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SOUTH AFRICA

UNPRECEDENTED attention has lately been drawn to the Union of South Africa owing to the royal visit in the early part of this year. This important member of the British Commonwealth has increased its influence through the war so that it ranks now among the countries, such as the United States and Australia, which were colonised from Europe but have developed a life of their own independently of the continent which has been the matrix of Christian culture. The King on his return pointed out that the South Africans were solving their own problems in their own way, and implied that they did not require promptings from the centre of the Commonwealth. This increasing autonomy must be recognised in Europe. It is easy to criticise the treatment of the natives, for example, without having lived on the spot, and such criticism will be unreal and a priori. The out-and-out Left-winger from Europe will clap his ideas of the down-trodden proletariat on to the native who has little status, and he will cause a deal of trouble without giving the native anything more to live for—because the European does not know their life or their ideas; he is baked too hard in the industrialised oven of Moscow or Manchester. The natives speak another language:

We, dark folk, love the land, and are like it:
 Our skins resemble burnt brown earth, or shadows
 Cast by tall rocks on pools of mountain water;
 We love to bask like conies in the sunlight . . .
 And suck the milk of silence from the mountains.

A South African poet, Francis Carey Slater, catches thus at the native attitude, and it would be hard to grapple ideally with such people, already sucked in and out by the demands of industry, the European heritage of gold mines and tobacco plantations.

This problem of the native is a typical one showing the need for autonomy. And culture and religion must be tackled in the same manner. Christian culture has reached a turning point when it may cease to be predominantly a European culture. Such continents as Africa have the advantage of taking all the tradition and heritage of the Catholic part of Italy, Spain, France and England. But with the approach of the atom bomb and the rapid disintegration of civilisation in Europe it is time that in Africa this culture became Christian African culture, autonomous and developing in its own way beneath the dark brown skin of the native as well as the sun-baked skin of the Dutch or English settlers. Again the Catholicism of Rome should be as intensely Roman in its attachment and dependence on the descendants of St Peter, but not Roman in its classic ornament, fiddle-backed vestments or plain chant motets. Indeed there are plenty of signs that the culture and Catholicism of South Africa is becoming progressively indigenous and autonomous in the right sense. Certainly it is the policy of the Holy See to encourage this in all Catholic missions—and this shows the wisdom of the Church at her best, faced by the powers of destruction which would break the Church by breaking her organisation. The Church in South Africa will become more and more the South African Church without the Reformation heresies which have largely lost their power to create nationalist Churches. In this way alone can the Catholic Church resist the evils of disintegrating European civilisation.

Amid the spectacular events of the royal visit a comparatively insignificant foundation stone was being laid upon which to build the structure of religious and cultural autonomy in South Africa. The Dominicans were inaugurating a formal house of studies in the university town of Stellenbosch, thirty miles west of Cape Town. Here, in the heart of South African learning and culture, the full course of philosophy and theology is now taught for the benefit not only of the future South African Dominicans but also of other clergy beside. And the lectures are conducted by professors who have received the

best that the European Universities can give. The scholastic philosophy of St Thomas is catholic and should be intelligible to the Hot-tentot, the Hindu and the survivor of Hiroshima. But it needs to be put into the ideas and terminology of those people. St Thomas himself attempted the task for the Spanish Arabs of his day in the *Contra Gentiles*. His example must now be followed on a wider plan and the attempt at Stellenbosch will be a test case. There the predominating European thought is Calvinist; but the traditions of that creed are reaching their expiry; and if its corruption is to be the generation of something at once Catholic and indigenous these Dominican studies provide the seed of the new life.

South Africa, therefore, as a subject for a special number of BLACKFRIARS, provides an interesting study. Not only has it importance in working out its own problems in its own way; it also stands as an example of what must be secured in the future in order to preserve the full Christian tradition even though its original home may crumble.

THE EDITOR

'I, TOO, AM AN AFRICAN'¹

HISTORICALLY, from the fact of its colonization by white men from the sea, Southern Africa has been linked in men's minds rather with Europe than with the rest of the African continent, and the truly African character of its inhabitants, even of the Whites, has been too easily forgotten, in spite of the use of the name *Afrikaner* (meaning merely *African*). In recent years, however, largely owing to the war and consequent movements of troops and population, the average white inhabitant of Southern Africa has become much more conscious of his relationships with the rest of the continent and with its aboriginal inhabitants, and aware of his responsibilities and the opportunity there is for him to play a decisive part in the future of Africa south of the Sahara, now in a state of rapid social, economic, religious and political development. This new awareness, long latent in the land-consciousness of the Afrikaans-speaking population, and now making itself felt among all sections of the people, is given utterance in the words of Field-Marshal Smuts used as a title to this article, and may be traced in many recent items of news from South Africa.

It is necessary, in order to avoid misconceptions, to preface a few statements of fact about the area of which we are speaking. Southern Africa² differs from the rest of Black Africa in being the

¹ Field Marshal the Rt Hon. J. C. Smuts in the Union Parliament, April, 1947.