

## 2. THE MORAL COST

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A SINGLE decade is a brief period in the perspective of history. Still it is sufficiently long for us to make some estimate of the events in it. Thus it is that, although it may take many decades, as the authors of apartheid assert, for the whole pattern of their policy to be clearly seen, we have witnessed enough of the application of apartheid to enable us to gain some idea of the moral costliness of what is now taking place in South Africa.

But before doing so we must be clear as to the ethical standards by which we are going to measure its cost. For me, as you will expect, those standards are Christian; standards which assume the validity of the Christian claim about Jesus Christ and the consequent view that Christianity has of the nature and destiny of human beings. I say this, not to demand acceptance of the Christian claims, still less to argue them, but to point out the basis on which Christian ethics rest. Further, we have to recognize that, while Christian ethics have grown out of Hebrew ethics, Christian ethics are essentially an ethic of the Spirit, because they arise as the consequence of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost—which was at once both a deeply personal and a corporate experience, and out of which was created an entirely new sense of “togetherness” which the Scriptures describe as “fellowship”. It was out of this condition that the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity made their appearance. Although we cannot deal with them in detail, it is important for our purpose to notice in passing one of the important truths that these virtues safeguarded. They served to protect the social character of the Christian ethic. While they are primarily to be expressed towards God, they can never be so expressed by an individual in isolation from his fellows. “He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” No doubt the “brother” in this question refers in the first place to the fellow-believers, but the Christian must exhibit this same faith, hope and love that he expresses towards God through his relations with other Christians, towards all mankind. This is important for our evaluation of the moral costliness of apartheid, for from the beginning Christian ethics

have had, among others, two abiding characteristics. In the first place Christian ethics are universal in their application. In Christ the barriers between men are destroyed. Certainly this conviction was not accepted without a fierce struggle within the Christian community. But the important thing is that it was, after a short time, accepted. The claim of the Christian ethic transcends the claims of race, sex, and class. Secondly, Christian ethics are internal rather than external. In other words, people are to be ready to do the work that falls to them without anxiously looking out for their own interests, conscious that it is a privilege to be allowed to serve God at all. By implication this means the recognition that other people have interests and rights which must be respected. So it is that when I attempt to evaluate the moral cost of apartheid, I have all this, and much more, in mind.

It would be easy to dismiss apartheid as being so utterly immoral that it can be written off as a complete loss. But to do that would, I believe, be completely irresponsible, for the consequences of human actions are rarely completely evil, just as they are never completely good, however high a person's intentions may be. At the same time the moral cost, for Africans and Europeans alike, is tremendous. Anyone who like myself is continually in intimate contact with Africans cannot fail to realize how serious is the moral cost to the Africans in so many ways. There is the mounting hatred that increasing numbers of Africans have for the police. We may say that this is very largely misplaced, because the police force is under orders. Nevertheless, it is a fact, and it must have the gravest consequences for the whole community when a large section of the population comes to regard the guardians of law and order as its enemies. Then there is the resentment of numbers of parents who are either compelled against their will to accept Bantu Education or who cannot get any education at all for their children. There is the frustration of masses of workers who move between squalid homes and work which offers them no prospect of ever improving their position, and there is the dangerous anger of African leaders who have no means of political expression. Hatred, resentment, frustration, and anger are all qualities of the human mind and heart, the very things with which morality has to deal and which morals exist to combat. It is hardly necessary to refer to the endless crimes against life and property by Africans, for these have become an almost accepted feature of urban life in this country. We must expect such a sorry state of affairs to persist while Africans can

find themselves arrested for the most trivial offences. Today in South Africa apartheid is breeding these evil things on a massive scale in the minds and hearts of countless thousands of Africans. Certainly the present effects of this great experiment in segregation are such that a great moral debit balance is rapidly being built up in the African people.

But grievous as have been the moral results of the policies of the last few years upon the non-Europeans, I am even more disturbed by the moral effects that such policies are having upon many White people in South Africa. There has, I believe, been a noticeable loss in the moral integrity of many Europeans in recent times. This shows itself in a great variety of ways: in the alarming rise in prison statistics; in the prevalence of juvenile delinquency; in the growth in drunkenness and loose living; in the increasing breakdown in family life; in a general deterioration in the standards of conduct and an ever-increasing lack of courtesy and good manners. It would be an exaggeration to link all this too closely with the policy of compulsory segregation, but I am persuaded that there is a closer connection between public policies and personal behaviour than is sometimes suspected. More than that, the student of history knows that the past has many examples to show of the evil effects upon a ruling class which has been determined at all costs to retain all the power in its own hands. Perhaps it will only be when it is too late to affect the situation that the Whites will realise how tremendous has been their moral impoverishment during these last years.

Yet to speak so of the moral consequences of apartheid does not, unfortunately, exhaust the full account of its costliness. Perhaps the historian of the future will conclude that the greatest moral failure of the moment has been that the great majority of those who have the political power to influence the course of events have directed all their efforts to maintaining a political and social structure in a society which was rapidly changing. That would not be so very grave an indictment were there the slightest chance of its being successful. But the long story of mankind suggests that no small ruling minority can ever impose for long its will upon a hostile majority. And its cruel attempt must inevitably lead to the destruction of many valuable social institutions which have been built up so laboriously through the years, whereas this time could have been so usefully employed in transforming them in such a fashion that they would have continued to serve the needs of this rapidly changing multi-racial society.