

1st Alfred and Winifred Hoernlé Memorial Lecture

Christian principles and race problems

Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr

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Hoernlé Lecture

CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES
and
RACE PROBLEMS

Jan H. Hofmeyr



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S.A. INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS
P.O. Box 97—Johannesburg

HOERNLÉ MEMORIAL LECTURE,

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REINHOLD FREDERICK ALFRED HOERNLÉ

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A lecture, entitled the Hoernlé Memorial Lecture (in memory of the late Professor R. F. Alfred Hoernlé), President of the Institute from 1934—1943), will be delivered once a year under the auspices of the South African Institute of Race Relations. An invitation to deliver the lecture will be extended each year to some person having special knowledge and experience of racial problems in Africa or elsewhere.

It is hoped that the Hoernlé Memorial Lecture will provide a platform for constructive and helpful contributions to thought and action. While the lecturers will be entirely free to express their own views, which may not be those of the Institute as expressed in its formal decisions, it is hoped that lecturers will be guided by the Institute's declaration of policy that "scientific study and research must be allied with the fullest recognition of the human reactions to changing racial situations; that respectful regard must be paid to the traditions and usages of the various national, racial and tribal groups which comprise the population; and that due account must be taken of opposing views earnestly held."

His Phelps-Stokes lectures on *South African Native Policy and the Liberal Spirit* still stand as a splendid evidence of the illumination that the analytical mind can bring to a difficult political problem, or nest of problems, while the very last thing he did, his analysis of the Alexandria situation, showed how intensely practical and effective an outstanding academic man can be.

But above all, it is the essential humanity of his spirit which we treasure as a continuing inspiration for all who cherish the causes which he had at heart. This Institute has special reason for mourning his early death—it drew much from him—it can best repay its debt by a quickened instinct of service to those ideals which it was created to further and which he made his own.

I am happy, then, on grounds of *pietas* to be delivering this lecture. I am not so happy on other grounds. I am very conscious of the fact that I cannot give you the kind of address which you would wish to hear. I suffer from a twofold limitation, firstly that I am a politician, and as such must ever remember the fact that politics is necessarily to a large extent the science of the practicable, and further that in my ministerial capacity I deal only secondarily with problems of race relations. An authoritative pronouncement on such matters from the Government's point of view can only be made by the Prime Minister—you had the good fortune of listening to General Smuts two years ago—or by a Minister more directly concerned with them than I am. I must therefore of necessity keep away from specific questions of the day, and, at the risk of being dubbed unrealistic and academic, seek to deal rather with what I would like to be regarded as fundamentals.

I think it well that such an attempt should be made. There is a tendency for us in South Africa to be so much oppressed by the magnitude and gravity of our racial problems that we fail to see them against the background of broader human trends. If in the sixteenth century men fought about religion, and in the nineteenth century nationality was the driving force of European politics, our own generation is one in which it is the concept of race that is the main divisive and destructive

force that tortures humanity. Twenty years ago Dr. J. H. Oldham, the great missionary statesman, wrote: "In the past Europe has been chastised with the whips of nationalism, in the future the world is to be chastised with the scorpions of racialism." How painfully prophetic those words are now seen to have been. At the root of this war there is the racist doctrine of the *Herrenvolk*. But let us not make the mistake of regarding that doctrine as confined to Germany. The growth of Naziism was part of a world phenomenon. Similar tendencies were at work in other lands before the war, and the danger of the present situation is that in the very countries that are fighting Germany to-day, there has in many cases during the war been a strengthening of racist tendencies, with the result that, when the conflict is over, we may find that, while we have defeated Naziism in its homeland, our own national life is deeply infected with the germ-cells of Naziism. By that I mean such things as intolerance, racial prejudice, thinking with the blood. If we justify—as we do—our participation in the war on the ground that the conception of the *Herrenvolk* is a dire threat to Christianity and to human welfare, we must not fail to ask ourselves to what extent a similar conception prevails in our own midst. It is the more necessary to do so because there are very many people who just don't realise the extent to which their own individual outlook has been affected by that very spirit against which, as expressed by Nazi Germany, they are waging war.

