

In my previous article I discussed the responsibility - or lack of it - of the "Afrikaans" churches in South Africa for the parlous state of our society and alleged that a major share of the guilt must be attributed to them. This does not, however, completely exonerate the so-called "English" churches. They, too, must accept their fair share of the blame for the situation in which South African society finds itself. In this, the third article in this series, I propose to deal with this rather contentious subject.

By and large, the term "English churches" has, it would seem, come to mean what this term conjures up in the politically and ecclesiastically dominant Afrikaans mind, i.e. all strictly non-Afrikaans churches, but most specifically the Anglican Church, and, most terrifyingly, the Roman Catholic Church - the dreaded "Roomse Gevaar" - with the various Lutheran churches occupying a place somewhere on the fringes of the South African denominational spectrum.

LEFT IN THE LURCH BY THE CHURCH

The third in a series of articles on the Church in South Africa.

Cheap and facile generalisation is, of course, always a major danger in, dealing with something of this nature. Who, after all, are the "English" churches? By no means even as uniform a concept as the "Afrikaans" churches, who in themselves constitute no composite body such as the "D.R.C." (Dutch Reformed Church) to which English speakers are wont so glibly to refer.

When one speaks of the "English" churches, one may, in fact, only be making a linguistic distinction and refer to churches whose membership are essentially English-speaking - which would certainly exclude the German-speaking Lutheran Church in South Africa.

Conversely, one may be making a confessional distinction, derived from the fact that all the major "Afrikaans" churches confessionally adhere to the Reformed, i.e. Calvinist faith. This would again exclude the Lutherans, putting them into the "English" camp, but also causes grave complications as regards the Presbyterian Church (confessionally most intimately related to the "D.R.C."), the Congregational Church (which has just become more closely related to the churches of Reformed faith through the merger between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the International Congregational Council at Nairobi) and the Baptist Union which, politically speaking, in any case, stands far closer to the Afrikaans churches in their overt and covert support of the Nationalist government and its racial policy of separate development than does, for instance, the Presbyterian Church.

Another way in which basic disparities can be highlighted, of course, is to point to the distinction between the outspokenly evangelically-minded churches (sometimes verging on sheer pietism) and the more ecumenically-inclined churches. This distinction, for which there is factually a great measure of justification, cuts across so many other distinctions, however, that it complicates rather than solves the problem.

The "English churches", therefore, form a rather amorphous entity. But this amorphousness does not render them either anonymous or entirely guiltless.

They display, on the whole, certain common characteristics which are indicative of an ecclesiastical malaise peculiar to the non-Afrikaans-speaking sections of the Body of Christ in South Africa.

CLERGY/LAITY GAP

What almost universally strikes one about them, *in the first place, is that the English-speaking clergy, by and large, are almost vociferously outspoken in their criticism and condemnation of the government's apartheid policy; whilst their laity, though apparently assenting, quietly carry on running with the mainstream of political and social opinion in South Africa, except, as is now beginning to happen, when political and social events start touching their pockets economically. This certainly smacks of hypocrisy. One cannot cheer, sometimes even egg on, one's parish minister in his bold stand against immoral and un-Christian government practices and yet quietly (usually profitably?) carry on with the "South African way of life" and actively strive to maintain an ultimately untenable status quo. One cannot, on the one hand, shout: "Jolly well spoken, old chap!" and, on the other, bring financial and other pressures to bear on one's minister of religion on account of his disconcerting outspokenness. Too many "English" churchmen have I met who have been reduced to silence, acquiescence and impotence essentially because of the non-support of the members of their fold.*

This "English" ambivalence in approach and attitude also finds itself reflected in the very life of the Church itself. Ostensibly and sometimes almost provocatively most of the "English" churches welcome non-white members on an equal basis. But the instances of discriminatory practice in the running of English church schools have become

notorious on more than one occasion. And among the "English" churches it is not only in the Roman Catholic Church that one has recently discovered signs of discontent among non-white clergymen and lay members because they are virtually accorded only second-class citizenship in the Kingdom of Christ.

