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INTER-RACIAL CONFERENCE OF CHURCH LEADERS.

JOHANNESBURG : 7 TO 10 DECEMBER 1954

OUR CHRISTIAN HERITAGE AND THE FUTURE

by

Dr. G. B. A. Gerdener.

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C O N T E N T S

	<u>Page</u>
Introductory ... ..	1.
1. Do we stand at the threshold of a new era? ...	1.
2. The nature of our Christian heritage ... ..	3.
3. The dark side of our heritage ... ..	7.
4. The brighter side of our heritage ... ..	13.
5. The future viewed in the light of what has gone before	19.
Summary ... ..	22.

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(A translation of the original which was prepared in Afrikaans)

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In connection with our general subject, the Extention of God's Kingdom in multi-racial South Africa, we shall also try, in this paper, to bring into focus our Christian heritage, in other words, to examine our missionary position as it is to-day and to project our examination of it for a moment or two into the future.

First of all two things should be made clear:

1. We feel that, for our purposes here, the three Protectorates (the High Commission Territories) and South-West Africa should be added to the Union, and the whole considered as a unit. Those four regions were represented at the previous gathering in Pretoria, and could appropriately be represented as gatherings such as this in the future.

In the days ahead the Rhodesias will be linking up with Nyasaland, and the Portuguese areas with the Belgian and French, for the purpose of extending God's kingdom - so it appears imperative that we join the Protectorates and South-West Africa to the Union to make a unit.

2. For more than one reason we shall not be able, in this discussion, to deal with the two smaller groups of our population, known as the Coloured and the Asiatics. This does not mean that they are unimportant for the extension of God's kingdom, but the former are, like the Europeans, a christianized group, while the latter represent the various religions of the East, which raises a variety of new problems.

What is more, we are constrained to confine our discussion to the white Christian groups and the Bantu people, who, in Southern Africa as well as in respect of the 80 million Bantu elsewhere in Africa, have their own call.

I. Do we stand at the threshold of a new era?

In our judgment this question must be answered affirmatively. After 150 years of Protestant missions we face a new era. The continent  
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\* Dr. Gerdener, one of the three chairmen of the present conference, is a professor at the "Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk's" Theological Seminary, Stellenbosch.

of mystery and trial has become the continent of opportunity and construction. The same applies in Southern Africa. The current which, for a century and a half, came mostly from overseas and brought untold blessings here, now emanates from local sources and henceforward will carry its blessings not only to the Union itself, but beyond its borders. The country which once received missions will become more and more the country which sends out missions.

The day of direct attack upon heathendom has also passed. That frontal attack, frequently throughout the years, was accompanied by an eradication, root and branch, of all heathen habits and customs. For that the older missionaries are often condemned. The sharp antithesis, is however, always a characteristic of the first stage when the ground must be cleared so that the Church may be built.

Now that we have entered the period of Church formation, the leaders and even the members of the young Churches will discuss their own contributions to the body of Christ, as it has been revealed amongst them. On the other hand, the older Churches, who did the pioneering work, must be on their guard against the rejection at any cost of our Western pattern at the one extreme, and the exaggerated veneration of everything that is local at the other. In Christ everything has been renewed and He fills words, thoughts, forms and customs with a new meaning and value. Not adjustment thereto, but possession thereof, must occur.

There is yet another aspect of the matter which shows the present time as the threshold of a new era. Until now South Africa has mainly been regarded as an outpost of Europe; but henceforward it will increasingly be considered as the portal to Africa, especially Bantu Africa. Already Southern Africa is being linked more and more with the rest of Africa in the fields of science and strategy. This will also have to happen in the field of Christian Church life. There is a constant and involuntary interaction occurring between the rest of Bantu Africa and ourselves. Of the total number of christians in Africa, a full third are in Southern Africa, so that the key to unlock the heart of Africa must be sought here. Two-thirds of the total population of Southern Africa are reported to be christians, so that it may be expected that in the era ahead it is we who shall have to consolidate our strategy so that the rest of the world can concentrate more on the rest of Africa.

Finally we regard the present time as the beginning of a new era because we see a group of local churches beginning to take form. The mission is progressively being replaced by the churches. Next to the

European/....

European group of churches, whether they maintain oversea contacts to a greater or lesser degree or not, whether or not they rest on a solid South African foundation, there will come into being a new group of churches, which will have to take their place amongst us. Yet the European churches will not withdraw themselves. Many are here for good. In this respect the pattern of Southern Africa is again unique and for this very reason very complex.

While the older churches wrestle with the internal problems of adjustment and relations, of the townward drift of their members and growing materialism, the rise of the young churches knocks insistently at our door, demanding their place in our household. It is the beginning of a new era, possibly the last before the second coming of our Saviour, for the powers of antichrist are closing their ranks and closing in on the Christian Church, its followers and its branches. For this reason, too, it is a new era: it is the approaching end, it is five minutes to twelve. As the era flies past, not only shall we have to seek closer alliance with each other, but we shall increasingly have to use the methods and techniques of the time in which we live. This is the challenge of our time, of another time, of the new era.

## 2. The Nature of our Christian Heritage.

It is certainly necessary that we take stock from time to time, stock of what conditions are in our own church relationships, and stock of our relations with other churches. It is only partly true that the Church of Christ cannot be measured or counted. In the first place it is weighed, and that in the scales of Good Himself. Eternity will make the correct inventory. Yet the Christian Church, and each true part of it, has an organizational and administrative side. The church is an institution with its offices and form of government, existing as supranational and international. Every church comes into existence in a given milieu. It must make contact with its environment: the state and the community, time and history. Especially must it enter into relations with other churches and entities in society. The members of the church are people with human, social, and economic needs and duties.