I do not therefore propose this evening to deal with specific questions of political or economic reform—I want to get behind such matters to the factor which will ultimately determine whether and to what extent progress is possible, and that is the spirit and outlook of the people. And in particular I want to emphasise the importance of the Christian approach to our problems of race relations. I offer no apology, politician though I am, for doing so. In our life as a community we make profession of our Christianity. It is fitting to use it as a touchstone of our public as well as our private attitudes in regard to these most important questions. Eight years ago our Prime Minister, General Smuts, took exception to the way in which

another person as merely a unit in a mass or a means to an end.

It was this doctrine that General Smuts emphatically endorsed in the address which he delivered at his installation as Chancellor of the University of Capetown early in 1937. In that address he preached the gospel of toleration among humans, the fundamental recognition of the common humanity of all men as the very foundation of our civilisation ; he ranged himself on the side of the Christian doctrine of human brotherhood against the intolerance of our time which he stigmatised as a returning to barbarism and he described the University as a place where there should be nourished a spirit of racial indifference.

What in the light of Christian teaching does that spirit of racial indifference mean for us in South Africa ? It does not imply, nor do I believe that General Smuts meant it to imply, the acceptance as a guiding principle of what the founders of the United States of America declared to be a self-evident truth, that all men are created equal. In Dr. Oldham's book, from which I have already quoted, he has a chapter entitled "The Fact of Inequality", preceding his chapter on "The Truth of Equality". It is, as he points out, simply not true that all men are in fact created equal in natural endowment. The world is full of differences—from some points of view it is the richer for it, and it is misleading and dangerous to minimise the inequalities which do exist. But these differences between individual men and groups of men, great and real as they are, are none the less differences within a unity. Underlying them all there is a common humanity, there is a fundamental equality of men as men. "Men", Dr. Oldham sums it up, "are not equal in their capacity to serve the community, nor are they equal in their needs. But they *are* equal in the possession of a personality that is worthy of reverence. They *are* equal in the right to the development of that personality, so far as may be compatible with the common good. And in the determination of what constitutes the common good, they have an equal claim that their case should be heard and weighed and that the judgment should be disinterested and just." That then it seems to me is what racial indifference means. It does not imply

that all men are created equal, but it is of its essence, that all men should be free through development to attain the best that is in them. It insists on the belief, which John Buchan described as fundamental to Christianity, in the worth (not the equality) of every human soul—"that something may be made of anybody, that there is nothing common or unclean." It associates itself with the definition of democracy as "that form of Government and of society which is inspired above every other with the feeling and the consciousness of the dignity of man". And it implies also that in the last resort, in those individual cases, where the differences of social tradition and cultural background have been eliminated, race by itself is not a sufficient ground for differentiation. So then there can be no reconciliation between the acceptance of Christian doctrine and the countenancing of a policy, open or concealed, of repression of, or the withholding of reasonable facilities for development from an under-privileged race. The South African who professes Christian doctrine must, with General Smuts, regard it as an outrage to say that South Africa has a population of two and not of ten millions, must repudiate the attitude of mind which, openly or by implication, claims that there is a divine right attaching to a white skin.

There is a second point of Christian principle, arising out of what I have been saying, which is hardly less important. I have spoken of the differences which exist between men of different races. What is important from the point of view of Christian principle is the way in which we react towards them. The temptation that comes to the ruling group in a multi-racial society is to ensure their perpetuation as part of what Professor Hoernlé would have called the technique of domination; in the Christian view they constitute a challenge to service, with a view to the stimulation of development and the neutralisation of handicaps. That therefore suggests a further criterion to be applied to our policies in respect of race relations. Is the motive of those policies self-regarding or is it other-regarding? It seems to be necessary to make that point with reference more especially to the description of our South

petition, without capital being driven away, unemployment resulting and the last state of the worker being worse than the first. To these seemingly irresistible arguments Lord Shaftesbury opposed the certainties of his Christian conscience. He gained the day; the forebodings of his critics were not realised; and in the end it was shown that he, not they, had been the true realist, who had correctly assessed the ultimate facts and values.

Against the background of what I have so far said, I propose now to make some remarks on three of South Africa's problems of race relations.

