

Reynolds C.L. (1990), “South Africa why give a damn?” *JOURNEY, Australia*

In making our sacrifices to the gods of success we can perhaps attain a life without pain or conflict but the cost is isolation and indifference. In becoming self-centered and power-possession orientated we at the same time tend to become apathetic towards the needs and struggles of others.

Apathy originally meant freedom from suffering but today it is more accurate to speak of apathy as freedom from passionate feeling. Pain, joy and love do not touch the apathetic.

The tragedy of our Australian way of life is not the increasing number of people in need who go unnoticed but the decay of conscience in our society. People are not sure what they believe in or feel anymore or whether there is anything worth believing in at all – other than themselves. Indifference hides us in the crowd.

Pink Floyd, that music group gifted with the art for psycho-exploration, in their song “On the Turning Away” on “A Momentary Lapse of Reason” exposes this moral dilemma:

“On the turning away from the pale and down trodden and the words they say which we wont understand don’t accept that what’s happening is just a case of others suffering or you’ll find that your joining in the turning away it’s a sin that somehow light is changing to shadow and casting its shroud over all we have known.”

Apathy eventually effects the apathetic as much as it does those whom it ignores. This is true for our country as much as it is for an individual.

While, in theory, there is no such thing as a social conscience since the conscience is defined as the self reflecting and correcting mechanism of the individual, in practice it is possible to speak of a social or collective conscience as individuals express their values as a society. As individuals, as well as a country, Australians need to claim values that express a concern for justice and the welfare of others.

While the innocent and less fortunate in Australia, such as children living in poverty and the Kooris, need our energetic support, those who suffer at the hands of oppression and exploitation in other countries should not be left to struggle alone.

While there are any number of other countries which we could give our moral support and solidarity, South Africa is a country in dire need. It appears to the black South Africans that any hope for justice and the end of oppression and murder will come from outside.

For more than thirty years black South Africans have suffered blatant racism and genocide.

The Whites of South Africa remain a privileged race: they have taken the best land restricting black settlements to poorer rural areas, providing themselves with every modern convenience but relegated the blacks to a life of legal restriction and poverty.

In South Africa live 4.7 million whites, 2.8 million coloureds and 22.7 million blacks. The coloureds are people of mixed race or people of other races who have immigrated for employment purposes and are treated better than the indigenous people. Of the Gross National Product of the Southern African region white South Africa receives 51.4% while South African blacks receive 3.2%.

The poverty and the restrictions on employment and housing impact the standard of health, literacy, life expectancy, infant mortality, alcoholism and nutrition. The blacks suffer not only because of the struggle for food and water but also to maintain and raise their families without being torn apart by apartheid and its restrictions on work.

It is apartheid and all it represents in terms of privilege and suffering that is the object of change for the blacks. In seeking outside help some have advocated economic sanctions while others believe they would only hurt the blacks. It is fundamentally this difference of approach which has stimulated much of the inter-racial fighting among the blacks - which has now reached alarming rates.

In 1989, approximately 1400 blacks were killed in factional fighting with possibly twice that number dying of other causes this year. The daily police report of June 26, 1990 reveals the degradation that has become common: "nine black men knifed by a mob, three black women burnt to death, a nine year old girl 'neck laced' with a burning tyre." The day before a dozen shacks were burnt down in Khayelitsha near Cape Town in clashes between groups supporting the PAC and the ANC with a PAC supporter burning to death in the fire. (Ref. "Star" 26/6/90)

There is no doubt that the racial tension in South Africa is affecting everyone. John F. Kennedy once said. "If pacific revolution is not made possible then violent revolution is made inevitable." This appraisal with particular prophetic relevance to South Africa in its present tension.

Yet there are signs of change. President de Klerk has been showing a willingness to design a new policy towards the blacks. The exclusiveness, the uniqueness of the Afrikaner is under threat of collapse under the proposed new partnership. There has been talk of a new constitution and of elections to allow more blacks representation.

In all of this, it is adherent however to find whites using "the old 'God' ploy" – as Maxwell Smart might say – to justify their domination and racism.

Most of the Afrikaners belong to the Dutch Reformed Church and for 300 years Afrikaner have considered themselves to be God's Chosen People, with a divine calling to keep their blood pure and to stay apart from the blacks. They believe they had a divine right to rule.

Despite protests and confrontation with other churches from across the world it wasn't till 1986 that the Dutch Reformed Church decreed that all people of all colours were created equal. Three centuries of white, divinely appointed domination may have come to an end but it will take some time for the people to change their hearts (conscience) and consider justice for all.

It is for this reason that de Klerk is seen by the right wing whites as Judas because of proposed reforms. They natively believe God is behind them.

It appears inevitable that a new nation is being born but the deprivation and the death are unlikely to stop for some time.

What the Blacks need is not our apathy or isolated self interest but genuine solidarity and shared belief in their right to life, and a decent way of life at that.