This all implies that we really must take stock from time to time, unless we wish to isolate ourselves or go the way of the sects. We all need to leave our places of work and spheres of influence from time to time and to ascend a vantage point, outside and above ourselves. It will also help us to judge whether there is not something in another christian or another church body from which we can profit. It will help

us to gain the right perspective over the whole line of our front of attack and to revise our estimate of our own value.

At this conference we have repeatedly looked back to the past and each time our hearts have been filled with thankfulness for what has occurred. Finally, a hundred or a hundred and fifty years is not very long in the history of a people. It is something more than a century ago that the Bantu tribes of the country were busy with their internecine wars. Cannibalism was abroad in the land, not to mention all the other abominations of heathendom. It is only half a century ago that the two European sections of the country were locked in a struggle to the death, and something more than forty years ago that the two Northern republics were joined to the former British Colonies in a Union. We have indeed great reason for thankfulness. We can say with the Psalmist: "I have a goodly heritage".

In the emergence of that heritage the Christian Mission has played an extremely important rôle. There are few christian peoples in the world from amongst whom one or more churches or missionary societies have not made their contribution. We can hardly praise too highly the men and women of days past for the self-sacrificing manner in which they fulfilled their tasks here. They enjoyed very few of the amenities and privileges of to-day. Their lives were repeatedly in danger, and in the face of many hardships they had to lay the foundations upon which we can build to-day. They performed wonders with the printed word, education and medicine, promoting the advance of the Gospel.

In general we can say that the Christian Mission in Southern Africa enjoyed a very favourable opportunity for obtaining a firm footing on this great continent. Few countries on earth have a healthier climate and more beautiful material prospects. The presence of a large and established European population was perhaps a hindrance to the mission in one or two respects, but in general a great advantage. Many Europeans, by word and example, by gifts and prayers, gave support to the good cause, and one need only imagine for a moment the absence of the European population to realize how different the picture of the missionary field would have looked. In countries such as India and Nigeria it can still be an open question what will happen to mission work if the European must withdraw, but that is not so in our part of the world. Here Christendom has won a victory, and will endure and prosper, even if to-day official missions were to be prohibited.

Nor was the task of the Christian Mission particularly difficult here. Amongst the Coloured little of heathendom is to be found. Here  
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and there individual Coloured have fallen prey to Islam. As a group in the population they are christianized. The Eastern peoples in the country have hardly been touched and must receive our attention. As for the Bantu, they have been a rewarding field of labour for the Gospel through the years. There has been no continuous and obstinate opposition to the Gospel, such as was met in North Africa and Tibet.

In general, Southern Africa has not been a difficult field in which to labour, except in so far as we have created various difficulties for ourselves. We have not had age-old systems of belief to break down, as in the lands where Hinduism and Buddhism hold sway, and the fanaticism of the lands where the prophet of Mecca is followed is unknown here. The terrible cast-system of India is known to us only from afar. Superstition and ignorance have naturally created problems unknown to countries with a higher culture and some measure of literacy. But here solutions are achieved day after day by the ordinary progress of civilization, and for the Gospel the road lies open.

The Bantu especially have shown themselves to be a cheerful race with a zest for life. They are certainly not a section of mankind that is dying out. There are no symptoms of decadence or decline as amongst the disappearing Hottentots and Bushmen.

The christian mission flourishes. The evidences of progress and development give comfort to the missionary in his work of faith that demands so much from them. A whole community, not just a few persons, is being built up to stand firmly on a christian foundation, and the Gospel has the opportunity of showing its choicest fruit.

A further portion of the heritage we have received lies in the attempts down the years to obtain co-operation between the various churches and communities in Southern Africa. In this connection we first of all think back to the notable conference at Worcester in 1860, in which Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Independents, Wesleyans, the Reformed churches, and representatives of the Moravians and the Rhenish Mission took part. Shortly afterwards, and certainly to a great extent as a result of it, a blessed revival was experienced in great portions of the country. The Evangelical Alliance was also affected by the revival and Prayer Week, between the first and second Sundays of the year, was instituted and is still observed here together with many churches in the world.

In January 1861 a conference similar to that at Worcester was called in Cape Town. On alternate days the proceedings were in one or other of the two languages. And that was ninety years ago! Two full days were devoted to the question of Missions and to the question of how

christian co-operation between the churches could be realized. Such conferences were then held throughout the whole land and the off-repeated theme was: "That they all may be one ..... that the world may believe."

In April of the following year a conference was held at Faure-smith in the Orange Free State at which the Wesleyan, Berlin, and French missions, as well as representatives of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk, were present. Amongst others these noteworthy words were used: "South African Christians are beginning to perceive in all seriousness their duty towards the heathen." These christian conferences gradually became mission conferences, of which the first was held at Genadendal in 1865. In 1872 Andrew Murray expressed the idea that a regular mission conference should be organized, which all churches and mission societies should be invited to join. This became reality and a conference was held every other year until the South African War.

