

# HOW U.S. EVANGELICALS BLESS APARTHEID

**“People abroad don’t understand our problems here,”** said the deacon of Johannesburg’s largest American-style Pentecostal church. We were sipping tea in the living room of his comfortable suburban home in an immaculate white enclave of the city. Through a window I saw the deacon’s garden boy, a black man in forties, cleaning out the swimming pool with a net fixed on a long pole. A new Mercedes was parked in the driveway.

**“Unlike your country,”** he went on, **“the blacks here are not a minority. One person, one vote just isn’t practical in the South African situation. There is no political solution to this demand.”**

Nevertheless, the deacon, a prosperous businessman, did not seem apprehensive about the bonfire to come. **“Someday, we will be recognized as a model for race relations all over the world,”** he said with eerie fervor. **“God is the only solution for South Africa.”**

But whose God? President Botha’s or Bishop Tutu’s? The God of apartheid or the God of liberation? In a giant step backward for Good Samaritanism the Big Three of American evangelism — Jerry Falwell, Jimmy Swaggart, and presidential candidate Pat Robertson — have been chosen Botha’s idol. Although all have officially deplored the masonries of South African segregation, they support the Pretoria regime in the sacred name of national security.

As Pastor Falwell portrayed

the crisis in a Moral Majority Express Gram: **“Communist terrorists are openly threatening to kill me and my family because of my campaign to prevent the Soviet Union from taking over the vital minerals, strategic sea lanes, and naval bases of South Africa . . . . Please send your \$100, \$25 gift now . . . .”**

Since the only alternative to Botha, in the geopolitical theology of the right, is a Communist bloodbath, Falwell urges mere prayers instead of protest against apartheid.

As a practiced renderer unto Caesar, however, Falwell polluted the national debate over economic sanctions and disinvestment in the summer of 1985, when he called Bishop Tutu **“a phony”** and appealed to fellow Americans to prop up the all-white government by buying Krugerrands. This solidarity was the result of an

authoritative five-and-a-half-day fact-finding tour of the troubled country. Falwell, a former segregationist himself, dared to claim that he met not a single black soul in South Africa who wanted to squeeze reform out of Pretoria by applying financial pressure. Since he hung out with members of the ruling party, perhaps his contacts were as limited as his stay.

Despite the moral isolation of the Botha regime, American evangelist-from hard-boiled fundamentalist to tongues-talking Pentecostals have made communion with the white cause in South Africa. The fruits of this shameful connection were apparent when I visited the country for five weeks last spring.

Jimmy Swaggart is the most popular American evangelist in South Africa. He has a large office and spiritual super market in Johannesburg, where his tapes, records, books, and pamphlets are for sale to the faithful, blacks and whites alike love brother Swaggart’s music. Since his fantastic apocalypticism serves the interest of the regime, he gets plenty of exposure on the state controlled television.

For instance, the South African Broadcasting — **continued to page 28**

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Company aired a tape of a scary Swaggart sermon just as the government announced a state of emergency in June of 1986. Blacks whom I interviewed viewed Swaggart's ravings as political

would soon be raptured into heaven. They would escape the terrible tribulation period when "the heavyweight champion of all the ages is going to come back" and destroy Russia.

Swaggart has actually put down roots in South Africa by

theological foundation for its war against the African National Congress(ANC), the illegal occupation of Namibia, and any abuse of human rights.

But not all native Evangelicals accept the political theology sponsored by the white state and blessed by

*Church leaders leading a funeral procession of a victim of state terror in Cape Town.*



propaganda. "The conflict that is coming is not just for a tiny portion of the globe," he preached. "It is for the entire planet, and that includes South Africa. And to be honest with you, you are a prime target, because there are few countries on the entire continent of Africa that hold up the Bible and Jesus Christ."

