

NEWSLETTER OF SUPPORT MINISTRIES

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THERE ARE CUCKOOS HATCHING IN THE ECCLESIASTICAL NEST

by
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"Beloved, being very eager to write to you of our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For admission has been gained by some who pervert the grace of our God and deny our only master and Lord Jesus Christ." So wrote Jude, who evidently would have preferred to write something about our common salvation.

I have the same mind and desire to write in a way that keeps our eyes simply on the Lord, and encourages us to walk purposefully in the Way with Him. But we live in a time when the Gospel is being subverted from within the Church itself. We all have a responsibility to encourage one another in the Truth of the Faith once for all delivered to the saints.

I have once again written about issues I frequently wrote about in times past. Alas, what I then warned fellow Christians against is now believed by many in the Church, and purposefully striven for.

When Christians in leadership in Church or State, do all in their power to prevent fellow Christians from freely fraternising with one another, one has become accustomed to saying that the Gospel is no longer being rightly perceived. We might even describe it as apartheid.

An earlier brand of liberation theology used an ideology of separation to preserve an Afrikaner national identity and to establish a political power base. In 1968 the SACC described this theology and ideology of apartheid as a pseudo gospel. It was Afrikanerdom's method of seeking a way of salvation for itself, and supposedly for the rest of us, by invoking a variety of Biblical texts like "Separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives." (Ezra 10:11) upon which to base our social structure in South Africa.

We saw in this a misuse of scripture for cultural and political reasons. This WAY was pressed upon us as the Christian way with an insistent intensity in the sixties. It had its genesis in a determined and understandable effort by the Afrikaner people to find a solution to their problem of the power of British imperialism, which smothered their aspirations in the land of their birth. The deliverance of Afrikanerdom was striven for through the Church, which seemed to be the only institution left to Afrikaners after their defeat by the British in 1902. The Church, and the nation within the Church, found its model in the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage.

The Afrikaner people saw a way of salvation through the use of the ideology of apartheid, as a political instrument to secure an independent future for themselves. Opposition to it was seen by both Church and State leaders to be disobedience to God. But it was a pseudo Gospel because there was in it nothing to do with the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. It was a misuse of Scripture. It was a cuckoo hatched in an ecclesiastical nest.

I have come to believe that we become like that which we most hate. In order to confront and destroy the fruit of Afrikaner Liberation theology, another power is being raised up which is simply another brand of the same thing. This form of Liberation theology is devised to serve Black national aspirations in a struggle to be free from White domination. Here again there is no place for the redeeming work of Jesus as it is understood in the New Testament.

Essentially both forms of Liberation Theology try to put things right by handling the fruit of sin, as it is expressed in social structures, without effectively handling the root, which is sin and guilt in peoples lives. Thus a false hope is raised in God's Name that the well being and peace long desired will appear as people are delivered from political oppression.

The first form of Liberation theology which we have considered drew its ideological power from a false understanding of what scripture has to say about avoiding morally corrupting relationships and a false reverence for what appears to be God's pre-ordained creation of national identities, instead of finding unity in a common discipleship in Christ. The second draws much of its punch from the misuse, or over-simplification of the meaning of "the poor" in scripture. Both have assumed the way to put things right to be strong political action, and the second, as the Kairos document makes clear, is orientated towards the concept of a holy war, against what are construed to be the enemies of God. This is an Islamic theology. A Christian understanding is that war is a matter reluctantly entered upon as the lesser of two evils.

Since both these ideologies presume to heal the hurts and oppressions that exist among men without Jesus' handling of the root of our disorders in our sinful condition, this means that we "deny our only Saviour and Lord," Jesus Christ. He is essentially irrelevant. What is more, like the foolish Galatians, we have, in God's Name, turned to salvation by moralism and good works with all the self righteousness which that way of life produces.

This is a deeply destructive cuckoo in the Christian nest. I do not find it difficult to recognise that cuckoo. I have been there during a significant period of my ministry. Liberation theology, from what ever source it may come, is essentially a misuse of scriptural truth for power political ends. But the power to whom scriptural truth points is God, who Himself, and who alone is "The Truth". He is the lamb of God. By Him alone sin and guilt are handled for all men. He sat down at the table with, and ministered to sinners who were the oppressed and the oppressors. But you cannot turn Jesus into an ideology without losing Him. You are then left with an idolatry masquerading as God's Truth. This will possess a dynamic other than the Spirit of God, who in the widest sense works our salvation. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." (Zech. 4 : 6).

MISUSED

The poor who are always with us, are also always exploited. God's love for the poor has been grossly misused for political ends. White South Africans, many of whom had no strong feelings in times past for the deplorable condition of the poor, and the gross inequality of opportunity for black people in our land, have suddenly begun to wring their hands in public about the poor suffering from the effects of sanctions. The question is, however, whether, for many of us the problem is really the threat which sanctions pose to our own well being.

