

**“We must develop a social conscience which will make itself felt against this policy which is plainly disruptive of family life.”**

## **WHAT CAN WE DO? THE AFRICAN POINT OF VIEW**

By **FATHER RAKALE**



**WE NOW COME** to the most important and urgent question of all — what can we do? I can well remember Archbishop Clayton when he was Bishop of Johannesburg saying to some of his younger Clergy, “I agree with you. I do not like the Colour bar. It is a positive evil, but what do you think we should do about it?” Needless to say there was a stony silence. I suppose this is how some of us feel this afternoon, faced as we are with the same question after hearing about, and discussing for two days, some of the adverse effects of migratory labour on African Family life.

It is no exaggeration to say that this system is the cause of much suffering and blank misery to the African throughout this land. We are all agreed it must go and go as quickly as we can make it, but the question still remains — how are we to set about it? There is no point in deploring this system and of doing so in the strongest terms without at the same time trying to think how best we can rid ourselves of it.

### **No real hope**

Given the fact that one is an African, voteless and voiceless in the country of his birth, the naked truth is that the African feels that there is no real hope that there is anything he can do at present to put this mischief right, the more so that he is conscious — dreadfully conscious — that for more than half a century he has taken every legitimate means to improve his lot and that of his family, and to have these wrongs redressed, without success. Do we then wonder that he is almost in the depth of despair that he can ever reverse this system and all its associated evils? There seems to be little that he and his White friends who wish him well can do.

The more one thinks of this system the more it becomes clear that we should be certain in our minds and bring it home to others what is the true nature of man, for it is only after we have carefully considered what man is that we can rightly treat him as he should be treated. In

other words, we cannot know how man should be treated until we know who he is. What, then, is an African? Is he a man, or merely a specimen of manhood, or some other creature or animal?

### **Less than a human being**

Our treatment of anything in the last resort depends on what we think it is. Hence we treat plants and trees in one way, cats and dogs and baboons in another fashion and we do so simply because of what we think they are. To the question, what is an African? the answer is that he is a human being, a person, a man. Despite his colour he possesses the same dignity as other men and is a living image of his Creator. It is this Divine element in him which gives him his worth and his dignity. Apart from the adverse effect of migratory labour, “one of the worst things which anyone can ever face in this world is contempt”, Professor Brookes once said, “and contempt is the daily bread of the African in his own country, and to find one treated less than a human being is a terrible experience”. Migratory labour is an evil because it is the failure to recognize the sacredness of human personality which is in itself a mirror of the Divine Personality.

Man's life, because he is a human being, should therefore be conducted and ordered with this point in view. The State should not treat him as having value only in so far as he serves its political and economic ends, as the Totalitarian States do. All

**FATHER RAKALE** was born in Springs, and educated at St. Peter's School, Rosettenville, Johannesburg. He went straight from there to the Theological College at the Priory, where he became a clergyman.

He worked as a clergyman in Sophiatown for three years at the Church of Christ the King, and in 1943 he went to Rosettenville for novitiate, becoming a member of the Community of the Resurrection in 1947, after which he went to the headquarters of the Community at Mirfield, Yorkshire.

From 1948 to 1950, Father Rakale served at a Mission in Southern Rhodesia run by the Community of the Resurrection. Returning to Johannesburg in 1951, he was Warden of St. Peter's School until 1954, and thereafter head of the Community House at Orlando until 1958.

During the removals from Sophiatown under the Group Areas Act, Father Rakale was at the Church of Christ the King there, and in 1959 he went back to Mirfield, where he remained until June, 1963. Thereafter he returned to the Priory at Rosettenville, where he is at present.

men, we say, are equal. But in what are they equal? There is not a single instance in which they are, or in which any two of them are equal. Is the phrase "all men are equal" therefore, absolutely meaningless? I think not. All men are equal in the sense that they are all involved in being just one thing, namely man. If this fact is disputed, then it can only be that we have forgotten about forced labour camps in Russia and the scientific experiments on living men in German concentration camps of a few years ago. Speaking of equality, one writer, (I cannot recall his name nor his book) says "Something even more obviously practical than human equality is at stake, namely human rights". The phrase "rights of man" too often means what it is good, or humane or socially useful to concede to him. Rights are what man is entitled to, not what society is willing to give him. But concessions, however liberal, are not rights. Rights belong to man because he is man and are valid even against society. Unless they are this, they are not rights at all, but only a more or less hopeful expectation of society's kindness. But has man rights? That depends on what we think man is.

## Persistent demands

Any ordering of the life of the community which does not consider persons as persons is condemned. But we must not be only aggressive in condemnation. We must make constructive demands for justice on behalf of man and get rid of, once and for all, the system of migratory labour. We must not be discouraged or despair when the State, as so often, turns a deaf ear to our appeals. We should be persistent in our demands for a redress of this wrong. We should develop a social conscience which will make itself felt against this policy which is plainly disruptive to family life. We will probably provoke unpopularity and in some instances abuse when we speak boldly and act courageously against this measure, but in the end we shall obtain justice and freedom for the human family if we are faithful in carrying out this duty. We who are committed to rid this country of this system should also see that there are houses available for the worker and his family within his means so that the family can be brought up in health and happiness, decency and dignity proper to man. We should feel we have a responsibility in this matter the more so because most of South Africa has not. Now at anyrate we should do all we can to arouse public opinion which will lay it before the Government.

## Opportunities for full development

In conclusion, every man has his calling and sphere of work in the world. By its nature this calling sets the man who follows it in a particular relation to every human family. Certain political and social obligations fall on men alike; the use of *the franchise is one and the care for freedom and the rights of man is another*. Other obligations vary from man to man according to his calling. The professional man has his professional Association, the artisan his Trade Union, the trader or commercial man his grouping. Even the voteless and voiceless man has his own grouping in which decisions have to be taken for or against the human family.

These decisions should pass into some direct action in the interests of the general good of the family. This kind of action is desperately needed in South Africa today more than ever before, not only for a man and his wife but also for his children who should not be condemned to grow to maturity with their faculties stunted by migratory labour which denies them the opportunities for full development.