First I want to deal with the relations between Jew and non-Jew. We do not perhaps normally think of this as one of our racial problems; certainly it is more complex than our other racial problems; but it is none the less much more a problem of race relations than is the so-called racial question as between Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking South Africans, and in essence anti-Semitism *is* a racial phenomenon.

Anti-Semitism was not a natural growth in South Africa—in view of our traditions, our traditions of a religious outlook and reverence for the Bible, of hospitality, and of the love of freedom, it might have been expected that it would never get a foothold here. In the light of those traditions the Jew was for long regarded throughout South Africa as the stranger at the gate for whom both the injunctions of Scripture and the instincts of hospitality bespoke a courteous reception. But during the last twenty years our traditional attitude towards the Jew has been widely breached. I have already referred to the growth of racism between the two wars and of Naziism as the chief exponent of that doctrine. It is with the Nazis that anti-Semitism took on a particularly aggressive form, and the anti-Semitism of Naziism *was* an article meant for export. The seeds of this evil thing were blown over the oceans even to South Africa. The stock libels of Nazi propaganda came to be sedulously disseminated among us, sometimes skilfully adapted to our local circumstances, and anti-Semitism grew apace. This was the position before the present war began. But

though the war is a war against Naziism, the process has continued. What I called the germ-cells of Naziism have grown in number and virulence during the war—wide sections of the community have become infected—the present position in this regard constitutes a grave danger to our national future.

I shall return to that point, but first let me say this. The Anti-Semitism of our day, which has rightly been called the new barbarism, is essentially un-Christian—it is in conflict with all that is of permanent value in our culture and civilisation. Between it and these truths of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, which are essential in Christianity, as they are also in the Jewish religion, there is a sharp conflict. To me it is a never-failing source of wonder, how people in this country and in other countries, who profess Christianity, and do not repudiate those truths, can also preach and practise anti-Semitism. To the extent to which a nation accepts anti-Semitism it is un-Christian and uncivilised.

What then are the ultimate causative factors of this aberration—for I cannot regard it otherwise? I would suggest two such factors. The first is the distinctiveness of the Jew, or, as someone once described it, the “other-ness” of the Jew. The Jew is different from the rest of us—we are conscious of that fact—and for all too many people the consciousness of difference acts as a seed-bed of intolerance. “The dislike of the unlike”, it has been said, “is a very common human failing”. The Jew is different because of his religious background, and of his continuing consciousness of the fact that he belongs to a people called to come apart and to be separate. But he is different also because the Gentile peoples have in the past forced him to be different, to live in ghettos, to have a separate economic and national life. When we who are not Jews complain of the distinctiveness of the Jew, it is well that we should remember that it is largely the consequence of the way in which they were treated by our own forbears. History has a queer way of taking its revenges. If you make a ghetto, it nearly always comes back on you or on your descendants. Not only those who live in ghettos

suffer ; those who compel them to do so also suffer, and the sins of the parents are often visited on their children.

But a second cause of the development of anti-Semitism has been the success of the Jew. In pretty nearly every country where he has had a fair chance, the Jew has been disproportionately successful. To a large extent this has been a natural reaction to the repression of the ghetto. But it is due also to his own qualities. There is a great diversity in the characteristics of Jews, just as there is in the characteristics of the rest of us. It is interesting to note how often it happens that the Jews as such are attacked because of opposite qualities displayed by individual Jews. But they have the generic characteristics of energy and the will to make that energy felt. That naturally brings its rewards. But whatever the reasons of the Jew's success may be, the point that I would make here is that prosperity stimulates envy, and that envy blinds those who feel it to the fact that the prosperity of one element does not impoverish the community as a whole, but enriches it. It is perhaps not without significance that in South Africa anti-Semitism seems to come most naturally to those who believe that to save the white man in South Africa you must keep the Native and the Coloured man and the Asiatic down, who do not recognise the fallacy in the attitude of mind which seeks to secure the welfare of one's own section of the community by preventing other sections from faring well.

