

## SOUTH AFRICA 2000 : TOWARDS A PERSPECTIVE

*Owen van den Berg*

One of the characteristics of the first conference on Religious Education was that although the title dealt with RE in our changing society, what thinking there was about the future seemed to see it as relatively unchanged. There was on that occasion an interesting but predictable dichotomy - the whites hoped for gradual change, the blacks for rapid change. Nobody seemed to have any clear conviction that real change would occur at all, or what sort of change it would be.

R W Johnson, in his book *How Long will South Africa Survive?*, wrote about this malaise a few years ago:

"Cries for reform are usually accompanied by urgent statements that 'time is running out', that it is 'five minutes to midnight', that it will soon be 'too late'. An oddity of such urgings is that, although they have been made for decades, it is never actually concluded that it is already 'too late'. The clock is stuck at 'five minutes to midnight'. It is at this point that reference is made to 'the vast fund of goodwill which still exists between the races'. African 'moderates' though fast losing patience, one is told, have still not actually lost it ...."<sup>1)</sup>

Keppel Jones, writing shortly after the conclusion of the Second World War, put it this way - note, some 35 years ago:

"Political discussion in South Africa is distinguished from the polemics of most countries by its unreality. With us conventional jargon, childish pretences and a tacit agreement to ignore certain categories of facts take the place of an objective handling of the actual situation. We cry 'peace' where there is no peace. We speak incessantly of goodwill and co-operation and getting together as though the lack of these things were due to an oversight and could be remedied by words .... One aspect of this unreality is the irresponsible optimism about the future of the country which is very

generally expressed. We cling to such comforting thoughts as *Môre is nog 'n dag, Alles sal regkom* and *It can't happen here ....* This dreaming is an expensive luxury."<sup>2)</sup>

This is not to say that there have been no attempts to predict South Africa's future. The first, and probably still the most famous, attempt was Keppel-Jones's *When Smuts Goes: A History of South Africa from 1952-2010 First Published in 2015*. Actually published in 1947, aspects of Keppel-Jones's work point to the extreme risk one takes in crystal-ball gazing. For instance, in the foreword he makes this statement:

"The reader will notice that South West Africa is entirely omitted from the story. No mention is made of it. This is because at the time of writing the future of that territory is about to be considered by the United Nations."<sup>3)</sup>

Keppel-Jones even failed to anticipate the victory of the National Party in 1948, predicting its victory as occurring in 1952 along with the Van Riebeeck festival.

A few random extracts from this fascinating historical-novel-with-a-difference show that Keppel-Jones's predictions have not materialised - but do they raise a smile? For instance:

"On November 16, 1977, the agreement was signed in Capetown. It provided that the Argentine Government would take not fewer than 200,000 South African emigrants from Capetown to Buenos Aires by December 31, 1978. The South African Military Government undertook to transfer to Argentina Iscor and Texcor stock of a par value of £500,000. In addition, each emigrant would be required to pay £10 as a contribution to the cost of his passage. Before the expiry of the stipulated period the two Governments would consult about a possible renewal of the agreement to cover an additional number of emigrants."<sup>4)</sup>

And again,

"The Republic had begun to disintegrate after 1996, and this new experience completed its conversion to a primitive subsistence economy. Every locality now depends on its own resources. Lacking economic unity, the country tends towards political chaos of the mediaeval type ...."<sup>5)</sup>

About the collapse of Pretoria, the BBC television crew commented as follows:

"You are now looking at Church Square, the heart of Pretoria. Our camera is placed at a window of the wrecked Raadsaal, which was destroyed by gunfire several days ago. This is the only place that is not too scorchingly hot to stand on. The other buildings have been blown up by the enemy and most of them are still burning, as you can see. By Jove, look at that! What a crash! That was a wall of the old Palace of Justice that you saw collapsing. Yes, I said Justice. The building to the right doesn't look too happy either. I'm not sure what that is. Here's William Penman, the *Times* correspondent, I'll ask him. What's that? The Reserve Bank. He says that was the Reserve Bank. It hasn't much reserve to draw on now. I wish you could feel the heat here.