Thereafter, in 1904, the General Mission Conference of South Africa was called into being under the chairmanship of Dr. James Stewart, of Lovedale. From the veteran François Coillard, at that time spending the evening of his life in Barotseland, a message was read deploring the Ethiopian schism. Yet there was also hope in Coillard's message: "I hope this conference is the beginning of a new era in the Christian Mission in South Africa. It is high time for us, as in China, Japan and elsewhere, to uproot the hedges and break down as far as possible the barriers between denominations and then to unite all our forces to widen the boundaries of the Kingdom of God".\* The day after these words were written, Coillard was called to higher service.

For thirty years, from 1904 to 1934, this Annual Mission Conference of South Africa continued to function. Eight conferences were held and outstanding papers were read, followed by frank discussions and far-reaching resolutions. Representation was entirely open, and each church or community could send as many representatives as it wished.

We think back to this portion of our heritage with great thankfulness.

In 1934 the Christian Council of South Africa came into being. In it the basis of representation was defined, though the resolutions remain consultative and indicative, without any binding power over the participating churches. For some time two churches of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde group took part in this Council, though since 1942 the mother and mission churches of this group have formed their own Federal Missionary Council, which meets yearly. Affiliated to the Christian Council are six regional councils and a small liaison committee working

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\* Report, First General Missionary Conference, 1904. p. 15.

with the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk's Federal Missionary Council.

A third group which is now taking shape in the broad field of missions, is the Interdenominational African Ministers' Association, affiliated to the Christian Council, which has adopted as one of its aims "To keep in view the idea of one United African Church".

Of importance in the composition of our heritage is the conference that was held in Johannesburg in September 1923, under the aegis of the Federal Council of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerke and under the chairmanship of Ds. D.S.Botha. At those discussions were present both English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking, representatives of government bodies, and a fair number of Bantu delegates, of whom some read papers. In Dr. C.T.Loram's foreword to the published report\* we read, amongst other things, the following: "That the oldest, largest and most completely South African Church in the country should have called the Conference, seems to imply a recognition of the impossibility of a living church holding aloof from the greatest of our problems, even though social, economic and even political issues are involved, an acceptance on the part of the churches of their responsibilities for having helped to create the problem and their willingness to help in solving it and the determination to regard this as a domestic matter to be settled in the long run by South Africa herself".

We have made this quotation because in it we find a possible cause for the connection, over the past thirty years in South Africa, between the Mission proper and the racial problem. It was a good twenty years earlier that we began to talk about the racial problem in South Africa and even before Union we gave serious thought to its place in our legislation. But over the past thirty years we have given priority to this question. To-day the whole world discusses what we do or what we leave undone. And we either agree or differ. Our congresses and reports consist largely in attack, or defence and explanation. We shall have to be on our guard to prevent the matter of missions being cast into the shadow or thrust aside by debate of a question, the solution of which time will help to bring, and which solution must in no case determine when and where the Gospel may be preached. The Gospel itself is the most important factor in the solution.

### 3. The Dark Side of our Heritage.

In any evaluation of what we have achieved over the years, we shall find a dark as well as a bright side in our heritage. In other words it would be an almost impossible task to decide whether we were satisfied or

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\* European and Bantu, being Papers and Addresses read at the Conference on Native Affairs, Johannesburg, 1923.



not with what we had achieved. With some things we can be satisfied, with others not. Over a part we must feel ashamed and humiliated, but about other aspects we are deeply thankful and are even entitled to feel proud.

We shall attempt to pay heed to both sides and must leave it to each church or to each person to let God's word, with its eternal standard, pass judgment. Now first of all the things we deplore and about which we must feel cast down.

a. We begin with our lack of plan. There is possibly no other country on earth, in which mission work is carried out, where there has been, and still is, so little delimitation or planning between the great bodies on the spot. It would appear that mission strategy does not, so to speak, occur in the country. Now and then there appears in the history of our missions an instance where a Society has entered our part of the world with a definite plan, e.g. with an eye on some particular territory or ethnic group. Sometimes our pioneers were guided by what the authorities permitted them to do, or by someone who had reconnoitred the territory advising them what to do. But in general it would appear that there has been no conscious, general planning or distribution of spheres of work, and that over the years.

We have no wish to enlarge on this state of affairs. It cannot cause other than perplexity amongst the inhabitants of the various states. It is also accompanied by considerable overlapping and duplication. What is more, it causes friction and a lack of uniform policy, as well as undermining the enforcement of discipline.

The number of separate bodies operating to-day in the missionary field in South Africa, stands at 77. Thirty years ago the World Missionary Atlas reported it as 58. About twenty new bodies have therefore arrived here in the last three decades. It is doubtful whether in this sphere the pot can call the kettle black.\* It is asserted that overlapping is worst in Natal, and it is worth note that it is in Natal that the greatest percentage of non-christians in the Union occurs. But even in an area like Swaziland, with a population under 200,000 we find, in addition to separatist bodies, no less than 23 churches or other societies in the field.† We must deplore this state of affairs, and ought not to acquiesce in it. We must, in all seriousness, seek a better way. From other fields it appears how serious such a state of affairs can become. For example, Mildred Gable writes as follows, under the heading, The Challenge of Central Asia, about Sinkiang province (also called Chinese Turkestan): "We as Christians need  
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\* R. K. Orchard, in The High Commission Territories, says, at page 13: "Although there is some overlapping (in Swaziland) the Missions do not consciously compete... There does not seem any need of more missionaries, but closer co-operation and planning seem desirable".

to face realistically the situation. Sinkiang is a glaring example of the loss of opportunity by an apathetic church and of lack of strategic foresight by a church which has been occupied with its conferences, committees and reports while men perished for lack of knowledge." \*

b. Separatism. The naked facts are that bodies that have broken away from the recognized churches in the country number some 1,300. One reliable source recently gave the number as 1,286. Apparently the number is constantly varying. In any case, it can be observed that the number has increased with the years, from 65 in 1922, and 300 ten years later, to where it stands to-day. Another fact of importance is that of the great number of sectarian movements, the government recognizes about 100 only, and grants them certain facilities.

