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## 11. APARTHEID: DIVINE CALLING\*

by D. F. MALAN

*On December 15, 1953, Rev. John E. Piersma, one of a group of Christian Reformed Church ministers in Grand Rapids, Michigan, wrote a letter to the Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa, Dr. D. F. Malan, asking for "a frank description of apartheid," one which could be used "to convince the American public." Reprinted below is Malan's reply of February 12, 1954.*

\*From *Apartheid: South Africa's Answer to a Major Problem* (Pretoria, State Information Office, 1954?).

... It must be appreciated from the outset that Apartheid, separation, segregation or differentiation—whatever the name given the traditional racial policy of South Africa—is part and parcel of the South African tradition as practiced since the first Dutch settlement at the Cape in 1652, and still supported by the large majority of white South Africans of the main political parties.

The deep-rooted color consciousness of the White South Africans—a phenomenon quite beyond the comprehension of the uninformed—arises from the fundamental difference between the two groups, White and Black. The difference in color is merely the physical manifestation of the contrast between two irreconcilable ways of life, between barbarism and civilization, between heathenism and Christianity, and finally between overwhelming numerical odds on the one hand and insignificant numbers on the other. . . . The racial differences are as pronounced today as they were 300 years ago. . . .

From the outset the European colonists were far out-numbered; there is no doubt that if they had succumbed to the temptation of assimilation, they would have been submerged in the Black heathendom of Africa as effectively as if they had been completely annihilated. Of necessity they had to arm and protect themselves against this ever-growing menace, and how could it better be done than by throwing an impenetrable armor around themselves—the armor of racial purity and self-preservation?

. . . [T]here is no parallel for the South African racial record of non-extirpation, non-miscegenation, non-assimilation, but of preaching and practicing Christianity with the retention of racial identity and of mutual respect.

This then is the basis of Apartheid. . . . Apartheid is based on what the Afrikaner believes to be his divine calling and his privilege—to convert the heathen to Christianity without obliterating his national identity. And as you have addressed me in the first place as a Christian and a churchman, let me at the outset summarize for your consideration the point of view of the Dutch Reformed Church with which the other Afrikaans churches are fundamentally in agreement.

A considered statement [of principles] on behalf of the leaders of the Dutch Reformed Church . . . was issued a few months ago. . . . I may summarize these principles as follows:

1. Missionary work has been practiced in this country from the early beginnings as being the Christian duty of the settlers to the heathen. . . .
2. The Church believes that God in His Wisdom so disposed it that the first White men and women who settled at the foot of the Black continent were profoundly religious people, imbued with a very real zeal to bring the light of the Gospel to the heathen nations of Africa. These first South Africans lit a torch which was carried to the farthest corners of the sub-continent in the

course of the last three centuries and whose light now shines upon the greater part of all non-White peoples south of the Equator.

3. Whilst the Church regards the conversion of the heathen as a primary step in his march to civilization it is prepared to face and, in fact, to implement the implications of christianizing the heathen. . . .

4. In the early beginnings the Church used the blessings of civilization as a means to attract the heathen, but today the traditional concept of European guardianship has taken the form of fostering and financing to the full the social, educational and economic development of the non-White. . . . [T]he Church has at all times vouchsafed the various Black races the right and duty to retain their national identities. Christianity must not rob the non-White of his language and culture. Its function is to permeate and penetrate to the depths of his nationalism, whilst encouraging him to retain and refine those national customs and traditions which do not clash with the Christian tenets.

5. The traditional fear of the Afrikaner of racial equality (equalitarianism) between White and Black derives from his aversion to miscegenation. The Afrikaner has always believed very firmly that if he is to be true to his primary calling of bringing Christianity to the heathen, he must preserve his racial identity intact. The Church is, therefore, entirely opposed to intermarriage between Black and White and is committed to withstand everything that is calculated to facilitate it. . . . Whereas the Church . . . opposes the social equalitarianism which ignores racial and color differences between White and Black in everyday life, it is prepared to do all in its power to implement a social and cultural segregation which will rebound to the benefit of both sections.