It is on this foundation that anti-Semitism in our day, used chiefly as the spearhead of Naziism, has been built up—and it is at this point that I come back to its danger to us from the wider point of view. First I would make the point that Hitler's attack on anti-Semitism was in effect also an attack on Christianity. His objective was the establishment of a totalitarian state, a state which would usurp the place of God and stimulate hatred instead of love towards one's neighbour. To such a totalitarian state no true Jew could give his undivided allegiance—bitter hostility between Naziism and Jewry was therefore inevitable. But those very doctrines which made it impossible for the true Jew to accept Naziism are also essentially Christian doctrines—

and to the extent to which the Christian Church in Germany, Protestant and Catholic, has sought to uphold those doctrines, it also has had to suffer persecution: Christianity cannot, any more than Judaism, accept the doctrine of the totalitarian state, and the Christian community which toys with the weapon which that type of state has sought to use against Jewry is planting the seeds of destruction in its own body.

The second point is this. We now realise, or should realise, how anti-Semitism was an element in the technique used in the building up of dictatorship. It has been part of the unhappy role of the Jew in history to be the scapegoat of Christian nations, bearing as such the responsibility for their discontents, their disabilities and their disappointments. In our own time in particular we have seen how a people in distress, oppressed by its burdens, could be made gradually to regard the Jew as its enemy, the cause of all its ills; how in the mentality thus produced, it turned to those who presented themselves as its protectors against the danger, and conferred on them dictatorial power. As we look back to-day on the pre-war period in our own land, we can discern clearly how anti-Semitic movements were set on foot, which received not only initial inspiration, but also material aid, from outside. Anti-Semitism was used as both the precursor and the instrument of dictatorship in other countries—there were those who were ready to use it to subvert democratic institutions in our own. To-day it is an even stronger force than it was then—it is being sedulously fostered—we must not be foolishly blind to what this may imply. We must be alive to the possibility that when the Nazis are defeated, the poison of Naziism may still go on doing its deadly work.

I pass on to refer to the relations between Europeans and Asiatics in our land. It is hardly matter for argument that in this field our record, when judged in the light of the principles I sought to enunciate earlier on, scarcely bears examination. The self-interest of the European brought the Indian to South Africa; self-interest has sought to get rid of him from the country; self-interest in so far as this cannot be achieved, is determined to keep him in what is regarded as his place. Within

the last year we have seen how the Pretoria Agreement, a sincere and honest effort to find a solution of the problem in its most important aspect, that is, in so far as it affects Natal, has been shipwrecked as a result of a display of mass intolerance, which is one of the least creditable episodes in our history, and we have had to listen to an Indian leader before the bar of one of our legislative bodies describe the policy which it was being sought to enforce as "Hitler's policy applied by Hitler's enemies to subjects of the British Empire." The spirit of forbearance and understanding, for the cultivation of which General Smuts made so eloquent a plea in the Installation Address from which I have already quoted, has been conspicuous chiefly by its absence.

It is well that we should remind ourselves how the Indian came to South Africa. There has perhaps never been a better summing up of the attitude of the average European in South Africa to the Asiatic than that given by Lord Milner: "The Asiatics are strangers forcing themselves upon a community reluctant to receive them". When it is remembered that it was the same Lord Milner who brought a new lot of Asiatics—Chinese coolies—to work in the mines of the Witwatersrand, an essential inconsistency in that attitude, considered in its long-range aspect, is also brought to light. For it is an inescapable fact that Asiatics came to South Africa primarily not of their own initiative, but because the Europeans wished them to come—they remained because the Europeans wished them to remain. So it was in the days of the Dutch East India Company when the Malays first came to the Cape; so it was in the nineteenth century with the coming of the Indians. If our history proves anything it is this—that however we may regard our Asiatic problem, the fact that it came into existence is due to the European, and the European alone.

There was only one reason for the original introduction of immigrants from India to what is now the Union of South Africa—the desire of the Natal Colonists of those days to exploit the potential wealth of their coastal districts. The natives, so the sugar-planters declared, would not come out to work in

sufficient numbers from the reserves which Sir Theophilus Shepstone had set aside for them, and when they did come their labour was inefficient. The nascent sugar industry was denied the hope of expansion if it could not get the labour it required. But in not-too-distant Mauritius indentured Indian labour had set sugar-planting on its feet. Why should not Natal follow suit—and prosper similarly?