What happens in Liberation theology is that the poor whom God loves and upon whose side He is, are too narrowly defined: We need to spend a little time to consider who were the poor among whom Jesus mixed, and on how Jesus described the purpose of His coming into the world.

There were various categories of the poor with whom Jesus was particularly involved. They were not only the materially poor and destitute. They were "outsiders" of various kinds. The most obvious were those who were disreputable because their poverty or their occupations, led to their being uneducated and ignorant in a religious sense. The religious ignorance of the poor, and the dishonest or immoral behaviour of others whose trades were proscribed, deprived them of any hope of salvation, according to the religiously respectable. Jesus' enemies spoke with contempt of His friends as prostitutes and tax collectors (Mk. 2 : 16 - 17). They were the poor.

Proscribed occupations included usurers, tax collectors and herdsmen - the latter because they were prone to sheep stealing.

"Jesus is on the side of people who are bowed down by disabilities of any kind. These might be crippling anxiety, futility, frustration or a sin-laden conscience"

The self righteous pharisee in Jesus' parable included in his list of outsiders, robbers or extortioners, adulterers and tax collectors. (Lk 18 : 11). Certainly the Gentiles and Samaritans were in this category also. When Jesus announced the coming Kingdom in the synagogue in Nazareth, the Jews who heard Him wanted to kill Him. The reason was that Jesus gave them an example of God using a Gentile woman in Sidon to be a blessing to Elijah, and told them that the only leper Elisha healed was not a Jew but Naaman the Syrian. Jesus was justifying His omission of words from His quotation from Isaiah which were regarded as referring to the Lord's condemnation of the Gentiles on the last Day. (See "And the day of vengeance of our God," Isa. 61 : 1 - 2 and Lk. 4 : 16 - 29). He also responded to the need of a centurion of the oppressing army and commended his faith, and had the time to chat about sin and salvation with a Samaritan woman. He said He had come for sinners like these and not for the apparently righteous.

OPPRESSED

Jesus reached out to those who knew they were outsiders as well as those who did not. The father in Jesus' parable, so prodigal in his love, was ready to embrace the obvious outsider son, stinking of pig styes as he was and also the self righteous "insider", the peevish and joyless elder brother. Jesus' catholicity of love is breath taking.

Jesus has a lot of time for the physically and spiritually oppressed. He sent his disciples to proclaim the Kingdom, and to show the signs of its coming by healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing lepers, and casting out demons. (Mt. 10 : 8).

He cares also about his disciples, and wanted them "to be with Him" although some of them were capitalists in the fishing industry like the sons of Zebedee. Another was, or had been, a zealot, and another a tax collector. He called them His little ones, and said that those who gave them even a cup of water in His name would be blessed. (Mt. 10 : 42). In St. Luke's account of the beatitudes Jesus is clearly addressing His disciples when He says, "Blessed are you poor for yours is the Kingdom of God". He is speaking of

disciples who have accepted the insecurities of poverty and also persecution as they carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth. (Lk. 6 : 20 - 22). They are the poor in their vulnerability.

His face is also toward all who labour and are heavy laden. (Mt. 11 : 28 - 29). That is to say, He is on the side of people who are bowed down by disabilities of any kind. These might be crippling anxiety, futility and frustration, or a sin-laden conscience. He promised them a new peace and freedom as they accepted the yoke of lives yielded to Him.

PHARISEES

There follow His woes spoken to the rich. How hard it is for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God, (whether the riches are material, spiritual, moral, or ideological righteousness). It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. But we are told, even that is possible with God. (Mk. 10 : 27).

We must not, in our description of the poor overlook St. Matthew's version of the beatitudes. These seem to be addressed primarily to the Jewish Christians, whose temptation, derived from their Jewish background, may well have been self righteousness. That is the temptation of moralists and ideologues in all ages, whether these are conservative or radical. The first of the beatitudes informs, once again, His disciples: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven". If then, a rich man has a deep sense of his sinful condition, and places all his possessions at the Lord's disposal, to be used as He may determine he too may receive the Kingdom of God?

Jesus also came to bring good news to pharisees. A surprising number of the Lord's parables were beamed in their direction to encourage them to respond to the Gospel. Evidently they too were poorer than most. This is good news for pharisees of this and every age!

Jesus came to preach good news to the poor. We now have those words, "the poor" in perspective in a New Testament context, as we considered the very people with whom Jesus mixed and to whom He addressed Himself.

