

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT

On

MIGRATORY LABOUR, FAMILY LIFE AND A JUST SOCIETY

23 August 1976

The present grave situation in our country with regard to human relationships causes us to write this letter.

We are deeply perturbed at the disturbances, and are anxious to see peaceful solution to the problems, which beset our country.

We abhor violence and cannot but decry the loss of so many lives, and the destruction of property. Our sympathy goes out to the relatives and friends of those who have been killed.

We see these upheavals as the result of a burning sense of injustice among those who are deprived of so many rights.

The first thing we would ask is that all those who have their home in South Africa be looked upon and treated as people, that is, as human persons with fundamental rights that must be granted by the community and the State to enable them to live as human persons and fulfil their responsibilities.

All people should be allowed to have decent family life, and this would require the abolition of the Migratory labour system, so that people can live together as families. They should be provided with adequate housing in areas, which are properly served with good roads, proper side-paths, sufficient playing areas and parks. These and other amenities will require considerable expenditure, but the people concerned are contributing to the welfare of the community in no small measure. Without their labour, the economy would come to a halt. Transport facilities and hours of work should be such that the husband and father can be enabled to make his house a home and have sufficient time to spend with his family. The restriction on residence should also be abolished, and people allowed to gravitate to areas of their own choice. Measures to undertake the re-development of run-down areas should not deprive people of the right to live in a particular re-developed area.

Dealing with the question of the family, the individual person's free choice of a partner in marriage should be re-instated and the Mixed Marriages Act be abolished. Similarly the choice of school should be left to the parents, for these have primary right in determining the education of their children. Universities should be open to all who qualify by reason of academic merit.

Since family stability is such an important need in human life, each family should be able to acquire ownership of its own house in due course, so that the family may live in security and tranquillity. The restriction of these rights in certain instances is a great weakness in South African society.

The economy of this country is on a work-seeking basis, therefore those who have to offer their labour in the employment market should have freedom to seek work where it is most likely to be found. Influx Control must be replaced by a human system. Likewise, the reservation of work to certain population groups should be abolished, and replaced by a system in which exploitation and unfair competition are prevented.

The payment of a living wage is a further right that all citizens have. The community as a whole owes this living wage to all who are engaged in producing goods or performing services for the community. The employer acts as agent of the community in this respect and the economic system must be so geared that there is equal pay for equal work irrespective of the group to which the employee belongs. The labourer must not be treated merely as a unit in the economic machine, but a human person. He puts at the service of the community his whole personality, and his wage must enable him to live as a human person, providing decently for his family, and being able to make adequate provision for sickness, old age and unemployment.

Prominent among the rights proper to all born in this country is a sharing in the governing of the country. All should be recognized as citizens on the same footing as others and should therefore be given the right to vote and thus to participate in the affairs of the country of their birth according to their abilities.

We support the recommendations of the Theron Report in regard to the so-called "Coloured" people.

We further condemn the present system of detention and banning. People should only be arrested on the "prima facie" evidence of a crime and thereafter brought to trial at the earliest possible date. There must be free access to legal advice. It is a definite disregard of fundamental rights for persons to be held "incommunicado". Banning should be abolished and freedom of speech fully restored, with the "proviso" that abuses of freedom of speech should be treated as offences and punished after due trial.

These are some of the changes that have to be made to secure a just society in South Africa.

This country claims to be a Christian country; one, therefore whose people seek to live by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This Gospel should be spelled out in the lives of all members of the South African community, by the implementing of the two commandments: to love God and to love one's neighbour as oneself.

There can be no true love of God, where there is not love of our fellowmen as well. Real love of God is practised only when one loves others as oneself, for our neighbour is loved by God as much as we ourselves are loved, and is made in the image of God.

Further, when there is injustice, there is no love of fellowmen. We are told to do others as we would be done by. Justice is but the beginning of love for it is the virtue by which the full rights of each are safeguarded.

If we would have peace, we must practise justice. Charity cannot be substituted for justice. It is the doing of more than justice. If its Christian love which should be the foundation of the social, economic and political life of our community, depriving a person of his rights as a human person is a kind of violence.

We know that there are injustices all over the world and many consider that persons of other countries should put their own house in order before accusing us. That cannot and should not prevent us from seeking justice in the human relationships of our own country where we live and work.

There are sufficient people of good will in this country for the wrong that oppress people to be righted. It requires but the practise of the Gospel. If a sufficient number of people who have a say in the country want social justice, it will be achieved.

While we invite all to reflect on the situation in terms of this letter, we also appeal to all to pray earnestly for those in authority that God may give them wisdom to know what is right and courage to do justice to all.

Owen Cardinal McCann
Archbishop of Cape Town

Stephen Naidoo, CSsR.
Auxiliary Bishop of Cape Town

J. P. Galvin
Vicar General

And 80 other priests of the Archdiocese