So the Government of India was asked to sanction the importation of Indian coolies. At first it was unwilling—ultimately it agreed, and in November 1860 the first shipload arrived. They came at the expense of the Natal Government, which allocated them to approved masters under a three-years' indenture. After the three years the labourer was required to re-indenture himself for a fourth year, or, if he wished, for two additional years. Thereafter he was free to live and work as he willed. After a further five years he had the right either to a free return passage or the equivalent of its cost in Crown land. The ultimate end of this policy was clear from the outset. The coolie was to be welcomed as a permanent settler in the Colony, and as a contributor to its prosperity. The conception of the Indian as a stranger forcing himself upon a reluctant community had not emerged.

His coming amply justified the predictions of those who had favoured it. The sugar industry prospered mightily, and in the words of a leading South African historian, Sugar became King in Natal. When in 1886 the Government of India forbade further importation of indentured labourers it was held to portend ruin for the Colony. With great difficulty the withdrawal of the ban was secured. Of course the coming of the Indian also brought disadvantages, which in due course asserted themselves. As a result the policy of Natal gradually changed, but the importation of indentured labour did not cease until 1911, and then it was the Government of India that stopped further recruiting.

I have recounted this story, not merely because it shows how it was the self-interest of the European that created this problem for us, but also because, by indicating the part played in it by

governmental authority in India as a consenting party, an unwilling consenting party, overborne by pressure from governmental authority in South Africa, it helps to emphasise the distinctive feature of this among our problems of race relations. Of the others we can say that they are our business alone—that no external government has anything to say about them—here we are on much less sure ground in making that contention. Again and again we are brought up with an unpleasant jolt against the fact that in this matter we are not just dealing with a quarter-of-a-million residents of South Africa—eighty per cent or more of South African birth—but also with an Indian nation or national group of about four hundred millions, a nation with a great cultural tradition, and the prospect of playing a very important part in the world in the future. Again and again in our attempts to settle the question of European-Indian relations in the Union we have found ourselves confronted with forces of wider than Union significance. So it was in the days when Smuts and Ghandi clashed—and as a result of the conflict there was forged in South Africa the weapon of Satyagraha, of Passive Resistance, which was subsequently to be used so effectively in India itself. So it was in the mid-twenties of this century, when legislative attempts to enforce Asiatic Segregation—the Bills were called Class Areas Bills—we politicians sometimes think that we can make unpalatable policies acceptable by calling a spade by some other name—so it was when those attempts led to the Round Table Conference of 1926, and the name of Srinavasa Sastri came to be held in honour in our land. So it has been again of late with the Pegging Act and the Natal Residential Property Regulation Ordinance. The imposition of sanctions by the Indian Government, the wild and whirling words used in the Indian legislature, are fresh in our memories, and the resentment caused thereby in South Africa is understandable enough. But it is also understandable that India should feel that it cannot disinterest itself from the grievances of the voteless descendants of those Indians whom, against its better judgment, it was importuned by South Africa to allow to come to our land. And it is strengthened in that

attitude by the recognition of its interest in the welfare of that section of our South African population, which the agreement reached at the Round Table Conference implies.


That then is a special feature of this problem—its international aspect. It is an embarrassing feature to us, and the appeal recently made in a Natal newspaper that an attempt should be made “to remove the problem finally from India’s sphere of interests” will no doubt be widely echoed. How is it to be done? The 1927 agreement admitted the stake of the Government of India in what is primarily our domestic problem, but it also pointed the way along which the removal of that stake can be secured. In that agreement the Government of the Union declared its firm belief and adherence to “the principle that it is the duty of every civilised Government to devise ways and means, and to take every possible step, for the uplifting of every section of their permanent population”, and its acceptance of “the view that in the provision of educational and other facilities the considerable number of Indians who remain part of the permanent population shall not be allowed to lag behind other sections of the people.” Those pronouncements of eighteen years ago were in full accord with Christian principles in their bearing on race relations. We have done a certain amount to give effect to them. But we have still a great deal to do before we can say to India—we have done what in the 1927 agreement we said we would do—your interest in our domestic affairs arising out of that document has now fallen away. Quite recently a Natal member of the Cabinet has felt constrained to say that “if Durban had shown a sense of responsibility and tried to tackle the housing problem in so far as it affected the Indians, there would have been no Indian problem in Durban to-day.” That same Minister has also said that “we cannot expect the Indian population, which now equals the European population in Natal, to be voiceless in the control of municipal and state affairs”. The plain fact is this. In 1927 the Government of the Union in effect affirmed its acceptance of a truth which I shall state in words that I have used before, the truth that the Ghetto damages not only those who dwell

