



CHALLENGES ON THE FUTURE OF THE AFRICAN YOUTH IN THE CHURCH TODAY. THE PEACE CHALLENGE TO SOUTH AFRICA. BY Dr. NICO SMITH

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRESENT SOUTH AFRICAN SITUATION

The French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, wrote in an introduction to a book by a Ghanaian author, "decolonizing the mind of the African," that colonizers right through history always had lives. Colonizers go to a country, colonize it and build a world of their own, according to their liking and usually much more luxurious than the countries where they came from. To build this world, they use the colonized people, exploit them and keep them in a powerless position. The colonizers eventually exclude the colonized people from the world they have built for themselves. They thus live their own convenient lives with the colonized people excluded socially but included as servants (slaves). This is their own life, their second life they achieved as follows: They structure society such that the colonized people are totally dependent on the colonizer. Eventually the colonized people behave that they cannot live without the colonizer, that all good things come from the colonizer and if the colonizer were not there, they the colonized, would have killed one another. The colonizer thus has his second life in the lives of the colonized people.

When we look at the situation in South Africa we find

how correct the observation of Sartre was. In 1652 the colonizer from Europe started to enter the Southern region of Africa. They gradually colonized the whole southern point of Africa, built their own luxurious world there and eventually excluded the colonized people from that part of the world in a final and constitutional way, a constitution they

themselves have created and implemented, in 1948, homelands were installed and a law for race classification was introduced by which every Black person in South Africa had to register as a citizen of one of those homelands. Those Blacks who found themselves outside the homelands were disowned from all the rights they previously had enjoyed. Through the influx control Act the blacks living in the homelands were locked up in areas which represented only thirteen percent of the total surface of the country, only those who were needed in the colonized areas, had to receive special permission to be present in the so-called white areas in South Africa. For the Black families who lived in the white areas before 1948,



special provision was made. This provision was the implementation of the Group Areas Act through which blacks could only live in certain black townships where they would have no property rights. Through this act more than three million blacks were resettled which means that they were forced to leave living areas in which many of them were living for generations already. They had to go and live in townships which were so-called matchbox homes were provided to them. These matchbox four roomed houses, were built on very small plots. "We were packed like sardines", one of the inhabitants of the township where I live, told me. In these townships a minimum



of facilities were provided and no one was allowed to alter a single brick in those houses, add anything to it or erect any type of structure in the backyard. I have been told that in a circular letter from the Department of Native Affairs as the Government Department which was responsible for handling the affairs of the Blacks were called the administrative Boards which administered the Black townships, were told to supply only the absolute minimum facilities in those townships in order to make it as inconvenient for the blacks in the so-called white areas. Because then they will develop the desire to return to the homelands. The result was that no parks, no playgrounds, no sport fields, no restaurants, cinemas, etc, etc were provided. The Blacks black townships became slave (labour camps) where blacks were locked up by night through laws which prevented them from going down town to the white city or entering any of the recreational facilities which they (the blacks) helped to create. The only recreational facilities which the blacks could enjoy and were available to them, were sex and alcohol and for both they are blamed for by the whites- having too many children and being drunkards.

2. PREDICTION FOR THE FUTURE OF SOUTH AFRICA

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant stated in an essay on "Continuous Peace" that peace in the world can only be achieved along one or

two ways. First of all the rationality and the morality of the political leaders in a conflict situation must be of such a nature that they are able to sit around a negotiation table and iron out their points of conflicts. Fortunately, he said, most of the conflicts in the world are solved that way. But when the rationality and morality of the political leaders have degenerated to such an extent that they can't sit around the negotiation table, the only way to achieve peace is through catastrophe of such magnitude that it forces conflicting parties to make peace.

Looking at the South African situation, I have reason to believe that the rationality and morality of the white political leaders in the country have degenerated to such an extent that they are totally unaware of the real issues at stake. This become evident from the fact the Nationalist Government in South Africa keeps on believing that a programme of Reform has eliminated (dismantled) Apartheid and is changing political dispensation to fit the political aspirations of the blacks. And what the Government has done so far in bringing about reform has already caused some of the Nationalist members of parliament to break away from the Party and constituted a new party, the Conservative Party. The leaders of this new party promises the white electorates that should take over Government, they will return to the old ways of the real and true Apartheid. This Conservative Party is already gaining support at a frightening tempo which witnesses the fact that also the whites in the country have

become completely irrational.

The Nationalist Government, in trying to sell its reform policy to the Black people, are at present pumping millions of rands into the Black townships in order to convince the Blacks that the Government has good intentions with them. They, the blacks, must therefore be willing to cooperate with the Government and everything will be well with them. The main real intention of the Government, however, is to get the blacks to participate in the coming elections for local councils which is to take place in October, 1988.

What are the effects of this total onslaught on the shoulders of the Black people by the Government?