Swaggart described the land of apartheid as a fundamentalist paradise where teachers could pray and read scripture in their classrooms and where abortion is outlawed. Their nation was so godly. "They hate Israel," he said, "for the same reason they don't like South Africa." But he assured his audience that if they believed in Jesus, they

helping to fund a new Assembly of God bible college outside Cape Town. Only after the American Pentecostal who runs the school signed a statement denouncing the anti-apartheid World Council of Churches (considered a Communist front by Botha's people and by our own Religious Right) did the government grant a multiracial charter. When I stopped by the campus last April, I learned that the student body included just a few whites.

Since the biblical justification for segregation has been abandoned even by the mainline Dutch Reform Church, the American brand of Evangelicism has furnished South Africa with a new

American missionaries. A group of 132 ministers who call themselves Concerned Evangelicals, most of them from the black township of Soweto, recently published a detailed critique of their own kind. Many evangelical churches and evangelistic groups, especially those organised by whites (here or in the USA) preach the gospel to blacks to make them submissive to the oppressive apartheid system of South Africa'. declared the pamphlet, entitled *Evangelical Witness in South Africa*. We as Concerned Evangelicals have been outraged by the

way in which American Evangelists like Jimmy Swaggart came here to South Africa in the mist of our pain and suffering, even unto death, and pronounce that 'apartheid is dead'.

I dropped in on a meeting of the group in a Sowetan church hall, Chickens ran free in the courtyard. Outside, in the dusty street, children played with toy cars crafted from wire and tin cans salvaged from the ubiquitous garbage heaps. Soweto is guarded by two nearby military bases. Occasionally, brown-uniformed white "troopies" would drive by on patrol. Here the state of emergency was an everyday reality.

The black Evangelical I spoke to felt betrayed by their American colleagues especially Jimmy Swaggart. I showed Brother Frans, one of the Sowetan ministers, an article written by Swaggart in the July 1985 issue of his magazine, *The Evangelist*. Frans was incensed by the following passage:

"Some 300 years ago, when the country of South Africa was formed, the whites built this country with ingenuity, sacrifice, and hard work. And through these last three centuries, more and more blacks opting for the good jobs and the higher wages in South Africa migrated in that direction. Consequently, there are now six or seven times more blacks in South Africa than there are whites. And because of this mistake about it, the whites have contributed to the suffering of South Africa but

far and away, it was the ingenuity, the sacrifice, and the hard work of the whites that made this country the envy of all of Africa

"I didn't know that he is as racist as he is," said Frans, like Swaggart, a Pentecostal. There is a South African edition of *The Evangelist*, but no one in the hall remembered seeing this particular issue. "Swaggart is saying things that he does not know," said Frans, shaking his head. "It is only a racist who can say these kind of things. It's very clear that America, as justified by you Evangelicals, is fighting an ideological warfare in southern Africa against the Soviets but at our expense. Your government has an interest in the status quo, and they benefit from apartheid,"

Ministers like the ones I encountered in Soweto are doubly suspicious about American evangelical groups. Several of them mentioned their fears of secret links to the C.I.A. This is not paranoia. The late William Casey was a good friend of South African intelligence. Reversing Jimmy Carter's policy of non-cooperation, Casey shared sensitive information with the Botha government, including material on the A.N.C.

What American Evangelicals really needed in order to sell accommodation toward apartheid is the prophetic equivalent of Bishop Tutu. But where could they find a black holy man of renown in South Africa who would condemn churches of protest and lay hands on the current regime? If bishop Isaac Mokoena did not exist, surely

P.W. Botha or Jerry Falwell would never have invented him. Despite less than distinguished credentials and brushes with scandal, Bishop Mokoena has been plucked from the obscurity of the Reformed Independent that he received the prestigious Decoration of Meritorious Service, an award bestowed on no other member of his race last year but graciously granted to the wives of the present and past presidents.

The American sponsors of Bishop Mokoena were willing to overlook his record and present him as the great black hope at the annual convention of the National Religious Broadcasters in 1986 and 1987.

The executives of N.R.B. have political muscle. Their various networks saturate the United States, and their satellites literally cover the earth. South Africa, trying to woo Evangelicals, has had a booth on the N.R.B. exhibition floor for the last two years. Bishop Mokoena was introduced to the press at the 1986 gathering as "a man who represents 4.5 million blacks." The small black figure was escorted by two bull-like Afrikaners who turned out to be Pentecostal ministers.

