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DOCUMENTATION

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS WRITES LETTER TO CABINET MINISTERS

FORCED REMOVAL OF AFRICANS

We write to you under a sense of deeply troubled concern in this matter. We realise that you have at heart the welfare of "those entrusted to our care" to quote the words of the Prime Minister. We believe that his meaning was that these blacks, as well as whites, have been entrusted by Almighty God to the care of the government and its officials. We, as Quakers, also have the welfare of all South Africans at heart.

We appreciate that you care about the preservation of civilisation in this land, but we fear that your actions, in certain respects, are endangering that very thing. We know that you are devout Christian people, and, accordingly, we venture to approach this matter in Christian terms.

We care deeply for the future of this country, but we are troubled with regard to certain actions which, we believe, are causing grievous suffering amongst black people in rural areas, who have been moved and are still being moved, against their will, from places where they had their homes and their roots, to less favourable conditions.

These people are human beings and children of God, even as we are. In creating man, (Genesis 2.7) "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breath into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul". That breath clearly puts something of God's life into man's body and something of his nature into his soul. There is thus in every person something we must not violate. And there is in every person some sense of right and wrong, so that he knows when he is being wronged.

We believe, moreover, as you will believe, that all who say "Our Father" when they pray, are brothers and sisters. We are sure you, as devout Christian people, all unite in this prayer which proclaims the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

Further, we believe it to be true, from our personal observation and experience, that many, many families of black people, who have been displaced in rural areas, have been relocated in places where they have no means of survival - no money, no employment, no land nor access to land. In such conditions, people lack means of travelling to a place where they can seek work. In one area with which we are acquainted, 643 families have been identified as totally destitute.

Would we like to be treated in this manner and find ourselves and our children lacking food and suffering hunger, and to know ourselves without hope of improving circumstances? Christ teaches us "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

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Very similar teaching is found in the parable of the Last Judgement (or the sheep and the goats) in St. Matthew's Gospel Ch 25 v 31-46, where the Lord tells us, "In as much as you did it unto the least of these my brethren, you did it unto me." From this it would appear that if we place a person in a position where he has not the means of survival, we are doing just that to the Lord Himself. And that consideration should surely cause us to pause, to reflect, and finally to stay our hand in fear and trembling.

It is a central testimony of the Quaker faith that there is "that of God", that is to say, something of God, in every human being. This, surely, is why Saul, when persecuting Christians, was persecuting Christ. That is why we believe, when people are forcibly removed to remote and barren areas, we are doing that to Him.

We ask you to consider the bitterness that must enter the hearts of those who are placed in such a position. Many of them have had faith in the white government that if they (the blacks) behaved well toward the government, the government would behave well towards them in their turn.

When people are placed in unfavourable situations where they have no means of survival or freedom to move elsewhere, must they not be tempted to say: "If Christ teaches these Christians to treat us in this manner, then Christ is a cruel tyrant." Will this not do grievous harm to the Christian faith - preventing the spread of the Gospel and even driving people from the Church?

We therefore believe that the Government, the public servants concerned, and those members of the white community who approve of such actions, or call for such actions, run the risk of offending grievously against the God-given Christian principle of caring, compassionate love. Like you, we wish to see a just, and prosperous, and peaceful South Africa. We would therefore ask you to consider whether a Christian may do evil that good may come, and we believe that you must answer, No. And is it not an evil thing to cause suffering - by removing people against their will, simply because they occupy land in a rural area or a town, where whites do not wish them to be - and to transport them to a place where they do not wish to be and where they suffer hardship ?

We have in our hearts a concern for yourselves, lest in this matter of forced removals, you should be drawn into any action which cannot be reconciled with the Gospels and the whole spirit of Christ's teachings. We are concerned lest the people of South Africa are being demoralised by approving or calling for such removals. Therefore, we ask you as caring Christians, to cease from removing people to such situations against their will. Furthermore, we ask you, as caring Christians, to accept responsibility for the adequate support of such people so removed, until such time as they can be made self-supporting. This is to us an absolute necessity and we earnestly pray you to give it your attention.

Our message is in Christian love : Fear not, but trust in God. The outcome will be good, if right be done.