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Van der Merwe Street,
Hillbrow,
JOHANNESBURG.

16th March, 1967.

REGISTERED POST

Mr Robert M. Sobukwe,
c/o Officer Commanding,
Robben Island Gaol,
Robben Island,
VIA CAPE TOWN.

My dear Bob,

I owe you a very humble apology for not having written before now. As you will probably have learned, I had hoped to be able to see you, and I was grievously disappointed when this fell through. I have written to the Minister of Justice to express my disappointment and also took the opportunity of raising the question of your release. But apart from all this, with life as chopped up as it has been recently, I have failed to write. Your letter of February 5 reached me on March 4. I did, in fact, write immediately, but my letter was so dismal in tone that I decided that it would be unfair to inflict it on you so I tore it up. So, as you see, you are subjected to a double censorship! Then your letter of March 1 arrived on March 13. It seems that Helen's submissions about the delay in your letters has borne fruit.

Both your letters moved me very deeply, particularly your second one. There is no shame -- there cannot be any -- in my telling you that I cried when I read it. I feel so very close to you, Bob. I recall constantly the last times we were able to see each other, of the many hours when we ranged in our chats over ever conceivable subject as though we had never not been seeing each other. I have said before, and I say again, that it is little that I do for you and your family. You deserve a lot more, and so often I berate myself for not doing more for you, and so often too I pray to G-d that I had the power to act effectively on your behalf. I feel a terrible pain within me about your situation. What more can I say than to agree with you that it should continue to be "Bob" and "Benjie"?

I saw your wife recently and can report that she is very well. She said the kids were doing fine. And I must compliment you on your fine turn of phrase in referring to Miliwa as a "Watusi woman". It is a perfect description of her willowy gracefulness. She has a

beautiful face, filled with a great peace and serenity. Your boys also are youngsters of whom you can be proud, as indeed I know you are. One thing though about the children is worrying me and I have discussed it with your wife, and that is that they are not learning enough English. There are practical difficulties involved but I have in the meantime suggested that ways and means be explored of arranging special tuition for them. I hope that this will meet with your approval.

As you say, Fr. Clive McBride was great about the arrangements for the family. He would be delighted to hear from you. His address is: 31 Maryland Street, Pictreton, Cape Town. He will also, incidentally, be arranging for the delivery of the slop pail requested by you.

Regarding the clothing list sent by you, it has given me a sense of triumph to have succeeded, at long, long last, in wheedling it out of you. You do not say whether you want winter weight or ordinary sheets so I shall send you the latter. But if you have found the winter sheets which I previously sent a boon please let me know and I shall have some more sent. The clothing is being attended to and should reach you before not too long. I shall try not to go too mad in the choice of colours and materials.

There are a few ideas for your greater comfort which friends have suggested and I would be glad if you would let me have your comments on them. Firstly, are you interested in any occupational therapy-type activities (sorry about the dreadful phrase, but it's the only one to convey what I mean). For example, a painting kit, or painting by numbers, or carpentry, or fret work, or tapestry work, or anything else in this line? Secondly, could you perhaps sound out the authorities about allowing a 16 mm film projector for you? We would then either try to get someone to donate one outright to you, and have say two films a weekend sent out to you from Cape Town, or else hire a projector and films for you over the weekends. I am certain that there would not be any objection to this arrangement, but I would be glad if you could make inquiries informally about it — that is, of course, if the idea appeals to you. Thirdly, what about brightening your quarters with a couple of paintings, a bedspread, small carpet, etc? I have also been wanting to ask you for some time whether you were satisfied with the plastic easy chair which you have, or whether you would prefer something more comfortable. In line with all this, could you describe what furnishings you have at present, and what more you would like to have? Well, I have provided a hefty questionnaire for you to answer, and I shall get cracking on these various items just as soon as I hear from you.

I am sorry, Bob. Several days have passed since I started writing this letter and was interrupted. It has been a hectic week, but a pretty good one on the whole.

You will have seen in the Press that there has been a rush of cases this week. Best of all, from my point of view, is the success I had which has given me new heart. If you lose solidly over a ~~period~~ period of nearly two years and then suddenly win, it does something for you! In fact, I have been in a state best described as euphoria.

Brian and Jill were at my flat the other evening for a victory drink, and we talked a lot about you. They naturally send their warmest greetings. They are sending you a thing called ~~xxx~~ "auto bridge" which apparently enables you to play bridge on your own. I don't know whether you are a bridge or card fan, but it should provide an entertaining means of exercising your wits. I'm a lousy card player. A girl friend once tried to teach me to play bridge. She explained everything carefully to me for an hour and the lesson then broke up in uproar when I asked her, in an embarrassed sort of way, if she would mind explaining to me which were the clubs and which the spades. I just can never remember the difference between them!

There have been so many books going out to you that I think I have lost track. I have an idea that I have misplaced one list of which I should have advised you, but am not too sure. In any event, this week another batch was delivered to the Island on my behalf -- it was collected from friends -- and the list reads:

The Chamberlain Letters
Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia 1926-1933
Poems of Miles Burrows
Before the Armada
Religious thought in the 19th century
From Puritanism to the Age of Reason
The Sermon on the Mount
Sophocles the Dramatist
The Pastoral Letters
Letters from Jack London
Death of a naturalist
Poems of Louis Zukofsky
Man's place in nature
Religious controversies in the 19th century
Post-Victorian Britain
Mayakovsky
Poems of Alexander Pope
The Stuart Constitution
The Icon and the Axe
The making of the English Protestant tradition
Textual and literary criticism
The Reichswehr and politics
The heights of Macchu Picchu
Art Afterpieces

I have been at fault in not sending the "Sunday Times" literary supplements but will rectify this shortly.