This is not the place to go into the reasons for this sad phenomenon. Sundkler, in his well-known book, Bantu Prophets in South Africa, points out two great initial causes of separatism, especially as far as the Zulus are concerned, and these are the Ethiopian and the Zionist, or the folk-motive and the religious motive.

It is important to note that the first historically separatist body, that of the Rev. Nehemiah Tile, came into existence in 1884, under the name The Tembu Church of South Africa. Some of his followers wished to make of it The Native Church in South Africa. But that did not succeed. Tile himself stated that he was tired of European control and indicated his own Tembu headman, Ngangelizwe, as the **visible** head of his organization. In any case, it was a nationalist motive that was dominant. Where the religious motive was to the fore, various heathen usages were often taken over, so that the sects even formed a bridge back to heathendom.

That separatism has been so fruitful in our country, compared with the rest of Bantu Africa, can apparently be attributed to the presence of a great and entrenched European population, retarding, if not impeding, various of the Bantu's national and religious aspirations. The sectarian phenomenon does not in fact occur amongst the Coloured and the Easterners in the country.

Every man, especially the Christian, is possessed of a reasonable desire for self-realization. He is called, and wishes to be of value. His religion is proselytizing. If he is frustrated in the political field and left behind in the economic race, the path of realization and leadership lies open for him in religion and the Church. Indeed, there he is roused into being master and manager of himself, guiding his/....

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\* World Christian Handbook, 1949, p.164.

his own development. And the sects are more anti-European than anti-ecclesiastical.

Yet separatism does not grow only from the anti-European stem. Deep in Bantu life itself lies the tendency to break away. If you cannot have your own way, then move off, build another kraal, form another group. The family is smaller than the tribal group, and it is the real point of origin of the cult of the forefather. Surely it is herein that lies a great deal of the cause of the fragmentation of so many sects. And for this very reason the ideas of co-operation, union of the churches, and the ecumenical do not take immediate root amongst the Bantu. We shall have to exercise patience with the phenomenon of multiplicity in separatism. To-day they include nearly 10 per cent. of the Bantu and are at once and the same time one of the darkest portions of our heritage as well as its most urgent challenge.

c. Vandalism. One of the most unhealthy outbursts with which we have to do to-day is the violence, arson and general destruction, affecting lives as well as property. The general violence which has caused great damage in towns such as East London and Port Elizabeth is more a matter for government than church. Happily it could be established that in most instances christians were not involved in this violence.

But the twenty-five or more instances of destruction at mission stations and institutions, are the concern of church and mission. Here again, this is not the place to go into causes. They vary from place to place, though the thankless attack on European leadership and teaching undoubtedly links the whole series like a length of rusted wire.

In more than one instance it has seemed that the vandalism arose from resistance to all authority. "Let us pull their bonds to pieces and throw off their chains," was the language of more than one bent on destruction. The discipline of the institution was resented and violence took the place of reasonable attempts at reform. Here and there it became obvious that where parental authority had gone to pieces or had never existed, there should be no surprise that the young people get out of hand when law and order are enforced.

In other words, the fault has not lain with the school or the hostel; not in the regimen, but in the home or community from which the young have come. It is there that we must seek to improve conditions. And we believe that it is here that our churches must lay the stress in the years to come. If religion, with its authority and discipline, can penetrate into the home and the community, the right spirit will be nourished in the schools and institutions. Behind and beneath the school lies the family.

The sting of this movement of resistance and its vandalistic manifestations are not directed against the missions as such. It is rather against Europeans in general, with whom the missionary is commonly identified. More, the teacher in many a mission school is also no longer regarded as a missionary, but merely as a European, keeping one or more Non-Europeans out of a position that he could fill.

d. Illiteracy. Here again we find one of the things which we as churches must deplore in connection with our heritage. It is an almost hopeless task to build up a self-governing church on an illiterate membership, and specially on illiterate leadership. Only when people can themselves read and study God's Word and other edifying reading matter, will there be stability in ecclesiastical life and the guarantee be given for the continuance of a young church, even if the older suddenly removes itself.

Although statistical data are difficult to obtain, it would appear that we cannot feel satisfied over the degree of illiteracy still holding in Southern Africa.

Even amongst the Cape Coloured, who have lived in the closest contact with European christians for a good century, the majority having been servants, there is still a large measure of ignorance and illiteracy. We cannot do otherwise than think of the Coloured as a christianized group. Many of them do perhaps live as heathens, but so do many Europeans. In any case they are within reach of Church and school and have made contact with christian truth, in some form or other, either directly or through some member of their family.

Nevertheless, it is disturbing that 52.4 per cent. of the total Coloured population of the Cape Peninsula live without any tie with the church. From a census taken in 75 congregations of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kleurling Kerk in the Cape, it appears that 50.7 per cent. of its members are illiterate. And this state of affairs exists in the cradle of our Coloured people, at the centre of the oldest established christian civilization.

