

Student Christian Movement

OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

Telephone No
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7. 11. 62.

My dear Alan,

I have been distressed to learn of the discord in the diocese of Johannesburg, and regret that I have been drawn into the controversy. I have already written to the Bishop on this latter point when I received from him a copy of his charge. After studying it I have sent him looking some comments on his statements, a copy of which I am enclosing. At the moment I am not anxious to be drawn into any public controversy so I would ask you to treat the enclosed as confidential. I have only sent it to you as an old friend as one who cares greatly for the well-being of our Church.

You are often in my thoughts for I know a little how difficult life must be for you among so many others.

Please convey my best. Affectionate regards & kind remembrances to Jonathan & his wife.

Yours as ever,

Arthur Jones

25, The Vale,
London, N.W.11.

7th November, 1962.

My dear Leslie,

Thank you for letting me have a copy of your Synod Charge. Now that I have seen it I should like to make some comments on various points. I am encouraged to do so since you said in your covering letter that you do not expect me to agree with what you said.

While I am in general agreement with your remarks on "The Voice of the Church" I should have thought that it has always been clear that when a bishop delivers his charge he is not necessarily expressing the mind of his Synod. In so far as he speaks of events in either the Church or the world surely he tries to interpret them in the light of the Gospel, whether his hearers agree with him or not.

But it is in the section "Christianity and politics" that I find myself compelled to question some of your statements. In that section you state that "we have a duty to obey the laws of the land in which we live." In general this is obviously true, for the maintenance of law in any community is necessary if the Church is to be free to do its work. Yet left like that it is open to grave misunderstanding. I cannot believe that Christians have to obey the laws in the absolute way that your words suggest. Normally they will, but occasions may arise especially in a country such as South Africa, in which, after serious prayer and thought, they will be compelled to disobey the law. This is no academic question, as already the bishops of the Church of the Province, after the most serious consideration, made it plain that if the State attempted to implement the "Church clause" in the Native Law Amendment Act they would advise the clergy and people to disobey it. Would you maintain that the bishops were wrong? This is an important question, as similar circumstances may easily occur again.

Your comments on those who are called to take a "political lead" disturbed me greatly as they suggested that Church leaders who do this are merely "playing politics". I know that you are aware that every bishop promises at his consecration to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrine contrary to God's Word; and both privately and openly to call upon and encourage others to do the same. It seems less than just to those churchmen who have given a political lead to fail to acknowledge that they have done so because they believe that apartheid is an affront to the gospel of Jesus Christ and makes nonsense of His saving death. Surely it is not sufficient to declare that one is totally opposed to apartheid. This ideology manifests itself in political, social and economic terms. How can churchmen seriously oppose apartheid unless they are prepared to come to grips with its various manifestations?

I appreciate that you sincerely believe that there is a "third course" between silence and political leadership which may be followed, but I am at a loss to know what you mean by this. Even if this course is followed, whenever a bishop speaks on any aspect of apartheid he is giving a political lead. Obviously he must decide for himself when he will speak and when he will act. This all bishops do. Looking back on my own experience in South Africa there were many times when I kept silent. And I know that in some cases my silence was due to the fact that I was not as well informed on some particular question as I ought to have been.

I also found your remark that "we are not sufficiently important for our likes and dislikes to matter much" sad reading. I find it difficult to believe that "likes and dislikes" adequately describes the attitude that Christians ought to have to apartheid. But more important, unless I entirely misunderstand your words, they suggest that the South African situation is such that Christians must abandon any hope of creating a society of free men in South Africa. Does this mean that all they can now do is to accept passively a monolithic totalitarian society? Not for one moment would I suggest that such a situation will not arise in South Africa as it has done elsewhere. But until it does surely Christians have a duty to struggle valiantly in every possible way against all that restricts human freedom and denies justice. Certainly it is imperative, as you say, that Christians renew their loyalty to God and avoid bitterness. Yet when you say that they "must be prepared to suffer when necessary" I ask myself how will they suffer unless they are prepared to be deeply involved in the South African situation? And when you add that "above all things strive to maintain a spirit of love" I am compelled to ask, how this can be done if churchmen acquiesce in unnecessary suffering and injustice? Indeed, may they not best show an active spirit of love both towards those in power and those within the Church who support them by resolutely opposing them? In so doing they are striving to save them from themselves, and to halt them on a road that will lead to their own destruction.

After studying your charge carefully I have come to the conclusion that the real difference between us is probably the different view that we seem to have of the Christian life. Underlying so much that you have written there seems to me to be a curious departmental view of life. As I see it the Christian has only one calling, and that he has to learn to exercise his discipleship at every level of his life, political, social, economic as well as ecclesiastical. Naturally the emphasis will differ in different individuals, but none can afford to ignore completely the call to work out his Christian discipleship at every level. While it is true that it is God who makes us Christians, it is also true that it is as we exercise our discipleship that we become more truly that which God has made us.

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Yours is indeed a heavy task and I am not anxious in any way to add to your difficulties. However, I believe that I should fail the diocese and people that still mean so much to me if I did not share these thoughts with you. You are often in my thoughts, and I pray that God will constantly guide and strengthen you in the perplexing and rewarding situation in which He has placed you.

Yours very sincerely,

The Right Reverend the Lord Bishop
of Johannesburg,
Bishop's House,
4 Crescent Drive,
Westcliffe, Johannesburg,
S. Africa.

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