It now becomes clear to what extent the colonizers have succeeded in colonizing the minds of the Blacks. In the black townships there are the elderly people, above the age of thirty five saying that blacks have to be thankful for what the government is now willing to do for them. So many things have been changed by the government and that must be appreciated. They are willing to accept things and be satisfied.

But an interesting phenomenon appears in the townships. People under the age of thirty five are in no way to accept the good things and trust the intentions of the government. On the contrary, they are even more in resistance to what the government is trying to achieve. Why is there such a difference in approach? What the colonizers never considered was



that by removing blacks from their own vicinity, they have taken them out of reach of their own colonizing power. Young people under the age of thirty five have indeed completely decolonized minds. They know that the colonizers will do every possible thing to keep in bondage. They realize that there is only one way towards real liberation and that is total onslaught against the total onslaught on their minds. The flames of freedom which is burning in their hearts is not to be extinguished, not with all the guns they have available in South Africa.

It was the resistance by the youth in the townships which eventually forced the government to declare a state of emergency. This the government had to do in order to be able to continue with its programme of so-called reform. Since the state of emergency had been declared, five different categories of weapon carrying groups are controlling the people in the townships. The unrest had faded out according to the government. But it is a rest at gun-point. It is a rest only on the surface. If you listen carefully you hear the thundering continuing underneath this restful surface. The struggle is continuing though not on the surface but in the hearts and minds of the black youth in South Africa.

Immanuel Kant said that when rationality and morality of political leaders are not able to achieve peace, the only way left is the way of catastrophe. As it seems that the white political leaders have already made a choice

for disaster, we have to look at the possible nature of the catastrophe the country is heading for. In this connection there are different scenarios disaster, which to my conviction has become inevitable, may come about. Let us consider a few.

1. The first scenario is that the present regime will continue to put into action its present programme to reform. The content of this programme of course is as even Gatsha Buthelezi said, the best kept secret in South Africa. But it seems that the state president Mr Botha, will from time to time make certain announcements on what the government or rather he has in mind for the future. So for instance he has recently announced in parliament that he is going to appoint a Prime Minister who may be a black person. It may be an indication that they have in mind to bring a person like Gatsha Buthelezi into parliament in order to convince some blacks still having colonized minds that they are going to give the blacks participation in the political dispensation.

These announcements by the State President will cause a growing fear and uncertainty in the minds of the whites. This may increase the support for the conservative party which may very likely take over their government at the next general elections for the whites. Such a take over may bring about two possible reactions. From the side of the State President it may force him to call into existence a military junta. He has at least a great deal of confidence that the army will stand behind him. From the

side of the blacks, a take over of the government by the conservative party can only speed up their total resistance in a revolutionary way. I don't and can't believe that blacks in South Africa will be willing to accept yet another return to the Verwoerdian type of Apartheid. It may happen then that all over the country blacks will organize a complete stay-away for an unlimited time- until the regime has been forced to their knees. Another possible scenario is that an application of sanctions against South Africa will bring an end to the regime within five years. The possibility of total sanctions from the side of the western countries seems however very unlikely. Should it nevertheless perhaps happen, it is still a debatable issue whether the South African regime will be able to survive in spite of sanctions. Some African economists believe that the country has enough internal strength and potential to survive another fifteen years after total sanctions have been applied. This still remains a debatable question.

A last and most frightening scenario is that a continuous deepening of the spiral violence will take place. Continuous outbreaks of violence will occur in which more and more people will die. This may continue for many many years. One thing is certain- the struggle for liberation will not end. Nothing can and will stop it again.

3. PRESCRIPTION FOR HEALING OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN DISEASE



What are possible solutions for the conflict in South Africa? Most of the people will of course say: only a continuous revolution will eventually solve the problem. Of course this is true and one can say it without being a Marxist. Pure intellectual abilities, even limited intellectual abilities, can tell a person, if he/she is not blinded by the ideology of Apartheid, that the revolution which has already started will not end until all the people in South Africa, oppressed and oppressors are liberated.

From a political point of view it is clear that there can be and never will be a solution without the political parties of the Blacks unbanned and the political prisoners released. Only then will authentic negotiations for a new political dispensation to start. If the Western countries may come to their senses in time, which seems unlikely, they may force the South African regime to the negotiation table with the authentic Black leaders. At present the western governments still have a staunch confidence in their white partner in South Africa and are naive enough to believe that the government is on the way towards a solution, namely change and therefore political stability.

But what is the challenge and responsibility of the churches in this connection? The most painful tragedy about South Africa is the fact that the churches, not Christianity have failed to fulfill their task in the country. They have thus failed both to

God and the people. It is not the Christian faith which has failed. I believe the Christian faith contains the potential to bring about solutions to any conflict between people in this world. It has the power to reconcile people and to create justice and peace in our world. In a joint communique released by leaders of the African National Congress and the leaders of the black Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, they have stated clearly that it can't be expected from the church to align itself with any political party in the country. But the church, if it claims to be a church, has the responsibility to be faithful to its own nature namely to work for justice and peace in this world. In this, the churches in South Africa has failed. Considering the fact that at least eighty percent of all the inhabitants of the country belong to a christian church, it is sad and really tragedy that in such a country the evil of apartheid could develop and be continued to the present in spite of the presence of the churches.