Now let us consider what He did to deliver the poor from oppression. The first thing He did was to announce the Kingdom. The first three Gospels record the announcement in rather different ways. Let us look at them. Mark says tersely, "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, and saying 'The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel'". Matthew tells us that Jesus went into Galilee, and that in Galilee of the Gentiles the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the shadow of death light has dawned. Galileans seem to have been despised by Judeans. "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" said Nathanael". Here then is a message of hope for outsiders. From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." (Mt. 4 : 13 - 17).

THE POOR

In Luke's Gospel Jesus is described as entering the synagogue in Nazareth, where he was given the book of Isaiah to read. He chose a passage from Chapter 61 : 1 - 2 . In reading this, He, by implication, claimed to be the Messiah. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me", He read, "because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord". He added, "Today has this scripture been fulfilled in your hearing".

Now who were the poor? I think we know by this time. What was their captivity and from what kind of oppression did they suffer, is the next question. There are several things to be said about that. The first is that if Jesus was speaking about prison walls, and His unlocking prison cells or dungeons, He was not as good as His word. He did not rescue His cousin John the Baptist from captivity, nor, for that matter did He visit him in prison. What kind of prison was He talking about in the parable of the sheep and goats? (Mt. 25 : 31. ff) Would He not have done what He told us to do? Or is he there too talking about bondages worse than imprisonment. May it not be true that to be in prison knowing Salvation in Jesus Christ is to be preferred to "freedom" outside without Him?

Could it be, after all, that this captivity and oppression is something ultimately more grievous than that suffered by the Jews in Egyptian bondage, from which they were delivered under the Old Covenant? Does not the New Covenant far surpass the old in depth and in splen-

dour? (2. Cor 3 : 7). Could it not be that what Jesus accomplished was the far more significant passover victory, achieved in His death and resurrection? Was He not speaking to the people of Nazareth about what is so succinctly conveyed by words in Colossians 1 : 13 - 14. Namely, "He has delivered us from the Kingdom of darkness, and transferred us to the Kingdom of His dear Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins". Are not guilt and being in bondage to the deceiver the most terrible of all oppressions, and bearing withal an eternal significance? Is there not only one place in the universe where our guilt can be healed, and is the name of that not Jesus? Is not sin and guilt the most potent cause of human affliction both personal and social? And what prevents us from seeing that, if it is not a blindness with which the ruler of this present evil age afflicts us? Does not Jesus also proclaim "the recovery of sight to the blind" when He proclaims His Kingdom?

ROOT OF SIN

Do we not see clearly who it is with whom Jesus came to do combat? God is not against any man. He is only against the deceiver of the world, whose name is Lucifer. The pseudo angel of pseudo light seeks to unseat Jesus, who proclaims His Kingdom. Lucifer counsels us to concentrate on the fruit of evil and sin in putting societies right. That leaves the root of sin to remain and proliferate more of its baleful fruits. This is he who counsels us to clean only the outside of the cup, but Jesus says, "First cleanse the inside of the cup that the outside may be also clean", (Mt 23 : 25 - 26). Yes, we are also to unbind the burdens of economic and political oppression, and care for the widow and orphan, (James 2 : 14 - 16). Undoubtedly too the black people of our land have been shamefully treated as outsiders, and that by fellow Christians. Those who do such things bring upon themselves the judgement of God, because they are commanded to love one another as Jesus loves.

"Lucifer counsels us to concentrate on the fruit of evil and sin, in putting societies right. That leaves the root of sin to remain and proliferate more of it's baleful fruits"

But do not tell people that the Good News in Jesus Christ depends now, and ultimately, on what men and women can do to produce a better world. (See Kairos Document, Page 20. "A message of hope"). That is not the Christian's hope. That is a sick joke to anyone who has any historical perspective. If that is all we may expect, we are without God and without hope in the world. But it is not all because the Good News is now and ultimately, "Christ in me the hope of glory".

GOOD WORKS

When John the Baptist in prison began to doubt whether Jesus was the Christ, Jesus told his disciples to say, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the good news preached to them". Jesus was fighting for the poor. He is striving with all His powers against the blindness of men. He tells us so when He says; "From the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of heaven has been coming violently, and men of violence take it by force". (I prefer the foot note in R.S.V.) The most dramatic evidence of the violent conflict is the casting out of raving and writhing devils. The ultimate battle is won on Calvary. It is not a battle against men.

But never let it be said that this removes from us the responsibility of feeding the hungry, and removing oppressive social structures from the shoulders of those who are beloved of God. At the same time we are told in Ephesians that the redeemed "are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared before hand that we should walk in them", (Eph. 2 : 10). These good works will certainly include what Jesus told His disciples to do as signs of the Kingdom.

