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Education for Tomorrow's South Africa

The future for our young people in S. Africa is frightening because their education is not fitting them for the problems ahead. Our hearts must be great enough to include in their responsibility all humanity.

Talk given at an Education Conference in Johannesburg

by PROFESSOR P. V. PISTORIUS

I KNOW that education is more, and should be more, than the mere imparting of facts and knowledge, for the simple reason that education is a preparation for life, for living amongst other people, for reacting to your environment; and life itself is far more than a mere collection of facts. If life had only consisted of facts and if, consequently, education had only consisted of imparting facts, we would have had no problem whatsoever; just as we have very little problem in the teaching of a subject like Mathematics or Geology or one of those subjects where the main approach is to impart certain truths and theories that can be demonstrated and proved by observation, experiment and rational reasoning, and which are communicable from person to person. But life is more than that because life does not only consist of facts; it consists also, and let me say, mainly of values. And, if I had to define value, I would say that it is the relationship between a fact or a set of facts and some person, some being, who has a free will and consequently has the right to assess and evaluate those facts in terms of some system which he has devised, perhaps, to fit those facts into his system of values and to give, unconsciously, those facts some rank, some importance in his evaluation of life and most important of all, in his evaluation of his fellow men. I think that South Africa happens to be *the* country in Africa which is the most advanced in knowledge and in technical matters; by far the most advanced, the most industrialised and the most knowledgeable country in Africa. Our need at the moment is mainly the need of evaluating what we have and evaluating what we are into a system of values, that will enable us and our children to react to their environment and to their fellow men in such a way that they can realise and bring to fruition what is their real selves, what is man and humanity itself.

Prof. Pistorius is Professor of Greek at the University of Pretoria and a challenging speaker and writer on S. African problems This article is the text of a talk given at an education conference in Johannesburg.

Higher Standards Needed

To me this is the most important thing — I stand very strongly not for a lowering of our standards, but for making our standards higher than they are, especially in the circumstances in which we find ourselves; and more important than that, I would like to see the educated man, the product of our Schools and of our Universities, be a person, a full person, who evaluates correctly and who can react to his environment and to other men in such a way that when we see and observe him, we say: "This is a human being, this is a man or a woman as we would wish to see them, this is someone who fits into our highest definition of what a human being should be." I think that that is very important in education. It is very important in education to know that we, by some chance, (by some misfortune some would say, which I don't believe) have been given the free will to form to a large extent our own system of values and to make our own character, so that the term "human being" is not a common name for similar creatures, but the concept of a human being, which does not exist, but is somehow the ideal to which we must strive. It is that ideal

human being that I have in mind when I speak, the person who is not yet or perhaps never will be, but who constitutes what we believe to be the essence of what a full human being should be. There is no common definition for that. If I were to give you my definition and you were to give yours, it may be that those definitions would be diametrically opposed and those definitions would be formed, not on the basis of fact, but on the basis of value. If I were to give a definition of some facts in Physical Science, I could easily be proved wrong, if I were wrong. I could be proved wrong by experiment and by logical demonstration. But if I gave a definition of what a human being is, I could not easily be proved wrong, for the simple reason that I may make use of the same facts as the other man who gives the opposite definition, and nevertheless I can come to a different conclusion for the reason that I evaluate my facts differently.

A System of Values

To me the great task which faces the educationist in South Africa is to instil in those who are committed to our charge, at least such a sense and a system of values, such a norm for evaluating themselves, their fellow-men, and the phenomena of experiences and the things which happen every day that they can evaluate those things in such a way that they can be the citizens of tomorrow. It is very easy to demonstrate and to explain to you how fact and value differ. If you think of the Civil War in America you see how differently those people in the North judged from those people in the South, on exactly the same data. They judged so differently that they fought a war on the matter and both sides were sincere in their evaluations. If we go to a lighter subject — a Cricket Match; how differently we evaluate the umpire when he declares one of our boys out and when he doesn't . . . how difficult it is for an English umpire to give May out when he has scored only two runs. How difficult it is for you and me to judge objectively on those who are near and dear to us! How difficult it is to extricate ourselves from a situation, to extricate ourselves from those things which have conditioned us and which have determined our sense of values, to break loose from that, to look critically and disapprovingly on what is our very very own, and to reject that.