"Look at that! Did you hear it? That was a belated time bomb in the Post Office building. I thought they had all gone off, but there may be more still to go. Look at the troops picking their way across the Square."<sup>6)</sup>

The renowned American sociologist, Pierre van den Berghe, writing eighteen years later, that is, in 1965, also attempted "to prophesy South Africa's future" and comes to the immediate conclusion that "the likelihood of revolution seems high", because "Mounting internal strains and external pressures doom White supremacy and racial segregation within the near future; the entire evolution of race relations since Union, and even more since 1948, excludes the possibility of a peaceful and gradual reversal of the present situation."<sup>7)</sup>

In fact, says Van den Berghe, "Once the colonial territories to the north of South Africa will have become independent, ... the collapse of White supremacy will be imminent .... Revolutionary change will ... probably result from a combination of ... strong international sanctions, strikes and passive resistance in the urban centres, peasant revolts in the rural areas, and well-organized sabotage from a foreign-based underground receiving outside military assistance and training ... conditions will become favourable for these develop=

ments within five years at most."<sup>8)</sup> "Five years at most", he wrote in 1965 - but do we laugh? Or does his concluding paragraph still strike a chord: "A South Africa divided against itself awaits the impending and inexorable catastrophe".<sup>9)</sup>

Prediction is hazardous. Potholm and Dale, writing in 1972 on the whole Southern African region, posited nine alternative scenarios for a Southern African future:

- i) continuation of the present subsystem
- ii) expansion of the subsystem
- iii) reduction of the subsystem
- iv) self-generated, peaceful alteration of the status quo to African majority rule or to power-sharing
- v) exogenously induced alteration of the subsystem: low levels of coercion (i e non-violent pressure on Southern Africa)
- vi) exogenously induced alteration of the subsystem: middle-range coercion (i e all acts, short of fullscale invasion)
- vii) exogenously induced alteration of the subsystem: high levels of coercion ("perhaps the destruction of the entire Witwatersrand complex")
- viii) self-generated, violent alteration of the subsystem, and
- ix) termination of the present subsystem.<sup>10)</sup>

In the short-term, Potholm predicted scenario i) as most likely, in the intermediate term (until 1982-1987), scenario iii) as most likely, while in the longer term (i e the 1980's and the 1990's) he held that systematic alteration is clearly possible. In fact, he said in 1972 that "we are now in a half-way, twilight period when it seems too late for peaceful evolution to African majority rule and too early for a revolution of significant magnitude ... to reorder the subsystem radically".<sup>11)</sup> And Robin Hallett, that renowned historian of Africa, states that "In this last quarter of the twentieth century, no country in the world, it can be said, faces so clouded a destiny as South Africa".<sup>12)</sup>

One of the joys of presenting a paper on the topic *South Africa in the year 2 000* is that I can do what I assume my audience today is expecting me to do - to predict what South Africa will be like in the

year 2000 - in the comfort that I have some 19 years left before anybody can tell me I was wrong.

"At night the streets are dark and deserted. No longer is it safe to be out and about on your own, since they stopped street lighting. Many are starving. Black market food prices are so high that even the rich are feeling the pinch - meat twice a month, fresh fruit and vegetables a luxury. Drinking water taps have ingenious locking devices.

There are still quite a few rich around, though richness has ceased to mean what it did in the Seventies and early Eighties. Few houses have gardens; those that do, are heavily guarded.

Their owners are rarely home during daylight since 12-hour working days plus four hours travelling time have become the norm, even during weekends. That's when 'the elite' join forces working on designs for new processes, or in government administration, or teaching technical skills.

In contrast, 'the masses' have more leisure and earn more pay than ever before. But neither brings joy. Whatever time can be spared goes on queueing for food, whatever money can be saved is soon spent in the black market.

Russians and Chinese are operating quite a few mines and factories in some areas of the country. Their working and living pattern is like that of the 'rich' and they are getting as exasperated.

Public buildings, factories, offices, but particularly supermarkets and food warehouses are under armed guard 24 hours a day. Even so, successful robberies are on the increase, attacks on guards and food transport are becoming commonplace. On TV, doctors speak out for compulsory vasectomy. Some managers dose their employees' daily ration of drinking water with contraceptive chemicals. Everybody lives in fear of youth gangs ...."

What I have just read you is a quotation from a Special Report: 2000, published in the *Financial Mail* in 1977 - which continues that "Few

South Africans ... appear to have grasped the fact that global man has entered a new ballgame, in which the rules and systems we now use are rapidly becoming irrelevant".

