the first lesson of South Africa that there is a white South Africa and a black South Africa." Although he didn't approve of apartheid, he wisely noted, "The native Problem is not one in which an unqualified stranger should dabble. Long residence in the country is absolutely necessary for its understanding." In the 1980's Coretta Scott King, widow of U.S. civil rights activist Martin Luther King, Jr., visited South Africa. She came away bewildered by the issue. She said, "It's far more complex than I initially thought."

### **Roots of Apartheid**

South Africa's National Party, which won a surprise victory in the 1948 national elections, coined the term "apartheid" (apartness) to describe its legislative policy of segregation of "separate development" of the races. But the National Party did not invent racial discrimination. Segregation laws had been firmly in place throughout most of South Africa since the 19th century. Apartheid, by whatever name, had been applied almost as a matter of course by the former British colonial administrations and Boer Republican governments alike. The spirit of apartheid was already present in the opening preamble to Transvaal's Boer republic, which read: "The people will permit no equality between white and Coloured inhabitants, either in Church or State." But the man who was primarily responsible for laying the foundation as a political system, which lasted until the early 1990s, was none other than the Englishman Cecil Rhodes. In the early 1880s, two important considerations had moved Rhodes towards a racist position - a politician's need for votes and an industrialist's need for a controlled labour force.

In 1887, decades before the Nationalist Party came to power in South Africa, he had stood before a packed House of Assembly in Cape Town and declared: "These are my politics on native affairs, and these are the policies of South Africa...The native is to be treated as a child and denied the franchise...We must adopt a system of despotism, such as works so well in India, in our relations with the barbarians of South Africa." Rhodes' view of racism was based on Darwin's theory of evolution, which was worked into a new doctrine of race. It accorded the white race the first position on the scale of "physical and human evolution." It has been said that "Darwin's work was a gift to the prophets of racism."

Rhodes and his ministers imposed apartheid in the towns. The non-whites who had long been an integral part of urban life now experienced segregation in schools, sports, prisons, hospitals, theatres and on public transportation. Rhodes' paper the *Cape Argus* suggested that Africans would serve well as "labouring machines." And Rhodes treated his black workers as such. In the "native" compound of Rhodes' De Beers Mining

Company over 11,000 African labourers were housed 20-25 to a room in corrugated-iron barracks, set out in a square and surrounded by a 12-foot fence, which was patrolled by company police with dogs. The whole area was roofed over by double-meshed wire netting and guard towers with searchlights placed at each corner.

### **The Afrikaner Broederbond (African League of Brothers)**

A powerful force among the Boers was the Afrikaner Broederbond, which was organized in 1918 in Johannesburg. Its main concern was the promotion of the Afrikaans culture, language, traditions and way of life. It was not directly linked to any political party, although, for a long period, it was, for all practical purposes, supportive of the National Party.

In 1934, Professor J.C. van Rooy, chairman of the Bond during the 1930s, sent a circular to members in which he stated that the key to South Africa's problems was not whether one party or another would obtain the whip-hand, "but whether the Afrikaner Broederbond shall govern South Africa." A document drawn up in 1944 revealed its nationalist-racist agenda. One article stated, "Non-whites will be restricted to non-white areas, for the advance of racial purity and the racially pure development of all segments of the society, consistent, of course, with proper respect to needs for labour." But in *Break Down the Walls: A Christian Cry for Biblical Justice* Dr. Johannes Verkuyl points out that not all members of the Afrikaner Brotherhood and the leadership of the National Party swallowed it as a whole. In fact, he notes, Dr. Malan, who led the National Party in those days, kept himself aloof from these ideological excesses, and indeed cautioned against them.

### **Reformed Churches' Position**

Apartheid was supported with varying consistency by three of South Africa's major churches, none of them affiliated with the South Africa Council of Churches. They are the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerken, the Nederduits Hervormde Kerk of South Africa, and the Gereformeerde Kerk of South Africa (the Dutch Reformed Churches, the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa, and the Reformed Church of South Africa). Consequently, they too advanced the idea that European cultural values in Africa should at all costs be protected, that the cultures of black Africa should not be destroyed and that gradual political and economic "enfranchisement" should be given to the blacks. They also went out of their way to back apartheid laws such as the one banning mixed marriages. They justified apartheid on Biblical grounds. They no longer perceived the church to be the visible embodiment of all God's redeemed people in Jesus. They thought that God intended people to be structurally apart in His church, organized separately as different races. But the commonly held notion that the Afrikaners supported it on the belief that blacks are doomed children of Ham did not find any defense in South African circles. According to Verkuyl, the ingredients for the religious foundation of apartheid are:

1. The Bible teaches that the differences between races are as fundamental as the unity of humanity, redemption in Christ, and the restoration of humanity in Him.
2. The story of the tower of Babel teaches that God's will is seen in the division of the people into separated communities.