The Liberation theology understands the poor essentially as the proletariat. This is a gross misuse of the truth of the Gospel for political ends, inspired by a legitimate yearning for freedom. To this I say, "Liberation, both personal and social, a resounding YES! But to liberation theology a resounding, NO! This theology of the poor is a theology without the redeeming work of Christ. It is pseudo. It is a rather nasty cuckoo hatched in the ecclesiastical nest.

It must also be said, however, that there would have been little desire to manipulate Holy scripture in this way, but for the almost total impotence of the Church to get to grips with people's deepest needs, and to equip them with the spiritual dynamic to care even for the spiritual and social needs of members of their own congregations, let alone for the social needs of their own neighbourhoods.

Tiresome cuckoos in the ecclesiastical nest are sanctified political ideologies and counter ideologies. These will always turn out to be false gospels, which cause us to excommunicate one another. There is no political absolute. Neither Capitalism nor Socialism nor anything in between, will work effectively without the people who have the right disposition to make them beneficent. There is always a need for a godly pragmatism.

Jesus did not promise us Utopia. He promised and established a Kingdom, which will find its consummation only at the End Time. It is a Kingdom of God but even now we receive the first installment of our Kingdom inheritance as the Holy Spirit comes to abide in us, (Eph. 1:13-14). This is realised eschatology. It is foolish to suppose, however, that Christians who receive the first fruits of their inheritance and who live in a fallen world could produce an ideal society. Jesus did not promise that at all, nor did the early Church expect it. Church people have often throughout history chased this will of the wisp which leads them over a cliff.

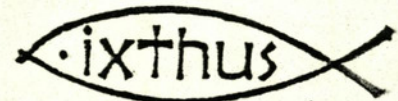
When the gospel is perverted to the grace of a political spirit takes over with religious fervour and dynamic, and we may be plunged into Jihad, a holy war of varying degrees of intensity. But the holy war is not a Christian concept at all. It is, however given expression in a mild form by Christians who are no longer able to communicate in any way with one another for political reasons. When this happens the counter ideology, brought into existence to remove apartheid, becomes itself an expression of apartheid Christians are separated, not on account of differences in race or culture, but for political reasons. Thus Christians who are convinced that the application of sanctions is in their judgment not the wisest way of reaching the common

objective of a more righteous social order, may be "excommunicated" because they do not adhere to the true doctrine of political salvation.

In what other way can we understand the cruel pressure exerted on Coresta King and her entourage who were guests at a deeply significant spiritual event in our land, not to meet with two other South African leaders who are in good standing in their Churches? These American friends were evidently bruised and distressed by being obliged to conform with what seemed to them inconsistent with the Spirit of Jesus. He sat at table with outsiders like tax collectors, prostitutes and also with pharisees. The fact is that He gave His life on the cross for sinners. St. Paul reminds us of this and encourages us to be of the same mind when he says, "Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." (Rom. 15:7). He has only got sinners to welcome!

It is quite clear that the American visitors handled a situation not of their choosing, with dignity and grace. But for us who live here, there are questions which disturb the mind. For Christians the most important thing about a man or woman is they have been redeemed by the Lord Jesus and are children of God through Him. That one is the President of the Republic, and another is the Chief Minister of KwaZulu, and another is a Bishop, is a quite secondary matter to us. But how are we to handle the implicit declaration that certain persons are persona non grata, or excommunicated, because their political views are of a particular kind? What validity does such a declaration, and the consigning to hell of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, also Christians in good standing, have? Should we all cold shoulder one another for political reasons?

A further question which teases the mind is, can we expect all other Anglicans, both white and black, who may believe with integrity that a better way than sanctions could be found, to await the same treatment? I am not asking who has more or less political wisdom. The question is simply, are we to expect a new dispensation in which we may be regarded as being in some sense in schism for not adhering to a particular doctrine of political salvation? A further question which remains to be asked is, was it not strange that such a political decision should have been made by a spiritual authority, or was this a spiritual decision made for political reasons? Whatever the answer may be, it would seem that we have one of the offspring of the Cuckoo of Liberation theology being inserted into the ecclesiastical nest. It is important that we recognise cuckoo chicks when we see them. By them the faith once delivered to the saints is being eroded. "Gird up your minds, ... set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (1 Pet. 1:13.)



SUPPORT MINISTRIES

The aim of the Support Ministries is to serve the work of God in Jesus Christ in the power of His Spirit in the CPISA and the wider Church in these ways:

- i. By supporting personal and congregational renewal in the Christian faith in worship and prayer, in growth and evangelism, in compassionate service and mission.
- ii By supporting ministries which stimulate such renewal.
- iii By supporting congregations which are concerned for or involved in renewal for themselves or their communities.
- iv By supporting co-ordination and communication of news, resources and events for the mutual benefit and encouragement of Christians.

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