The purpose of this quotation is, first, to make the point that South Africa in the year 2000 will most decidedly be different from 1981; secondly, that it will most decidedly be different from the way we expect it to be different and, thirdly, that it will be different not only politically but in every other way as well. For so long in South Africa we have been dominated by the consideration or pseudo-consideration of political issues that our future scenarios - where they exist at all in a form other than business-more-or-less-as-usual - tend to be overpoliticized, and thus tend to ignore the impact of changes of a demographic, ecological, economic, sociological, psychological and religious nature.

The point is well made in a report by the Futures Research organisation Syncom:

"The facts of our political, social and economic reality are sufficiently known and documented and need not be restated here. What is less understood is its *systems dynamics*:

- Each racial, religious and ideological sub-group perceives the same 'reality' from a vastly different perspective;
- Within each sub-group the motivation of the individual is changed, often unpredictably, by group pressures;
- Emotional factors in a climate of domestic (and global) insecurity and uncertainty further reduce the individual's capacity to develop a clear perspective. His ability to distinguish between the real and imagined threats is impaired. Light at the end of the tunnel for one man is an oncoming train for another;
- Selective reporting and distortions by the media and the influence of pressure groups further diminish the individual's options to make sound judgements."<sup>14)</sup>

Francis Schaeffer, in his book *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century*, makes an attempt to outline some of the "special pressures"

on western society. He cites the following:

- the increasing loss of what he calls the "Reformation memory": we are experiencing the first full post-Christian generation;
- the loss of truth: modern man no longer believes in truth, while "often science is ... engaged ... in filling up the time with small details so that no great questions will have to be faced;"<sup>15)</sup>
- the demise of leadership;
- the collapse of social responsibility;
- the population explosion and ecological destruction;
- the Atomic Bomb: "Modern man has no moral imperative for what he *should* do, and consequently he is left only with what he *can* do;"<sup>16)</sup>
- the biological bomb: "Within 20 years we will be able to make the kind of babies we want to make."<sup>17)</sup>

"It is obvious", he concludes, "The future is open to manipulation. Who will do the manipulating?"<sup>18)</sup>

And so one can go on, through Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock* and E E Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful*. All around us the horror stories abound: crime is up, inflation is up, divorce is up, refugees are up, cancer and heart disease - and malnutrition - are up, petrol stocks are running out, ozone layers are wearing thin, food supplies are running out, even the Kruger Park is no longer sacrosanct. Spaceship Earth would seem to have lost its fuel tanks in more ways than one. Nor is there any clear flight-path that Spaceship Earth should follow.

T Patrick Burke puts it this way:

"There is at present on the public scene no satisfactory conception of what constitutes progress for mankind. Both the developed and the developing economies are preoccupied with a technology that sees no value beyond itself, though the human inadequacy of this is now publicly apparent. The religions of mankind are confronted with the historic task of offering a genuine alternative. So far they have failed. They have either ignored the technological society, as in India and China, or they have

succumbed to it, as in Europe and North America. A critical yet comprehensive vision of ideal values is lacking. It is questionable whether mankind will remain long resigned to this deficiency."<sup>19)</sup>

Focusing specifically on Third World development strategies, Peter Berger argues forcibly that "The world today is divided into ideological camps. The adherents of each tell us with great assurance where we're at and what we should do about it. We should not believe any of them".<sup>20)</sup> Contrasting the capitalist and socialist models for Third World development, Berger rejects both:

"The critics of capitalism are right when they reject policies that accept hunger today while promising affluence tomorrow (and they are right when they question the promise). The critics of socialism are right when they reject policies that accept terror today on the promise of a humane order tomorrow (and, again, when they question whether such a tomorrow is believable)."<sup>21)</sup>

Both models are to be rejected, he argues, because they are costly in terms of physical deprivation and suffering - what he calls the calculus of pain - and because they exact a high price on the level of meaning: they destroy people's conceptions of the world as meaningful - what he calls the calculus of meaning: "Human beings have the right to live in a meaningful world." There are no quick and easy answers to the problems of South Africa's future.

South Africa in the year 2000 will be totally different - even the name "South Africa" may have disappeared. It will be totally different in ways we are unable to foresee, and it will become increasingly more different as the years pass. We are threatened with a total loss of perspective: yet decisions that are taken today will influence the lives of our descendants well into the 21st century. Swedish educational futurologist, Torsten Husen, makes the point that "teacher training decisions taken during the 1960's will have repercussions up to the mid-twenty-first century".<sup>22)</sup> Schaeffer makes much the same point: "I believe that when my grandchildren grow to maturity, they will face a future that has little similarity to ours.



