

# The South Africa Collection

## No.5: Response to 'Rich Man, Poor Man' by Peter Lee

### **The South Africa Collection**

is a series of background and position papers written in preparation for and as an outcome of a six-week period of community consultancy in the Western Cape in May and June 1987

By  
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The book is a searching Christian analysis of the South African situation and the role of the churches in its resolution. It is written by a white, English-speaking clergyman recently appointed as a Bishop in the Church of the Province. This response homes in on the assumptions, dynamics, splits and paradoxical contradictions embedded in the heart of the Church. South Africa is described as a microcosm of the global process used as a scapegoat in the dynamics of international apartheid. Change processes, defences and regression in the church parallel similar dynamics in its social context. Increasing the levels of anxiety and terror is seen as a counter-productive strategy in an attempt to move towards greater human wholeness.

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# Response to 'Poor Man, Rich Man'

## by Peter Lee

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The foreword was written by Bishop Desmond Tutu before he became Archbishop and it indicates some of the directions of his thinking, for instance:

"It is refreshing, especially in the South African context, to have a white evangelist who realises that the gospel of Jesus Christ is a whole gospel for the whole person and that it does not tolerate false dichotomies between the secular and the sacred, between politics and religion, between contemplation and action." [p.9.]

The move is towards integration without the dissolution of differences, in other words the removal of the conflictedness from boundaries described in this extract as "false dichotomies". What is important of course is to study the "false dichotomies" or conflicted boundaries still remaining in Desmond Tutu's own construct and to see those as handling the residual, unresolved core of splitting, projection, dissociation and denial which will generate collusional behaviour in the Archbishop and perpetuation of the system against which he so fervently struggles.

The next extract indicates Tutu's response to the charismatic movement, and in particular to Bishop Bruce Evans of Port Elizabeth, who was of course Rector of Wynberg before David Prior:

"What is even more impressive for some of us is to have someone in the renewal movement in South Africa, and one who is white to boot, who has not given the suspicion that involvement in the so-called charismatic movement has been a respectable cop-out. People for whom I have a great deal of time such as Bishop Bruce Evans of Port Elizabeth, one who is involved in the same movement as Peter, has told me that most of the 'white' parishes in our Anglican church that have shown any significant concern in the harsh socio-political and economic issues of South African have been 'renewed' parishes." [p.9f.]

It is clear that we must examine both the role and limitations of 'renewal' in the life of the church. Peter Lee himself gives a key to this in the closing pages of the book (see comments on p.202).

Peter has a fascinating thumbnail sketch of the Jewish community in Johannesburg:

"... the 50,000 or so Jews in the city's half-million strong white population, a group whose social and economic impact is strongly felt (and quite widely resented). They have stimulated the economy, brought in skill and energy, and plunged into philanthropy; formed a high-profile block of Jewishness with synagogues, special schools, a rabbinic academy and an intensely 'us and them' mentality." [p.16]

The Jewish community represents a flight group. Essentially a refugee mentality in retreat from the pogroms of Russian influence in Lithuania and also of course from emergent fascism within Nazi Germany. There is a sense in which the experience of the Jewish

community has prepared them precisely for a leadership role within the present situation in South Africa. However the fundamental psychodynamics of Jewishness as such [see D. Wasdell 'The Jewish Repression', 1982] and the psycho-social dynamics of a flight group reinforce the paranoid behaviours, the tight social boundaries, the 'us/them', inside/outside conflictedness, the good/bad idealisation, etc. and in this group also we will find an identical set of matching dynamics to that within the Boer laager.

The dynamics of South Africa are common global dynamics - it is not a special case. If it can be treated as a special case then it can be isolated and dealt with at distance as a defence against dealing with the similar psycho-dynamics, both individually and corporately, at every point within the global matrix. Thus a particular nation state, like South Africa, becomes a scapegoat within the community of nations, to be cast into outer darkness, bearing the sins of the world in such a way that it is hoped that by its starvation and destruction, the rest of the world will somehow be made clean and pure. This is the Christian way of dealing with psychosis and it is utterly inhuman. Peter Lee recognises the commonness of the South African situation and also highlights the sense of South Africa being a global microcosm:

"... illustrations of human need and of the churches' response could be multiplied with different local colour in every country in the world. Sure, the South African colours are vivid, which makes it a good place to grapple with the issues - at least one can see them clearly. South Africa has the distinction of holding in itself the same racial proportions, numerically speaking, as the world; and it is the First World-Third World economic relationship which characterises the world as a whole within its boundaries." [p.21]