place, has achieved much for the promotion of native welfare and is capable of achieving very much more. To that extent also the support of Christian principle may be claimed. But what is not always realised is the limitation of the extent to which that policy can be applied. General Smuts's forthright statement in that regard when he addressed the Institute two years ago came as a shock to many. And in so far as Segregation does not mean effective territorial separation, in so far as it is merely an instrument in mixed areas for the upholding of the power and privilege of the European in a caste-society, based on the maintenance and furtherance of his interests, the argument from Christian principle falls away. We certainly show little respect for God-willed differences of race by the way in which we tend to treat the native in our towns and on our farms as one who is, and must remain, an inferior being. Let us be frank. For all too many South Africans the motive in supporting Segregation is that of self-interest. It is part of the technique of the white man's domination, a means of keeping the Native in his place. And such is the weakness of self-interest as a touchstone, that we tend to forget the validity of the truth, to which expression was first given in the United States, that you cannot permanently keep any element of the population in the ditch, if you are not prepared to stay there yourself—at least we lose sight of the extent to which native progress may minister to our own well-being.

Of the concept of Trusteeship I have already spoken. It too holds much of value, more than Segregation. It has of late been a forceful impulse towards native progress. But there, too, we come up against what I have on another occasion described as the pitfall of Trusteeship—we find that, consciously or unconsciously, we tend to let ourselves be influenced in the administration of the trust imposed upon us by the consideration of our own European interests, and not by the interests of our wards. To the extent that we do that the concept of Trusteeship must fail, and ultimately we may be worse rather than better off for having advanced it.

If then we reject self-interest as our touchstone—and, of

course, the consequence of the consistent use of it can only be the adoption of a policy of repression which must lead to disaster, not least for us Europeans—what are we to do? Professor Hoernlé, you will remember, analysed the possible lines of policy that might be followed in South Africa. His analysis led him to no very hopeful results. There was, however, one very important qualifying phrase in his exposition of the problem: “So long as the heart of White South Africa remains set on domination”. Does not that suggest that perhaps something might be gained if those who are dissatisfied with things as they are were to think not just in terms of a change of policy, but also in terms of a change of heart, a change of race attitudes? Is that quite as hopeless as some people seem to think to be. After all, while a sense of colour-distinctiveness is deeply embedded in the South African people, colour prejudice in the sense of hostility to non-Europeans is not. It is an unhappy fact that there is a feeling outside South Africa that the European South African is deliberately unfair to the non-European fellow citizen. That is not the case. There is a fundamental desire in the minds of our people to act justly towards the non-Europeans. In general our record in our dealings with the Native peoples of our land is a good one. The fact of the continued survival in increasing numbers of the black men in South Africa, in contrast with what has happened in other countries where men of different colours have met, shows that there has been an essential humanity in the attitude of white man towards black in this land. Even those who have most strenuously rejected the concept of equality between white man and black have none the less in their hearts recognised the participation of the black man in a common humanity. One of the features of Voortrekker practice in this regard was the acceptance of native servants as part of the family in the wider Roman sense of that term. All that is true. It is of course also true that colour prejudice does exist to a considerable extent, though as something artificial rather than natural, the creation largely of politicians, who have been aided in their efforts by the instinct of fear to which I referred earlier on.


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The Hoernlé Memorial Lectures

The IRR is republishing the text of the Hoernlé Memorial Lectures, a series of talks which started in 1945. The original introductory note to the lecture series reads as follows:

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About the IRR

Since 1929, the Institute of Race Relations has advocated for a free, fair, and prospering South Africa. At the heart of this vision lie the fundamental principles of liberty of the individual and equality before the law guaranteeing the freedom of all citizens. The IRR stands for the right of all people to make decisions about their lives without undue political or bureaucratic interference.