And the Church today should be getting ready and talking about the issues of tomorrow and not about the issues of twenty and thirty years ago, because the Church is going to be squeezed in a wringer".<sup>23)</sup>

We are threatened with loss of perspective because the absoluteness of our beliefs has been challenged, because increasingly we meet others who think differently. So we lose certainty about the basis or ground of reality - our ontological assumptions are challenged. We lose certainty about the means of discovering reality - our epistemological assumptions are challenged. And so we lose certainty about our ethic, our actions - because the basis for these actions is shaken. And so we find ourselves inflicted with the disease Durkheim called *anomie* - the feeling of being disconnected from our world. It is what Berger has called the homeless mind. What is more,

"The 'homelessness' of modern social life has found its most devastating expression in the area of religion. The general uncertainty, both cognitive and normative, brought about by the pluralization of ... modern society, has brought religion into a serious crisis of plausibility. The age-old function of religion - to provide ultimate certainty amid the exigencies of the human condition - has been severely shaken .... Modernity has accomplished far-reaching transformations, but it has not fundamentally changed the finitude, fragility and mortality of the human condition. What it has accomplished is to seriously weaken those definitions of reality that previously made that human condition easier to bear. This has produced an anguish all its own ....<sup>24)</sup>

Nor have Christians been exempt from these trends towards *anomie*. In a startling book written almost twenty years ago, Harry Blamires stated that:

"There is still ... a Christian ethic, a Christian practice, and a Christian spirituality .... But as a *thinking* being, the modern Christian has succumbed to secularization. He accepts religion - its morality, its worship, its spiritual culture; but he rejects the religious view of life .... Except over a

very narrow field of thinking, chiefly touching questions of strictly personal conduct, we Christians in the modern world accept, for the purpose of mental activity, a frame of reference constructed by the secular mind and a set of criteria reflecting secular evaluations .... The reason we have nothing to say to the contemporary situation is that we have not been thinking about the contemporary situation."<sup>25)</sup>

Let alone the future.

Schaeffer makes a similar observation:

"Suppose that when we awoke tomorrow morning and opened our Bibles, we found two things had been taken out .... Suppose the first item missing was the real empowering of the Holy Spirit; and the second item, the reality of prayer. Consequently, following the dictates of Scripture, we would begin to live on the basis of this new Bible .... Let me ask you something: If that were the case, what difference would there be today from the way we acted yesterday?"<sup>26)</sup>

Is this anomie a factor in the decline of Christianity, numerically speaking? Prof David Bosch points out that "In the year 1900 some 36 per cent of the world population were Christian. By 1973 this percentage had dropped to only 26. According to some calculations a mere 16 per cent of the world's population will still regard themselves as Christians by the end of this century".<sup>27)</sup>

The crucial issue concerning South Africa in the year 2000 is not mass urbanization. Sure, we shall have massive problems in this regard - according to Prof Dewar we shall need "four more cities the size of the combined P W V region (Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging), or eleven cities the size of Cape Town".<sup>28)</sup> But that is not the crucial issue. Nor is it population growth - sure there will be two people in 2000 for every one today, give or take a few millions. The implications for job creation are staggering: to quote Prof Rias van Wyk, "At present over 210 000 job seekers enter the labour market every year ... steadily increasing to reach about 360 000 by the year 2000 ...

about 8,5 million jobs that have to be created, or average 1 500 new jobs each working day over the next 20 years."<sup>30)</sup> But that is not the crucial issue. Sure, we shall find ourselves in an increasingly technological and bureaucratized society of enormous complexity. But that is not the crucial issue.

What is crucial is the impact these things have on our attempts to give meaning to what we experience. Urbanization, population density, technology, bureaucratisation, the rapidity of change, the decline of our fundamental institutions, the impact of the mass media and of 'news' - these will influence ever more significantly the sense we inject into or derive from our lives. And we shall be tempted to become increasingly anonymous - our private lives separated from our lives of work, our thoughts our own, private: seeking psychological refuge in two lives, we find none in either. And that privatisation of our lives we call freedom - and so we run increasing risks of being trapped in our freedom. Kazantzakis, in that superb novel *Zorba the Greek*, puts it this way:

"Zorba shook his head. 'No, you're not free', he said, 'The string you're tied to is perhaps longer than other people's. You're on a long piece of string, boss; you can come and go, and think you're free, but you never cut the string in two. And when people don't cut that string...!'"<sup>31)</sup>

And Christian poet Jim Bates wrote

There is a freedom that man fears  
The freedom of his fellow man ....