As far as the Bantu are concerned, illiteracy holds vast numbers of them too in its grip. In the most advanced territory of West Africa, viz., the Gold Coast, some 90% of the inhabitants can neither read nor write. In our own country (the Union) the position is somewhat better, but certainly far from satisfactory when the eye is on the extension of God's kingdom. \*

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\* According to a UNESCO report in 1946 78% of the Bantu in the Union were illiterate. By far the greater number of those who can read (say 70%) are in the towns.

It appears that in this territory of every 100 Bantu -

	<u>Bantu language</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Afrikaans</u>
Read only	1.9%	1.4%	0.9%
Read and write	27 %	10.5%	4.6%
Neither read nor write	69 %	86.5%	92.6%
Uncertain	2.1%	1.6%	2 % *

That good progress has been made over the years appears from the following comparative table, which is concerned only with reading or writing a Bantu language -

	<u>1904</u>	<u>1921</u>	<u>1946</u>
Read only	1.1%	1.4%	1.9%
Read and write	5.1%	9.6%	27 %
Neither read nor write	93.5%	88.5%	69 %
Uncertain	.3%	.5%	2.1%

The above figures refer to all ages. Conceivably the increase in the school-age group (between 7 and 14) is appreciably higher. For example, in the Cape Bantu schools show the following increase -

	<u>1921</u>	<u>1936</u>	<u>1946</u>	<u>1952</u>
Number of children (between 7 and 14)	334,842	426,170	490,548	529,176
Enrolled in primary Schools	109,796	177,170	246,995	293,584 $\phi$
Percentage increase	32.7%	41.5%	50.3%	55.4%

And with this enough of the dark side of our heritage in Southern Africa. The aftermath of two world wars has, alas, here as elsewhere, had various harmful results. Not the least of them is the rising cost of living and the resulting poverty, continuously hindering our mission work and all attempts to uplift. The Non-European's attitude has also been altered by them and not infrequently his morale adversely affected.

The fact, too, that South Africa has a large European (Christian) population, can have an adverse influence on our mission work, especially in the process of becoming sufficient unto oneself. A church such as the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk, which has its entire interests in this part of the world, must be especially on its guard against the danger of retaining too much authority too long over its daughter churches, even if the reason is that they still receive financial support from the mother church. It would appear as if the young churches in Central Africa became self-sufficient at a faster tempo than/..

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\* G.A.Gedat: Was wird aus diesem Afrika? page 23.

$\phi$  There are 5,911 Bantu schools in the Union, with 900,000 children.

than those right before our door. It would do us all good, in these times, to take to heart once again the thoughts of Roland Allen. \*

4. The brighter Side of our Heritage.

A report from the Rhenish Mission in South West Africa, with more than 85,000 souls in its care, is typical of what we generally meet in the Union and the Protectorates. There is the bright side as well as the dark. There is much to be thankful for and perhaps even to be content with, though self-satisfaction can never deserve recommendation.

In the report mentioned we read: "Trust and distrust, discipline and its lack, alternate with each other. Drink and immorality claim many victims and a secular spirit often gains control". Of eleven ordained Native clergy, who are with twenty-one European ordained clergy in that mission, there is the highest commendation.

Frequently, as we contemplate the two sides to our heritage, we are reminded of the words of Isaiah the prophet to the Edomite, with his question: Watchman, what of the night? His words were: The morning cometh, and also the night. There is a bright side next to the dark.

Notwithstanding what statistics disclose in connection with the progress of the Gospel, the question whether there has been qualitative progress would certainly draw many differing answers, even in this gathering. Is the Gospel pushing back heathendom and conquering? What evidence have we that heathendom is disappearing? Does not heathendom occur inside the church? These and similar questions can be asked and certainly deserve well-considered answers,

A short while ago there appeared two studies by anthropologists, of two related ethnic groups in Southern Africa, viz. Sheddick's The Southern Sotho and Schapera's The Tswana. According to the authors the groups differ in their attitudes towards their old beliefs. Sheddick is of the opinion that the majority of the contemporary Basuto follows the beliefs of their ancestors, whether publicly or in secret. Schapera, on the other hand, asserts that those old beliefs are seldom encountered to-day. "Christianity," he declares, "is to-day the official religion of most Tswana tribes, not in the sense that all confess it, but because their authorities and leaders support it." He admits that their acceptance of it is largely conventional and that few of them really understand its principles. The social, political and clerical services of the missionaries are more highly valued/....

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\* Roland Allen: Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or ours? The spontaneous expansion of the Church. World Dominion Press.

valued than their religious services. This tallies with what Dr. Shepherd, of Lovedale, wrote not long ago: "In some parts the non-Christians remain insensitive to the work of the churches, but follow with avidity the instructions of agricultural instructors where the best and newest methods of working their land are concerned." \*

Apparently few of the rites of the old ancestor cult are performed to-day. But the belief in witchcraft persists obstinately. For example, at a funeral or at some crisis or other, the arts of the witchdoctor are not infrequently made use of.

It also appears, for example among the Tswana in the Protectorate, that whole tribes accept the Church officially and yet do not personally join it. A missionary from those parts mentions numbers who call themselves barati (lovers) of one or other church, but do not join it formally, although some might perhaps have been baptized as children. And large-scale secularization, caused especially by the drift to the towns, though it is accompanied by outward repudiation of heathenry, brings no acceptance of the christian faith. From this it would appear that there are grounds for asserting that the growth of population is outstripping the growth of the churches.