6. But the duty of the Church has its bounds. It is wrong to expect the Church to enunciate a racial policy for the peoples of South Africa. . . .

7. The Bible is accepted as being the Word of God and the Dutch Reformed Church accepts the authority of Holy Writ as normative for all the political, social, cultural and religious activities in which man indulges. The Church acknowledges the basic rights of the State as a particular divine institution to regulate the lives and actions of its citizens.

Passing then from the historical and spiritual basis of apartheid to its everyday political application as practiced by the present South African Government, let me remind you that government is the art of the possible. It makes no sense, therefore, to criticize the policy of apartheid in the abstract and without due regard to facts and conditions as they exist and as they have been allowed to develop through the centuries. And may I emphasize that to consider only the rights of the Blacks would be precisely as immoral as to have regard only for the rights of the Whites.

I must ask you to give White South Africans credit for not being a nation of scheming reactionaries imbued with base and inhuman motives, not a nation of fools, blind to the gravity of their vital problem. They are normal human

beings. They are a small nation, grappling with one of the most difficult problems in the world. To them millions of semi-barbarous Blacks look for guidance, justice and the Christian way of life.

Here a tremendous experiment is being tried; not that fraught with the bloodshed of annihilation, nor that colored by assimilation, but that inspired by a belief in the logical differentiation, with the acceptance of the basic human rights and responsibilities. Human rights and responsibilities can, however, only be exercised by human beings who are capable of appreciating their significance and it is here that my Government, dealing as it does with a still primitive non-White population, is faced with a major educational problem. . . . Today nearly 800,000 Bantu children are given their schooling free of charge, whereas many more attend technical and industrial schools and an ever-increasing number are being fitted at universities, hospitals and training establishments for the profession of doctors, nurses, policemen, clerks, demonstrators, artisans and builders.

. . . It is computed that every European taxpayer in our country "carries" more than four non-Whites in order to provide the latter with the essential services involving education, hospitalization, housing, etc.

For, apart from education, much is done for the physical rehabilitation of the Bantu in his own reserves—in many cases the best agricultural land available in our comparatively poor country. . . .

Allegations that the country's non-Whites are not accorded political rights are untrue. In the urban areas, Advisory Boards whose members are elected by the residents of Black urban residential areas, provide an adequate mouth-piece, whilst tribal authorities are now being established in terms of the Bantu Authorities Act in the rural areas. Through this means the Bantu are given the opportunity to play an active part in the administration of their own affairs and, as they develop, more responsibilities and duties, as well as privileges, are granted them until they are proved to be competent to govern themselves. . . .

Contrary to popular belief abroad, the Whites and Blacks are practically contemporary settlers in South Africa, the former migrating from Europe, the latter fleeing from the terror of Central African internecine wars of extermination.

It is only fifty years since South Africa, until then a poor country, has, through the discovery of its vast mineral resources, emerged from its pastoral era. Half a century of intense development has brought about the upliftment also of the Bantu far beyond that reached by him in any other country on the sub-continent. . . .

Theoretically the object of the policy of Apartheid could be fully achieved by dividing the country into two states, with all the Whites in one, all the Blacks in the other. For the foreseeable future, however, this is simply not

practical politics. Whether in time to come we shall reach a stage where some such division, say on a federal basis, will be possible, is a matter we must leave to the future.

In any case, the full implementation of the policy of separate racial development will take very many years. Call it an experiment, if you like, and one could say it is an experiment which is as yet only in its initial stages. Many aspects of the problem are certainly still far from clear, and it would be unwise, even if it were possible, to draw up a blueprint for 50 years ahead. In more than one respect progress will have to be by trial and error. And if in this process we should err, I ask you and your countrymen not to judge our efforts only by our incidental failures nor to reproach us for what you may at this great distance judge as being lack of the spirit of Christ.