Again, if one starts looking for the real roots of this phenomenon, one finds that it is basically

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the laity of the "English" churches that neutralises all the good intentions of the clergy and acts as an agent of stultification and frustration. The roles appear to be directly reversed in the "Afrikaans" and in the "English" churches. In the former, the hierarchy are the dedicated apostles of apartheid and all its attendant evils, leading an often deliberately uninformed or misinformed laity along a (Calvinistically) predestined path of "separate development". In the "English" churches, he who pays the piper, calls the tune and an essentially apartheid-loving laity is effectively pressuring the well-meaning clergy into impotence.

Sadly, it would seem that perhaps the greatest talent of the "English" churches has itself become a trap reducing them to virtual imprisonment in their own house of the spirit. One refers, of course, to the tradition of enlightened liberalism which is one of the main characteristics of the English-speaking churches and which significantly includes their loyalty to the English tradition of civil liberty and political equality. Their impassioned defence of these values through all the years of their history in South Africa, even in the face of harsh opposition by the civil authorities, has had a most decided and beneficial influence on the struggle for a just society in this country.

SPIRITUAL ARROGANCE

This very excellence has, however, all too often led them into the temptation of spiritual arrogance. All along there has been an inclination to look down upon their dour and obdurate Afrikaner neighbours and to refer disparagingly to their Old Testament style of theology which appears perennially to be bogged down in the 17th century. This caused Afrikanerdom to withdraw even further into their spiritual laager, brought about a hardening of hyper-Calvinist attitudes and led to an increasing distrust of all "liberalists" and "humanists", i.e. of the "English" themselves. Lofty liberalist idealism also unfortunately led the English-speakers to make

light of and even to disregard the harsh realities and exigencies of the South African situation which so deeply concerned the Afrikaners. For, being generally less affluent than the English, the Afrikaners were always compelled to live closer to the realities and accordingly started regarding themselves as far greater realists than their English fellow-countrymen. This in turn, led to a kind of counter-arrogance among the Afrikaners which only drove the wedge in deeper between the two groups and ultimately caused the almost complete cessation of all meaningful dialogue between them - on the church level in any case.

THE THIRD FORCE

Neither side is apparently prepared to make any real concession to accommodate the other and both share in the guilt for this unhappy state of affairs which can only be regarded as most gravely detrimental to the cause of Christ and His Kingdom; a state of affairs, incidentally also, which has been partly responsible for the emergence of that remarkable "third force" on the level of the churches: the rapidly growing body of African Independent Churches.

The measure in which the "Afrikaans" churches have through their obduracy and ideological intransigence, been responsible for the seemingly unbridgeable gulf between the two church groups has already received wide attention. Far less notice has been taken of the quite considerable measure of guilt attaching to the "English" churches in this connection. They can, of course, be partially forgiven because they have in a very real sense been hamstrung by history - most eye-catchingly in the persons of men like Reed and Van der Kemp of the London Missionary Society and later of contentious personalities like Reeves, Huddleston and De Blank - which caused Afrikaner suspicion, resentment and distrust to harden so disastrously.

But they are by no means blameless. Whilst it can be said of many Afrikaans churchmen that they have made sincere attempts to come to an understanding of the English liberal mind, one knows of too few among their counterparts who have made any real effort to find out what makes the Afrikaner tick, ecclesiastically and theologically in any case. The only notice taken of him has all too frequently been only for the purpose of criticising and condemning, not appreciating and objectively appraising: One fails to understand how such barely concealed condescension, such unappraising readiness to judge and condemn, can be reconciled with the true spirit of liberalism. One also fails to see how, with such a highhanded approach to the foibles of their fellow-Christians, any compromise can ever be achieved the Pharisees and the Publicans.

And such a compromise *must* be achieved if the *una sancta* is ever going to become a meaningful concept and reality in our country.