Here and there is talk of the revival of heathendom, for example in circumcision schools and ritual murder. Even in the towns some heathen practices are found in the midst of the most advanced civilization. It is worthy of note that ritual murders are more frequent in recent years in Basutoland: Between 1897 and 1910 only one was known, between 1910 and 1939, no less than ten were tried in the courts while a number were suspected, and yet in 1940 at least 70 cases were reported, of which a good half were brought to court. This state of affairs has led a writer<sup>b</sup> to declare: "Christianity has made little headway against belief in medicine, in spite of a century of activity." This deduction of Ashton takes us no further.

More to the point is his summing up on page 117, where we read: "Nowadays a fairly definite belief in God is widespread owing to missionary influence and teaching over the past hundred years. Practically everyone has some knowledge, no matter how garbled, of Christian doctrines, but the degree to which these doctrines have been accepted and the old ideas abandoned varies greatly, and to-day Sesuto belief ranges from the complete orthodoxy of ministers and teachers of the Gospel to the traditional paganism of the conservative Tlokoa group. The beliefs of the majority fall somewhere between these extremes."

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\* World Christian Handbook, 1949, p.213.

<sup>b</sup> Hugh Ashton: The Basuto. International African Institute, 1952.

The anthropologist Schapera, already mentioned, declares in his work The Tswana (Ethnographic Survey of Africa), page 58:

"Observations of the Protectorates suggest that relatively few really understand the principles of christianity or sincerely try to lead a devout life. Their attendance at church is largely a matter of routine, they practise in secret many of the old customs forbidden to them and in various other ways show that their christianity is merely conventional. The missionary himself is now better described as a parish priest than as an apostle. New members of the church are recruited mainly from the children of Christian parents and their acceptance of christianity seems to be largely a matter of course instead of genuine conversion."

Dr. Monica Hunter has come to a similar conclusion in connection with the Pondo and witchcraft. She emphasizes the obstinate belief in witchcraft: "Practically all Pondo believe that much illness is caused by witchcraft or sorcery and that success in important enterprises - agriculture, stock raising, hunting, love-making, lawsuits, war - is largely dependent upon magic.<sup>φ</sup>

We come to the conclusion, therefore, that alongside of raw heathendom there exists an entire middle group of "barati", accepting a mixture of christian truth and heathen error, and that many heathen notions continue to subsist amongst members of churches. On the other hand, christian belief and practice have permeated the whole of heathendom to such a degree that it is doubtful if there are really pagan groups of considerable size anywhere in Southern Africa, except in isolated corners.

It is certainly worth while enquiring why witchcraft survived so stubbornly. Is it not that it touches every-day interests and activities, and imparts hope and faith in victims over difficulties and disappointments? For the average member of a Bantu tribe christianity is too remote from the realities of economic and domestic life to be a substitute. Only by degrees will the technique of modern science seep through and bring the acceptance not only of the cultural benefits of christian civilization but also of the profound truth of its doctrine as fruit of the Gospel.

Where we have attempted above to contrast the dark and the bright sides of our heritage, we have been inclined to say that there has been a qualitative advance on the whole front. Here and there, perhaps, a battalion has been repulsed, but elsewhere there has been victory. The outbursts and mistakes that have occurred, must be ascribed in the main to the process of growth. At that stage there are always maladjustments and clumsiness. The gap between the

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protected life in the tribe with its communal texture and modern complicated and individualistic society is so formidable that the wonder is not at the explosions and dissipations, but at the progress and loyalty. Let us bear in mind that people reach a stage when they begin to feel their own strength, but do not know their own weakness. Emotion and enthusiasm are as necessary as conservatism and resignation. We must be patient with one another.

Victory over heathendom has been potentially achieved, so that the powers inherent in the Christian Mission in our country can go in to consolidate the victory. The way to it and the time for it are our task. In any case, two-thirds of the total population of Southern Africa are already "christian".

What Statistics Show.

Between 1911 and 1951 the number of European Missionaries amongst the Bantu in the Union and the Protectorates increased from 569 to 1,203. Of these, the increase of Protestants was from 405 to 572, and of Catholic Missionaries from 164 to 631. The Roman Church has concentrated mainly on the Protectorates and South-West Africa. Orchard (op.cit.p.23) even asserts that a good third of all the Roman Catholic missionaries in Southern Africa are to be found in Basutoland. According to the Catholic Directory the number of Catholic Bantu in the Union is 661,401, while the South African Yearbook gives 656,519 as the figure for the Union, the Protectorates, and South-West Africa.

As far as the number of Bantu christians is concerned, we estimate, to the best of our ability and from very divergent figures, that, including Catholics and Separatists, there are in the eight areas under consideration :

	<u>Christians</u>	<u>Population - Total</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Union of South Africa	4,122,250	7,831,915 <sup>*</sup>	52.6%
Protectorates	448,413	1,042,558	43.1%
S.W.A.	191,256	366,010	51.9%
	<u>4,761,919</u>	<u>9,240,483</u>	<u>51.5%</u>

In other words, something more than half of the Bantu in the areas concerned return themselves as "christians". In both South-West Africa and the Union the proportion is a good 1 to 2. In the Protectorates some 2 out of every 5 of the Bantu are already "christians", namely, Bechuanaland 40,000 out of 292,755 (or 1 to 7), Basutoland 343,913/....

<sup>\*</sup>67.5% of the entire population of the Union (census of 1946). We expect that the latest census figures will show it as a good bit more than 8,000,000.