There is a freedom that threatens  
That disturbs the freedom he has carved out for himself  
So we live  
Shut in by fences, regulations, gates.  
Apartheid in a thousand forms  
Secures us from the freedom of the world ....

For freedom we build our walls  
For freedom we make our bombs  
For freedom we pass our laws  
For freedom we imprison and restrict  
For freedom we create the Ghetto

And we shall meet no one  
 And speak to no one  
 And listen to no one  
 Who does not look as we do  
 Think as we do  
 Act as we do  
 Except at a safe and deferential distance<sup>32)</sup>

Religious education is about communication. What will we be trying to communicate in religious education in the year 2000 - and you will note that I am assuming that the political authorities will still allow us to have religious education in the year 2000? Do you think the following scenario at all possible, let alone acceptable?

- No longer will we be teaching a triumphalist Christianity to a captive audience, or making imperious demands that applicants for teaching posts have to include in their letters statements about whether they are willing to teach Scripture: we shall no longer be trying to legislate for Christianity.

Rather we shall be teaching our pupils about all the faiths that have a significant adherence in the area we presently call South Africa. Beyond this core of information we shall specialise in teaching Christianity in some schools, Islam in others, Hinduism in others, and so on.

- No longer will we be teaching religious education in a bland, self-satisfied and non-problematic way, focusing on the vertical, God-man relationship and trying to enforce our definitions of morality by virtue of carefully selected and totally decontextualised Biblical verses.

Rather we shall be presenting the essential teachings of Christianity in a non-threatening way, not avoiding but exploring differences of opinion between different Christian groups, not avoiding the social and political issues but facing them from a theologically sophisticated perspective, not proof-texting from Scripture but dealing with Scripture in a theologically defensive way. As Burke has said, "A religion that does not at least in some way stand in serious and substantial contradiction to society has either found utopia or is not doing more than half its job." <sup>33)</sup>

- No longer will we ignore the impact of the total society upon our pupils, but we shall be attempting to engage them in debate about the meaning of reality and about the choices they face in life by questioning in a penetrating way the alternative definitions of reality that impinge upon their consciousness via the media and the society in which they live.

- No longer will we be trying to rescue people from the world by trying to proselytise them into a psychologically dangerous conversion experience. Rather we shall be accepting young people as people, accompanying them through the hard, hard problems they face so that we might be instrumental in their being set free in and for the world.

- No longer will our secular views of success or failure inhibit and distort our religious education; we shall have recognised Kathleen Bliss' axiom that "Anxiety to press on the child everything for fear he should never meet it elsewhere is self-defeating and can be damaging".<sup>34)</sup> Freed from our guilt, we shall have stopped trying to enforce our views and will be encountering our students in the fullness of our being and the fullness of their being.

And there will be a growing number of people whose lives are a potent contradiction of what Schumacher called "the hollowness and fundamental unsatisfactoriness of a life devoted primarily to the pursuit of material ends, to the neglect of the spiritual".<sup>35)</sup> Japanese Christian Kosuke Koyama reminds us that Jesus Himself was not a 'success' in today's terms; rather he was "nailed down" - the ultimate symbol of immobility, the 'maximum slowness'.<sup>36)</sup> Can we expect things to be different?

Does the year 2000 frighten you - or do you rather not think of it? Do you build dykes - or bridges? How do these words ring in your ears when you think of the future:

"I am utterly convinced that nothing can separate us from his love: neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly

rulers or powers, neither the present nor the future, neither the world above nor the world below - there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Jesus Christ our Lord."<sup>37)</sup>

"Refusal to consider change under the direction of the Holy Spirit is a spiritual problem, not an intellectual problem."<sup>38)</sup> It was Jesus who claimed, "Behold, I make all things new". Newness, change, is not something unfortunate that we have to endure. South Africa in the year 2000 won't fit into my scenario or into your scenario. Yet there is no reason for us all to become specialists in getting left behind. My task here this morning is not fulfilled by my scaring the daylights out of you, or by offering you a few comforting thoughts with which to conclude my lecture. It is fulfilled if it does something to assist you to face firmly the fact that our conference is meant to concern itself with "Religious Education in our Changing Society". It is in this hope that I thank you for hearing me out.

#### R E F E R E N C E S

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