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South Africa: A Personal Observation

by Ed Hindson

To most Americans South Africa seems to be an anachronism existing on some distant and forgotten shore. The Republic of South Africa is primarily known for its mineral wealth in gold and diamonds and its racial conflicts in black and white. Recently our attention has been focused again on the racial issue in South Africa. Nobel prizewinner Bishop Desmond Tutu has decried the evils of apartheid, and rightly so. Yet Senator Kennedy's visit to the Republic drew protests from blacks who accused him of trying to buy votes back home.

Few Americans have any firsthand knowledge of the Republic of South Africa, the richest and most powerful nation on the African continent. This is a complex nation of some 20 languages and races. Thus, the racial problem is not simply a black and white issue.

As a doctoral student at the interracial University of South Africa, I spent a considerable amount of time in southern Africa between 1979 and 1984, visiting Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Mozambique in addition to South Africa. I found Africa to be an amazingly beautiful continent populated with some of the finest people in the world.

I visited the hospitals, preached in the churches, spoke in the schools, and lectured in the universities. I preached to Zimbabwean patriots in a refugee camp on the border. In 1979 I rode across war-torn Rhodesia in military-escorted caravans. Later, in 1981, after the government changed, I drove across the country myself. I met the people: students, educators, farmers, laborers, government officials, doctors, nurses, pastors.

I do not claim to be an expert on African politics, but I do believe that I know something about the people. Like most Americans, the vast majority of South African blacks and whites are kind and gracious people. They want peace and prosperity. They want their children to have a better opportunity in life than they had. Like us, they fear the uncertain and the unknown. To them the greatest uncertainty is their future survival as a people.

The people of South Africa have the inherent resources to constructively correct their social imbalance and racial inequities.

My experiences convince me that the people of South Africa have the inherent resoures to constructively correct their social inequities, while providing a stable economy that can benefit all the peoples in the Republic. In view of the progress of the past five years, I believe that the policy of apartheid soon will be dissolved and that constructive engagement is the best policy for our government's dealing with South Africa. Foreign political bludgeoning is the one sure way to slow down the process rather than improve it. Destabilization would push South Africa into the Communist orbit. This would result in political chaos and mass starvation throughout southern Africa.

Prior to the elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power in Zimbabwe in 1980, foreign politicians and religionists were crying out against the so-called "enslavement" of blacks in Rhodesia. The World Council of Churches called for the overthrow of the white supremacist government in the name of liberation theology.

Today most Americans have forgotten about Zimbabwe (as they have about Vietnam and Cambodia). Five years later the average black family is no better off than they were under Ian Smith's government. Zimbabwe's economy is unstable and the food and water supplies are threatened by a severe draught. Much of the white population has fled the country, claiming police brutality, property confiscation, and political intimidation. Zimbabwe is a great country with a great potential, but forced change has not helped her realize that potential.

America can forget about Zimbabwe if it wants to, but South Africa cannot. For them it is too close to home. Most white South Africans fear that "one man, one vote" ultimately means "one man, one vote, *one time!*" Certainly they are fearful of losing a nation they have been building for over 300 years. Wouldn't we be? It is hypocritical of Western nations like America or Australia to tell South Africa what to do with its indigenous population in light of our treatment of the Indians and theirs of the Aboriginals. But nobody wants to talk about that issue.

There are still many unanswered questions in South African politics. If black rule is necessary, which blacks? Should it be the industrialized blacks of the townships like Soweto, or the majority tribal blacks of the rural areas? Will the minority tribes like the Venda accept rule from a majority tribe like the Zulu? Apartheid has been an official government policy for less than 40 years. America took a lot longer than that to deal with our own racial problems. I am convinced that South Africa needs our encouragement to continue to hasten its current reform. They do not need to be undermined by hypocrites from abroad. ■