"I have come to appeal to you to speak to your congressman, speak to your senator, ask him to offer some words of encouragement to the President of the United States to step up investments, not only within the present areas of South Africa but also in the homelands," announced

Bishop Mokoena, who proceeded to berate the effort to impose sanctions on South Africa.

A hopeless proselytizer of the terrible status quo in his country, Bishop Mokoena has wandered the globe meeting right-wing leaders, arguing against sanctions, declaring the end of apartheid, and attacking genuine black leaders like Bishop Tutu. ("The Nobel peace prize for such a man is an insult to the black Christians of South Africa," he insisted in 1984.)

Naturally, Ronald Reagan, an arch opponent of sanctions before Congress forced the issue in 1986, was informed of this ecclesiastical ally. Reagan once referred to the bishop in the bumbling press conference in reply on August 13, 1986: "There are religious leaders, another one, another bishop you never heard of him, I don't know whether I pronounce his name right, but it's, I think Moreno or Monorem. I'm going to have to find out how they, what sound they attach to some of their letters. But he's the leader of some 4.5 million Christians there and all of them are deadly, opposed to sanctions."

In fact, the bishop is not the shepherd of 4.5 million independent Christians, according to Professor G.C. Oosthuizen, head of the Research Institute on Black

Independent Churches at the University of Zululand, who dismissed the inflated figure in the Johannesburg Star. "Bishop Mokoena is talking

expulsions. "He is practicing sexual intercourse with the male students of the college," the petition stated in the most serious complaint. Reached



*South African clergy agree with the freedom Charter.*

nonsense by claiming he can speak on behalf of four million blacks in South Africa," said Professor Oosthuizen. "He represents only a small group of a few thousand."

The bona fides of the bishop are tainted by an imbroglio involving sex and money. In 1979, Mokoena was accused of financial mismanagement and committing "unnatural sex acts" in papers submitted to the Supreme Court in Johannesburg in an attempt to ban him from running the South African Theological College of Independent Churches, which he founded and chaired. Fifty-two of the young theologians at the school signed a petition charging him with a multitude of malfeasances, from non-payment of students allowances to unwarranted

by telephone in Johannesburg, Mokoena said that he had been vindicated by the court, but he refused to discuss the specifics of the case or any other incidents in his past over long distance lines. "It's a pack of lies," the prelate shouted. Mokoena was restored to his post at the college and remains there today.

In 1986, the benevolent bishop attempted to establish a new "moderate" multiracial political party, along with Thamsanqa Linda, former mayor of Ibhayi, a township near Port Elizabeth, he formed the United Christian Conciliation Party (U.C.C.P.).

I passed by the headquarters on the 19th floor of a downtown-Johannesburg

building. The debris of a campaign celebration of some sort still littered one of the empty rooms. The U.C.C.P. had no literature, posters, or leaflets. Yet the election was only a week away. In fact it had no candidates running in the all-white election. The party appeared to be nothing more than a front. A couple of Mokoena's staff casually referred to personal connections at John Vorster Square, the Johannesburg headquarters of the South African police.

All this activity on behalf of the regime has made the bishop a subject of assassination by other blacks. In the summer of 1986, gunmen broke into Mokoena's church, mistook the assistant pastor for him, and shot the unlucky man dead. Later in November another mob of blacks kidnapped the bishop from his car, beat him up, and dumped him outside Johannesburg.

Bishop Mokoena is hardly the only South African black making celebrity tours of the United States. Members of the cabinet of the Ciskei, one of the so called homelands, flew to Southern California to appear on a Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) Praise-a-Thon in 1986. Prior to this airlift, Ciskei granted TBN permission to build and operate a TV station there. The South African ambassador to the Ciskei helped TBN with arrangements.

Three Christian pro-government blacks appeared on Pat Robertson's "The 700 Club" last summer. Two were

evangelical ministers, the third, a young woman, claimed to have been a member of the AN.C. She dropped out and turned herself in to the police after she was "born again." One of the others, Rev. Barney Mabaso, said that "the spirit of the ANC is the spirit of anti-christ."