It would appear that South Africa is itself a paradigm presentation of global dynamic. As such it also offers a paradigm context in which to study the fundamentally common psychotic responses of the species and beyond that a point of integration and intervention which could have global impact on every level of the human strata. It could well be said that South Africa represents a vital key to the health and survival of the world community. In that case, Cape Town represents the core presentation of the situation in South Africa and Wynberg the core presentation to the behaviour of Cape Town. St. John's Wynberg, it is said, represents precisely the core of Wynberg, of Cape Town, of South Africa, of the World. We can expect here to meet global level defence maintenance dynamics, holding that congregation rigidly in a defensive enclave. Clearly in South Africa we have inter-group dynamics in a paranoid context raised to a level and an intensity and a clarity unmet elsewhere. As Lee rightly notes there is also the First World/Third World economic relationship held as intra-national, while in the wider global matrix apartheid applies at an inter-national level, and the First World/Third World boundaries are held at a distance and by the splitting of state from state. There is a sense in which the Isle of Dogs in East London here in the UK represents at a slightly lower level the same situation as South Africa in that we have the First World/Third World confrontation neighbourhood by neighbourhood, road by road, family by family, district by district. If South Africa represents the crystallising of the structure of conflicted empires at the apogee of projection, then the Isle of Dogs represents a holograph of the internalised retrojection of empires and of First World/Third World injustice, mirrored back into the core of the matrix of power. If South Africa presents the surface, the Isle of Dogs presents the centre. South Africa presents the symptoms, the Isle of Dogs holds the cause. The East/West meridian, the origin of time, measurements of length, the split between the hemispheres, both east and west and north and south in the trading relationship and the power base, the economic laws and the navigation and communications functions sustained in

collusional construct by the Christian capitalism and plundering brutality of the trading companies.

The core of Lee's book is an exposition of the teaching and life of Jesus applied to the contemporary South African situation. Towards the end of the book are some important sections on the processes of change and the resistance to change within Christian institutions, so:

"The worshipping boundary needs to be addressed in another way. Alvin Toffler has provided a classic treatment of the culture shock which people undergo when overexposed to rapid change in his book entitled *Future Shock*. One of his shrewd observations is that when people are battling with the culture shock of moving house or country, or when they are having to manage their response to unusually rapid personal or social change, they will tend to create refuges of stability into which they can retreat to a feeling of how it was in the good old days. Some turn their home or their favourite club into a kind of museum where this tranquillity can be experienced. Unfortunately, though entirely naturally, the church is an obvious candidate for that treatment. It claims anyway to represent certain unchanging realities in which man can find security, and so easily the furniture is also rendered unchanging to reinforce the deeper things. The effect is to give the local church a far more tenacious interest in the conservation of liturgies, decorations, and practices than society at large experiences. Churches often feel like last Sunday's flowers just because they cannot throw anything away; congregations become more inveterate hoarders of habits and ways and behaviours than their members are of old golfing hats and courduroy jackets. Change for its own sake has no value; but change for God's sake hits undue opposition for this reason.

Worship hits a cultural boundary at this point. The missionaries who imported Christianity into the colonial world of the nineteenth century imported a good deal of European culture with it. As we have seen, that culture was likely to be highly tenacious, especially when expatriate Englishmen were using the Anglican Church as a museum of Englishness in the culture shock of foreign climes."[p.183f.]

This section exposes Lee's assumptive boundaries. Regression and defensive resistance are seen in the churches as responses to culture shock and future shock. That is change of culture from one setting to another, experienced for instance by the expatriate missionaries, and also response to change within a context over time, so that the culture shock of tomorrow's different world is somewhat similar to the culture shock of moving from one context to another. The context may be geographical and cultural, or the change may be temporal. Lee is correct as far as he goes. The problem is that the anxieties generated by culture shock and future shock are comparatively small when compared to the psychotic anxieties which generate the religious institutions in the first place. We have to probe deeper, to understand the whole nature of religious institutionalisation as itself a defence against psychotic anxiety. The symptoms he describes are pointers to a deeper core which requires further analysis. Lee's own collusional assumptions prevent and in fact render taboo any such probing and therefore sustain the psychotic defensive behaviours within the church and therefore also collusionally within the society it serves. His insights are necessary but not sufficient for the generation of significant social transformation.

Lee then takes his imagery further from culture shock and future shock into simple culture differentiation as in class differentiation, or educational differentiation between the church and its catchment area, or between the ministry and the church congregation.

"One corollary of this is that if the worship of the church is utterly culturally alien to the one in which it is offered, that community will not relate to it and may never enter into worship at all. That has been the church's experience (and fault) in many parts of the world. It can easily

apply in inner-city Britain, where the essentially bookish and cerebral format of middle-class liturgies cuts no ice at all; and the only way ahead is to freshen up the format in the style of local life. But if the minister is himself a product of an outside culture, and especially if he needs to take refuge in the forms of the church as a refuge from the culture shock of the community where he is working, he will all the more disqualify his ministry from making the cultural leap that is needed. And all sorts of doors, not least the trap door between man and his God, will stay closed." [p.185]