343,913 out of 561,289 (a good 1 to 2), Swaziland 64,500 out of 181,269, or 1 to 3.

Statistically the progress of our mission work can be shown in another manner :

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of Missionary Societies</u>	<u>Total ordained missionaries</u>
1850	11	150 (estimated)
1910	30	2000 (Catholic priests included)
1950	77	3784 (Bantu clergy included)

The above figures are all approximate, but rather on the conservative side.\* The various figures differ so much that it is virtually an impossible task to determine anything statistically. Unfortunately the figures of the 1951 census are not available. It appears likely that for every person in holy orders (including all possible bodies and types of worker) that there are no more than about 2,500 Bantu. Southern Africa can therefore be regarded as the best-manned territory on earth. Whether there is an optimum distribution is very much to be doubted. The number of Bantu clergy must also continue to rise steadily and their training reach an always higher standard.

#### Incidental Services.

The foregoing statistics as well as the qualitative review of our heritage are in fact limited to the evangelizing aspect of mission work. But the incidental services must also be considered. Evangelization always make a comprehensive approach to man and his community. Head and hand, as well as heart, must come under the influence of the Gospel. It must begin with the reformation of the individual, but it must permeate through to society and the people. And the social, economic and political aspects of life do not fall outside the scope of the Gospel.

We have a rich heritage from these incidental services, especially where education, the supply of reading matter, and medicine are concerned. As things are developing to-day, medical and educational services are being progressively taken over by the State. It must be stated to begin with that the churches and the missions have delivered inestimable service over the years, in hospitals and clinics as well as in the schools and institutions, and always will be able to render indispensable services. That the State will make ready use of them, must remain our ardent hope and prayer. That we ourselves shall want to render those services, we will not doubt.

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\* In 1877 the proportion of christians to the total population of what is now the Union was 1 to 10, in 1911 1 to 4, to-day about 1 to 2.

It appears to us that here, as elsewhere in the countries where the indigenous church becomes autonomous, the two great directions in which Europeans will be called on to help will be the training of servants of the Gospel and the provision of literature.

We must now say something about the latter in respect of the past, and first of all about the translation of the Bible. The following table from the local British and Foreign Bible Society will give us an idea :

	<u>Languages</u>	<u>Distributed</u>	<u>Contributions</u>
1800	4 (Hottentot, Sechuana, Xhosa, Sesuto)	3,940	£249
1900	13 (As far as the equator)	61,892	£725
1950	30	377,307 (for 1954 a good 400,000)	£29,873 (for 1954 about £50,000)

We have received a shining heritage from the Christian Mission as far as the production of literature is concerned. The missionary was the first to reduce the Bantu languages to writing. They took the lead especially in preparing grammars, vocabularies and translations of the Bible. The Bantu themselves started to write late, first of all after 1900. Southern Sotho, especially, has built up an outstanding literature. "In every language," says Professor Ziervogel, even in those in which but small numbers can be disposed of, such as Venda and Tsonga, in which no literature worthy of the name exists, schoolbooks have been produced in their dozens. If we include schoolbooks and religious matter, there must be about a thousand books in the Bantu language of South Africa. Taking into consideration the numbers catered for, estimated as some 2,000,000, this is no small achievement." \*

It also struck us that when an Afrikaans newspaper recently held a competition for literary works, no fewer than 242 manuscripts were received: 98 in Sotho (Pedi and Southern Sotho), 66 in Zulu, 40 in Xhosa, 16 in Venda, 11 in Tswana, and 11 in other languages.

Direct from missionary presses and bookshops, such as, for example, Lovedale, Maseru (Sesuto Book Depot) and the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk-Boekhandel in Bloemfontein, tens of thousands of

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\* Bantu, August 1954. What the South African Bantu have achieved in the field of literature - Prof. D. Ziervogel, Pretoria. p.36.

books, mainly of a religious nature, go forth each year. In issues of the South African Outlook of 1 December 1945, 1 April 1946, and 2 September 1946 there appears a bibliography of books produced and in use by missions in Xhosa, Southern Sotho and Zulu respectively, in which some 600 different items are enumerated. In 1953 Lovedale Press distributed no less than 520,000 copies of its own publications. Although school books and general literature achieve high figures, it is satisfactory to see that pride of place is held by books about the Bible and the Christian faith. From a list published 15 years ago by the International Committee on Christian Literature, it appears that 352 out of 730 publications (in Sotho, Tswana, Xhosa, Zulu, Venda, and Tonga) were of a religious character.

In research and publicity we are also making favourable progress. For example, in the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk's Theological College at Stellenbosch no fewer than ten dissertations for the degree of Master of Theology have in recent years been of a missionary or historical character. More and more books appear in Afrikaans, as well as English, on the subject of missions. In addition there are journals and pamphlets, so that the reading public can no longer complain of a lack of reading material. Perhaps more systematic use could be made of the radio to spread reliable information.

The government's recent purchases of land for Bantu settlement, such as, for example, Zwelitsha, are also favourable. Not only will the law against overpopulation and overstocking, as well as soil erosion, be strictly enforced there, but the admission of churches will also be controlled. That is certainly a hopeful sign.

5. . The Future viewed in the Light of what has gone before.