What can and must then the church do? I want to draw your attention in this connection towards the master of all philosophers as I have drawn your attention to two philosophers in the previous points. I want to remind you of the words Him the founder of our faith and the church, Jesus Christ the son of God, namely: "Happy are those who work for peace for God will call them His children." (Matthew 5:9) older translations read: Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the children of God". Peacemaking is some-

thing very different from peace-loving. There are many peace-loving people in our world-too many of them. They love peace but they don't want to do anything about it. They are like a young man loving a girl but doesn't want to make love with her. Peacemaking in the same way means involvement and involvement means making something working for peace.

To make peace in our world means that the church has to be involved in politics. It is one of the severe damages which white missionaries have done to our people of South Africa, namely to teach them that Christianity shouldn't be involved in politics. In that way they were violating Christ's words and His very command to His followers. It is said that this indoctrination which was imposed by the white missionaries is still being continued in the minds of Christians in independent countries of Africa, while their countries are decolonized the Christians still have colonized minds. They follow the instructions of the white missionaries as if all those instructions were directly given from God. How hypocritical the white missionaries were! While they or many of them were themselves deeply involved in politics by supporting the colonial powers and even cooperated with the colonial powers, they taught the African Christians not to be involved in politics.

What must be the nature of the Christians involvement in the politics of their country? I believe that they must always be aware of the fact



that although they are involved in the politics, they have a special responsibility to fulfil namely to be peacemakers. And they can only be peacemakers if they resist the evil (devil) within whatever political involvement they may have. Here the words of Jesus Christ are again applicable, namely, "You are the salt of the earth... you are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:13,14) In every aspect of society the Christians must shed light around them helping people to see the way. But they also have to be the salt and the work of the salt is to prevent that evil will have its way. This function of the salt can cause a lot of pain. Whenever you rub salt into a wound, it is very painful but it purifies and therefore heals. If you fulfil this function of peacemaking some people will perhaps call you a marxist or a communist or a radical. It doesn't matter what people say or think about you. It is only what God say about you that is important. And Jesus said, if you are peacemakers, God will call you His children. To the youth in Africa as a whole, I want to bring to their attention that in the year 2000 Africa will have the largest number of Christians of all the continents. What type of Christianity will it be? Are we going to allow Christians be corrupted as Christianity in the western world? To the young Christians I want to say stand behind your church leaders in their struggle for justice and peace. Don't allow the regime to create suspicion against the leaders. Support those

leaders who have the courage to resist the evil and to be the light and salt to the people. I also want to call upon young African Christians to draw young white Christians into the struggle for justice and peace. Be patient with the young white Christians. Remember that they are kept ignorant., They do not know the African life. They need to be informed and even rechristianised. They have to be aware of the fact that they can't claim to be Christians if they are not willing to work for justice and peace in this world. Even if they belong to the church, God won't call them His children if they are not peacemakers. And peace cannot be brought without justice being done. The struggle for justice and peace in South Africa had been long enough entirely a struggle by blacks. It needs to become a united struggle and together we will overcome.

To the Christian youth in the rest of Africa I would also like to say two things: first of all liberate yourselves from all forms of colonized thinking in your faith. Do not just allow the ways, traditions and customs as they were handed over to you by the white missionaries. Rethink your faith within your own situation, context, culture, etc. Be dew-breakers into new ways of understanding Christian faith. (A dew-breaker is someone standing up early in the morning and being first to leave his footsteps on the grasses covered by dew).

In becoming dew-breakers in new ways of understanding Christian faith, also help especially the leader people in the churches to follow in your

footsteps in order to develop decolonized minds in them as well.

Secondly be deeply involved in the development of God's creation with all the riches which God has put into his creation. In your country there are many different kinds of such riches. Help your fellow-country citizens to explore those riches in order to improve the quality of life more meaningful and the world more human. But always remember that in all forms of involvement, you have to be present as salt and light. As the salt, you have the responsibility to protect life in your country against decay and make life tasteful to God's people. As light you have to reflect the light of the light of the world, Jesus Christ the Lord. In His light which you have to reflect, people will see the way towards developing into what God wants them to be.

Conclusion

According to recent estimations Africa will be the continent with the largest number of Christians in the world at the year 2000. What a wonderful opportunity the church has to influence the minds and thinking and therefore also the actions of the people. I plead with you not to corrupt Christianity as the western countries have done during the past two centuries. Take care of the Christian faith and above all be faithful followers of Christ Himself, our Lord and Saviour, the king of this world.