3. Paul's speech to the Athenians forms another ingredient. It hinges on Paul's statement that God "defined the borders of their habitation" (Acts 17:26).

Although Verkuyl condemned apartheid as un-Biblical, he did note that no one can deny that within the framework of apartheid a good deal of good has been done for the nonwhite groups. Indeed, many who loyally supported apartheid were also in favour to improve the social and economic circumstances of the blacks. Between 1952 and 1972 the Nationalist government built more than 300,000 houses to accommodate people from the shantytowns.

### **Illegal Immigrants**

Another factor, which brought strong support for apartheid, was illegal immigration and urbanization. During and immediately after World War II there was a large influx of blacks into the urban areas, drawn by the jobs offered and higher wages paid by South African's rapidly growing industries. Large shantytowns developed around most of South Africa's major cities. They were accompanied by crime and primitive living conditions. In 1951 the total of illegal immigrants was approximately 600,000. The government tried to put a halt to it. It promised that its policy of apartheid would put a stop to the confusion caused by the influx of blacks into the cities. It started to apply segregation much more methodically and systematically than any of its predecessors. It passed, or refined, laws governing virtually every aspect of the lives of black, coloured and Indian South Africans. All South Africans were strictly classified according to race. The government firmly applied the infamous pass laws, which were intended to prevent illegal immigrations, that made it an offense for blacks from the rural areas to visit cities for longer than seventy-two hours without permission. The apartheid measures were strongly resented by the blacks and coloured, as well as some whites. The Criminal Laws Amendment Acts of 1953 introduced certain provisions, which were designed to stifle the rising wave of protest in the land. The measures to suppress protest were draconian.

### **Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd (1901-1966)**

Dr. Verwoerd has been called the "chief architect" of the so-called "grand apartheid." He was born in Amsterdam. After immigrating to South Africa with his parents, he spent his early career as lecturer and journalist. As editor of the nationalist *Die Transvaler* (1938-48), he opposed South Africa's entry into World War II. He was elected Senator in 1948, and became a minister of native affairs (1950). His relentless support for apartheid ensured his election as National Party leader in 1958, and as his country's sixth prime minister he pledged himself to the founding of a South African republic. His administration was marked by further development and ruthless application of the highly controversial apartheid policy. He also established the principle that all South Africa's black people were entitled to progress to full independence and self-determination within the homelands they had traditionally occupied.

Dr. Verwoerd was a brilliant man who utterly dominated his cabinet with his intellect and forceful personality. But with his rigid and unbending attitude he plunged South Africa into political isolation. At a Commonwealth meeting he argued that apartheid is not the same

as racial discrimination. He also stated apartheid was purely a domestic policy as far as South Africa was concerned and that members of the Commonwealth didn't have the right to interfere with each other's domestic issues. He was expected to accept in ten minutes a change of mind, which it had taken Europe a century to achieve. John Diefenbaker (1895-1979), Canada's prime minister at that time, was one of Verwoerd's fiercest critics. Verwoerd's government withdrew from the Commonwealth and South Africa became a republic in 1961. His period as prime minister was cut short on the 6th of September 1966, when he was stabbed to death at his seat in parliament by a demented messenger, Dimitri Tsafendas, a Greek immigrant.

## Double Standards

A white minority consensus democracy governed South Africa. Its authoritarian rule placed a check on and suppressed independent organizations. Racism was especially rampant and visible during the phase of petty apartheid (the fifties to the middle eighties) with all the infamous apartheid signs. Apartheid abused human rights, strengthened the rich at the expense of the poor. It led to the subversion of fundamental Christian principles.

Although apartheid politics had to be abolished, double standards were applied with fanatical devotion. In 1984, Dr. T. Adeyemo, General Secretary of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Madagascar pointed to the hypocrisy of African political leaders, who were involved in bribery and corruption, but were preoccupied with the demand for justice, dignity, equality and majority rule in Southern Africa with little or nothing said against the despotic rulers among their own ranks. Adeyemo asked, "Doesn't righteousness demand a fair denunciation of any form of wickedness wherever it operates?" Furthermore, many Commonwealth nations practiced their own form of apartheid. India with its "unofficial" caste system is one example. And all African states practiced racial policies of black nationalism and social engineering. In his book, *Modern Times*, Paul Johnson points out that throughout black Africa, the documentation of social control - work permits, internal and external passports, resident permits, expulsion orders - proliferated rapidly with independence.

Johan D. Tangelder  
November, 2003

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