We have no desire to trespass upon the field of the following speakers. We merely indicate various points in our earlier discussion which may indicate possible tendencies.

a. Separatism. This erring piety must be led back to the right paths. Many of the motives were wholesome, even if the methods were doubtful. Cannot the stepchildren become foster-children and then real children of the Churches? If they do not return to us, they can wander still further afield and become prey even to heathendom and unbelief.

b. Lack of planning. It would help greatly if all admission of new societies could be frozen, although we can still use certain specialized workers, especially for the training of clergy and the production of literature. It is doubtful whether there is any other way to

prevent/.....

prevent overlapping and confusion. Better mutual adjustment and stronger discipline will thus be possible. These things have repeatedly happened in history, e.g. between the London Missionary Society, the Wesleyan, the Rhenish Mission and the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Namaqualand. In my own church we are busy handing over our work in the Sudan to the Christian Reformed Church of the U.S.A. Last year we took over stations of the Berlin Mission in Mashonaland. Where there's a will, there's a way.

c. Ethnic grouping. We must seek a policy of co-operation and consolidation for translation of the Bible and provision of literature in Southern Africa. There are already 19 Theological schools and 17 Bible schools for Non-Europeans in the area we are discussing. Would not more concentration be possible here? The deepening of our spiritual life and the spontaneous offering of young lives for the service of the Gospel will have to show the way.

d. The co-operation of the Bantu. Some months ago Professor H. R. Tomlinson addressed these words to 43 Bantu who were receiving degrees or other awards at a graduation day of the University of South Africa: "Be grateful for what you have and make the best use of your talents. Put spiritual things before material ones, for they are eternal; they are the only things we can take with us." We would subscribe to these words. If we do not accept responsibility, trust each other and co-operate, all our good plans can be rendered idle and all our knowledge become dangerous. "The African people want a national church, that is a church which will accommodate all their national elements and build them up into an independent nation. The greatest question is whether such a church could find room in the body of Christ, and how it will be formed," said the Rev. J.A. Calata, president of the Interdenominational African Ministers' Federation in 1950.\* Whether such a church will find room in the body of Christ depends only on whether it reveals the spirit of the Head, Jesus Christ. How we are formed is a side issue, compared with the main question: Is our life in Christ healthy? If it is, we shall obtain our place and become members of the one body.

e. The future of the Mission. With the increase of Bantu clergy and the growing independence of the young Bantu churches, the missionary must render himself more superfluous and direct his vision to the rest of Africa. But there is much territory to conquer and to that end we must close our ranks and work better together. Where new bodies enter a field, they must be expected to undertake pioneer's work/....

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\* South African Outlook, 1 December 1950. p.186.

work: "Not to build on another man's foundation." (Rom.xv:20).

Campaigns of evangelisation can be regularly undertaken and members of the congregation drawn in, as far as possible. From a certain missionary comes the hint to go out to the heathen quarters every Sunday afternoon with every available soul, and there to bear witness. What remains of heathendom must be systematically reached.

f. The future of the Churches. In his discussion of the Bantu Presbyterian Church, which was recently admitted to the World Council with the Cape Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk, Dr. R.H.W. Shepherd countered the suspicion that the formation of this Bantu Church could be condemned as apartheid: "The daughter runs the house and so develops and matures her personality, yet she has the mother's assistance without the latter's dominance.... Happy is the apartheid in which the self-government is real.... Happy is the apartheid in which the highest office in the church is open not merely in theory but in fact, to Africans. Happy is the apartheid which reckons the Black man as a man and as a partner - in his own sphere more than an equal partner".<sup>≡</sup> We cannot put it better than that.

In this paper we have had mainly to do with a goodly heritage from the past. Here and there faults cling to it. But our duty is not only to receive the heritage with thankfulness, but to hand it on worthily to the future. Precisely what the pattern of the Church and the individual churches will be in our homeland is difficult to predict at this stage. Time will decide much of it. We must gird our loins and build, less concerned over the form and the pattern than over the being and the spirit in which we undertake the work.

One thing is certain, that the Gospel we take to the Bantu is not like a dry piece of wood that has no relation to the soil; we plant a living organism eager and compelled to thrust its roots deep, to find union with Bantu life so that it can draw strength from it. We do not believe that there are any amongst us who would keep the Bantu for ever in leading strings. Some will possibly prefer the pattern of the Order of Ethiopia within the Anglican Church to the Bantu Presbyterian Church alongside the Presbyterian Church of South Africa or the Nederduitse Gereformeerde BantoeKerk alongside the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Moederkerk. The aim of all is certainly responsibility and independence for the Bantu, and they have the desire to co-operate in obtaining it.

Personally, we see nothing of integration between the Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking Churches, culturally and in other/...

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\* The South African Outlook, 1 November 1949, p.165.

other respects similar, and existing side by side for 150 years. Our doors stand open to each other, and there should be more of this. But to this end we use no coercion. It must develop from within. How much the more must this not be the case with the Bantu, different from us in language and furniture of the mind, permitting him to make his own choice and his own contribution to the body of Christ.

If the two groups of English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking churches can live together in peace in our homeland, why not a third group of Bantu churches? And if two can grow together into one, why cannot three become one? The manner in which it can happen will not be plotted out in 1954, but perhaps the first stone can be laid in its place at our conference. If it happens, we shall thereby greatly honour and enrich our goodly heritage.

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S U M M A R Y

1. The new era makes certain claims. What are they?
2. Acknowledgement of co-operation and confidence already attained.
3. The danger that we may give in to the obsession of problems and antithesis. .
4. Our attitude towards separatism, lack of plan, and illiteracy.
5. Will christianity conquer in South Africa?
6. Points that deserve emphasis at the moment.
7. The future pattern of our Church(es).

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