Later, the same three some, along with their Afrikaner interpreter, turned up on Capitol Hill for a meeting with the House Republican Study Committee, where Mabaso characterized Tutu and the ANC as "wolves in sheep's clothing" and went around the bend saying that Tutu supported "drunkenness and immorality and murdering."

Pat Robertson, the televangelist who would be president, has a TV station in the homeland of Bophuthatswana in north central South Africa. Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) aims its signal at occupied Namibia. The Afrikaans version of "The 700 Club" is aimed at the white rulers of that embattled country.

Robertson has a special interest in the frontline states. He has even sent a video crew into Marxist-run Mozambique with a RENAMO (Resistencia Nacional Mozambicana) commando team. RENAMO is a rebel group that has received weapons and direction from Pretoria and gained a reputation for terrorism. The CBN crew filmed RENAMO guerrillas planting antipersonnel mines and blowing up a tree to block passage.

Robertson a regular at the

Reagan White House and a "personal friend" of Oliver North, aired several pro-South African government segments over the last few years. Ben Kinchlow, the black co-host of the "the 700 Club," visited South Africa and, like Falwell, was shown around by government guides. Kinchlow later reported to his viewers back home that he personally experienced no racism in South Africa.

Almost all American evangelical organizations in South Africa practice apartheid, according to Concerned Evangelicals. "They hold separate services for different race groups for mythical claims of language and cultural differences," the 132 ministers charge in their joint accuse. Campus Crusade for Christ (C.C.C.), founded by Reagan pal Bill Bright during the early years of the cold war, has functioned in South Africa since 1972. This California transplant thrived by evangelizing affluent Afrikaans-speaking businessmen and high-level government officials.

In 1983, the C.C.C. in South Africa split into two racially segregated field operations with two different names. The whites and Asians got to keep the original title, while the blacks had to settle for the less catch Life Ministry of South Africa.

Apparently, the schism was initiated by the black crusaders themselves. According to Brother Frans, a former C.C.C. disciple now with Concerned Evangelicals, some of the blacks felt like second-



*Anglican Ministers at a funeral of activists slain by the fascist junta.*

class citizens, and they took hits from their own people for labouring in white-bosser vineyards.

This racial distinction extends to separate but unequal treasuries. The Afrikaners have a much larger budget than their poorer black brothers.

Back at C.C.C. headquarters in St Bernardino, spokesman Don Beehler defended the colour line in the South African branch: "We recognize that they [South Africans] are in a better position than Americans to deal with the cultural difficulties and complexities in their country." Even so, Beehler denied that the C.C.C. approved or practiced apartheid, which means apartness in Afrikaans. Eager to emphasize the racial harmony behind the segregation, Beehler noted that the Afrikaners and blacks "spend time together in

conferences, retreats, and prayer." as for the finances, he said that each racial group depended on its own base of support, emphasizing that all American resources went to the blacks.

In yet another Hands Across Apartheid programme, cadres of Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship International, flew to South Africa for a two-week fact-finding mission, with the help of the South African Tourism Corporation. A 30-minute video produced and narrated by Ohio Full Gospel Businessmen has close ties to the Reagan administration. The President himself claimed that the prayers of the F.G.B.'s on his staff healed a nasty ulcer in 1973 when he was governor of California.

South Africa's officials are pleased with the result of their outreach to American Evangelicals. "They have been

a great help to our country in her hour of need, said one manning the tourism booth at the national Religious Broadcasters convention last year. "They have been very successful. People return to the United States with a proper understanding of the South African situation."

American Evangelicals have fanned the fires of hatred in South Africa by labeling all religious critics of the apartheid system "apostate" followers of the Antichrist simply because of their policies of the state. They have made the following deadly statement: Resistance to Botha equals Communism. That makes every black protester a potential subversive and a possible target of repression. Once dehumanised ideological enemies can be killed more easily with a clear conscience. Such is the glory of a holy war.