The dependency and parallelism on and with Bishop David Sheppard is quite marked and indeed overtly recognised. The analysis has the same strengths and suffers from the same fundamental flaw as Sheppard's analysis of working class and inner-city Britain. However the most fascinating comment that Lee makes is in that last sentence: "All sorts of doors, not least the trap door between man and his God, will stay closed". There is some incredible unconscious symbolism hiding behind those words. There is an awareness of a variety of openings, doors, entrances, which somehow relate to the boundary between the church and its society, or culture, or community. But also this issue of the trap door between man and God. Trap doors, doors as a trap, a trap that holds in or holds out, it is a door between two storeys, with God presumably in the upper storey and man in the lower. God in the safety of the womb in the roof, man excluded from Eden, cast out into the lower storeys of terrestrial being, dropped from between the celestial legs, unable to get back up through the trap door into the safety of sacred space. Is man in danger of dropping through into God in the depths? Or does he have to climb up to God in the heights? Does God come down through the trap door to reach man? Or up through the trap door to invade his space? What is the distinction between the inside and the outside, between one side of the trap and the other side of the trap and for whom is it a trap? Conversely, what are the trappings with which the door is attended and at what point in his history has man experienced going through the door as getting trapped? It seems to me that we are talking about the boundary between the womb-world and the post-natal environment, between dream-time and waking-time, between sacred space and secular space as differing constructs of one and the same fundamentally experienced primitive reality in the psychodynamic imprinting and history of every person.

Within Lee's understanding of the nature of the church and his collusional assumptions setting, he describes one of the essential structural attributes of the growing and effective church:

"For most growing churches around the world, some pattern of midweek groups - whether called home groups, house churches, prayer fellowships or what - has been an essential system for fostering that growth in understanding ... Home churches of this kind need to be a microcosm of the body of Christ, worshipping, studying, interceding, caring for the members and undertaking acts of service and witness in the community." [p.187]

I think Lee puts his finger rightly on the growth point of the structural intervention point, the human engineering entry point, within the system. In so far as we can structure in facilitative contexts for people to become more whole, and in their wholeness reach out and transact an open boundary to the society around them, just so far are we fostering health within the social system. The issue then, of course, becomes how defensively collusional the little groups become and whether those collusional defences can then be worked through layer by layer, step by step until people can recover from religion and grow out of the church into the wholeness of what it is to be human in a whole society, in a whole world. It is a place in which holiness has to have worldliness added to it, so that the metaphysical is demythologised and recognised as the ground of our being, physical, chemical, biological, psychological, sociological.

Lee also notices the schizoid characteristic of social structure in South Africa - not that it is necessarily different, though it may be more intense than elsewhere - and the necessity of iterative learning through reality testing and reality relationships as a way to counter the schizoid fantasy structures, so:

"South Africa is designed to keep people from knowing each other, so that prejudice and the laager mentality reinforce each other. We live and react out of images, not realities. So anything which helps us to encounter reality in the flesh, and not via others' opinions or the distorted media, is of value." [p.187f. ]

The problem is, of course, that Lee does not get down to the diagnosis of the original causes of schizoid behaviour in social systems and sees them as being facets which can be overcome by right relations to reality, by effective communication patterns and so forth. In fact the schizoid presentation in social systems is itself the symptom of fundamental causes relating to anxiety and anxiety defences. Any attempt to shift the symptoms around without dealing with the underlying causes merely redistributes the pain and the splitting emerges in other contexts. We have to move beyond this naivety. The integration of schizoid presentation in the heart of the human psyche is not achieved by attempts to bridge the splits within the communication pattern, which emerge on the surface structure of that society. Such an approach is essentially Jungian, or religious, and does not deal with the psychodynamic roots of the problem. Collusion with the causal core is no more clearly stated than in Lee's comment :

"When intimidated they need to see that there is so much that can be done before serious confrontation with state authority even begins - and start doing it. But of course they also need to learn that the state can become a beast in the eyes of God (as in Revelation 13) and be more afraid of God than of it. Only that way will they find the courage to confront the authorities when they are disobeying God." [p.201f.]

So fear rules in the heart of the church. Terror, psychotic anxiety, are the roots of motivation both inside and outside the Christian congregation. So when fear is experienced in relation to the outside, the Christian is urged to see that there is much that can be done before serious confrontation begins. So we move off the boundary into non-confrontation, as a result of intimidation and work in those areas in which the fear is manageable. Next is to see that the state itself can become the idealised bad object - the beast - the ultimate source and presentation of evil, and concomitantly therefore the ultimate source of psychotic terror and then the Christian has to learn to be more terrified of God than of this presentation. And in that overwhelming terror of his maker, lesser terrors of the made fade into insignificance, so that courage is evidenced, and evidence of, displaced terror. I will face an enemy because I am more terrified of a greater enemy, so the Christian is apparently caught between Scylla and Charybdis, between the terror of a holy God and the terror of the beastly state. This is no way forward. The analysis is utterly flawed at this point. What we need to see is that the construct which generates God in the first place, as also in parallel process the machinery and psychotic presentation of the state, comes from one and the same causal matrix in the psychotic terror of the foetal unconscious, projected onto the cosmic boundary. To hold up God as the holder of psychotic projection, which therefore takes the projection off some other part of the system, is in no sense a movement towards wholeness, it is simply a redistribution of the psychosis - a redistribution moreover in which the dynamics persevere, that is tight boundary controls, paranoid projection, psychotic behaviours, scapegoating, denial, inside/outside polarisation, and above all regression away from the conflicted boundary into

some kind of safe space on the other side of the trap door, rather than integrated and annealed and courageous working through of the boundary into a reality related space in the here and now of our world crucible.

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