As you predicted, I was indeed shocked to learn about your change of feelings about being a Christian. Even more so, I was taken aback at the apparent immediate cause of your change of feeling -- the books which you have read. I haven't yet got around to reading "Honest to G-d", but I have always understood it to be positively critical. But I can understand that this sort of book would push one away from one's religion. But what effects have Bonhoeffer had in this regard? I know that, for myself, my readings of Bonhoeffer have caused me to waver in my view of him. I started off, having heard a great deal about him and having read only a little, with a tremendously high regard -- I placed him on a pedestal high above other mortals. But I have come to see him as a very simple, ordinary man who stood up for basic beliefs, lived -- and died -- for them simply and sincerely. In a way this is a disappointing thing about him to have to accept. One likes to see one's heroes cast in a giant mould, and from what I have read, Bonhoeffer wasn't that at all. Also, I must admit that in reading his writings, it has often presented a challenge to faith -- to have believed so implicitly, and to what end? And I would also admit that it does seem to me (although I might be wrong about this through lack of enough knowledge) that his opposition was not all that clear or effective. I rather tend to suspect that this aspect of him has become ~~inflated~~ inflated because there were so few who did oppose, so that the role of those who did must necessarily be inflated. As I know my history of that period, it seems to me that the initial opposition was wiped out in the very early 30's, and the opposition which developed in the early 40's was of a very different character and motivated by feelings and drives which, in a way, had been responsible for bringing the ~~existent~~ evil originally into power. But I am digressing here. I would very much like to hear from you, Bob, why there has been this great change within you. I know, of course, how the ministers have failed you as people and this must have had its effect. But I know that you had accepted this, and your change has bewildered me.

Also, while I think of it, I have always wanted to ask you how you reacted to the books on Judaism. Let me hastily add that I am not seeking to offer you an alternative, but am merely interested in your response as such.

And when you say you are no longer a Christian, does this extend to a rejection too of G-d?

You will probably have seen a recent ~~news~~ report that my passport has again been refused. As a result, and for other reasons which I have previously outlined, I intend leaving South Africa, within the quite near future. I shall probably head initially for the U.K., and will either stay there or try for university work in the U.S. I wish I could discuss this with you. There are still great conflicts within me, revolving mainly around

my feelings of responsibility for bringing about change, my feelings of despair at having to leave Jenny behind, and my feelings also, as you will know, at having to leave you behind. When I recently conveyed my decision to your wife, her reaction of dismay pushed into the open all my own concealed fears and guilts. Yet it is a decision which I feel must be taken. Only one assurance can I give you, as I gave to your wife: that whatever I have been able to do for you and the family will continue unchecked. Others will do the direct work, and I shall continue to do whatever I can from wherever I am. I am not going just yet as there are still things that I must do, and ~~at~~ there are still responsibilities in which I must face up to. If, and as I write the "if" is an unknown quantity, these responsibilities do not materialise, then I would hope to be away within the next couple of months.

I know that what I am writing will cause you great unhappiness, and it is in fact the reason why there has been so much delay in writing this letter to you, and why I tore up the one which I first wrote. But I felt that I wanted you to know my thoughts and my intentions in advance so that anything which I did would not come as a complete shock to you. I have, of course, about a year ago I think it was, told you of my intention of leaving, but it is now a cut and dried decision. Provided, as I say, that nothing befalls me in the way of having to face up to responsibilities. On that score, you must know that I fully accept my responsibilities and would not contemplate actually leaving until I know that I am not to be called upon to meet them.

That relationship of mine ended a while ago. Despite your sweet words in your letter, your wife (after I had told her of the breakup) told me of your worry about it and your prediction of heartbreak. You were right, I am afraid. All was not what it seemed. Well, it has helped to add another coating to the barrier of cynicism. I am well out of it and it is completely in the past.

Since starting this letter, I have ordered the clothing needed by you, and I hope that it will be to your taste. While doing the buying it struck me that I did not know whether you washed your own clothing -- and ironing? -- or whether it went to a laundry. Anyway, to play safe, I relied as much as possible on drip-dry articles, for pyjamas and shirts. You did not specify whether the pyjamas should be winter or summer weight so I bought you two pairs of the former and one of the latter (in a drip-dry material which will dry within a couple of hours). The sheets also you did not specify so I have bought ordinary ones. Will you let me know whether you need winter ~~winter~~ weight sheets? P.S. You can relax about the clothing this time: nothing really daring except a Bri-nylon cloth for a shirt which I hope you will find comfortable. But colours and materials are conservative.

This letter is developing into a serial....it's Saturday morning already and I am still writing it. There is so much else that I want to write to you about, but I have taken so long with this letter that I think I shall end off now and write again in a few days time.

I gave your love to Jenny and she reciprocates -- although I should mention this is not ~~the~~ word which she actually used!

Keep well, Bob.

With great affection,

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