These things are not only determined by fact, nor even mainly determined by fact. I believe that the human being is a rational being, but he is not primarily rational. He is an axiological being because he is primarily dominated by means of a certain system into which he has adjusted his facts. Take your own South African situation — there are the *same* phenomena which we all observe, the *same* data which we all see in this multi-racial country in which we live, with its clash of cultures, traditions and interests. Do we not *all* observe the same thing? Are we not all in possession of the same logic? Why is it that we stand in opposite camps, violently opposing one another without a shred of hypocrisy on either side, both sincere in their convictions that their evaluation of facts is right?

I told my students one day, in trying to explain to them how we are governed by our system of values and how we are slaves of those systems, that it is the duty of every ethical, moral man to have a continually dynamic system of values, never static, to take nothing for granted, to accept nothing permanently, but to look most critically on those things of which we are most convinced, and to be most suspicious of those things which we want most. I asked them this question — they are mostly theological students preparing for a theological course and taking Greek for that reason — Do you believe in Christ because you are Christians, or are you Christians because you believe in Christ? Now those two questions are vastly different questions, and the fact is that in one country you find a group of people who subscribe to one form of religion; in Asia you find another block subscribing to another religion. Have they examined it logically? Have they taken and assessed the facts, calmly, coldly, as a Professor of Physics would evaluate his facts in the laboratory? Or, have they accepted those facts before they have examined them, and, having accepted them, they will never reject them and will defend those facts by rationalisation. Rightly or wrongly, I do not blame them, for that is human nature, but we have to deal with a situation in which that may become a mortal danger to us, because in South Africa we have various systems of values, with the result that we evaluate facts differently, and there are walls built between groups in South Africa and in the world that cannot be penetrated by logic or by fact.

There are things of which you cannot convince a man, there are things of which you will not be convinced, unless you are willing and

unless that man is willing to submit his system of values on the altar of logic; and that is a thing that very few of us can do. Now that may be a small matter when only small matters are touched, when it is a question of pleasure, a question of taste, and when it is a question of custom in this or that. But when it comes to the basic question of evaluating your fellow-man, of giving a definition of what he is, that becomes a far more important matter because it carries within it the seed of destruction. It is not only because it touches things that are basically of human existence, but also because those things are entrenched behind values that are logic-proof, with the result that we do not understand one another's language and we are often quick to blame and to resent criticism from others. Let us realise before I go on, what education really is.

Man A Slave

Let me state that I think that man is fettered. He is a slave, fettered by his values, values to which he clings and which he will not relinquish as he deals with his opponent. He deals unjustly with him, while that opponent is as helplessly fettered by *his* own prejudices and system of values. So we stand as human beings in closed compartments, unable to communicate with each other. Were it Mathematics or Logic or Geology or Physics or Chemistry, we could communicate as people do. Behaviour, Ethics, and concepts like justice, what a human being is and what he should be, are the vital things in the main tasks of education. I want to add, I hope the trend of this conference will be to divorce education from the mere imparting of technical knowledge — that the most important task of education is to create the full man with a system of values that can stand objective analysis. This is the crucial point. A man who can stand analysis by somebody who does not share in that special prejudice, who is not a part of that society where that prejudice or value was conditioned on the human being, by somebody outside, who knows nothing, but who, hearing and understanding, would say: "Yes, I think that is right and that is wrong." The tendency in life is always to go the opposite way, is to give the highest value to the smallest circle. You notice that in a small hostel at a school or a university the so-called *esprit de corps*, which is another word for pure snobbism, is far stronger than in a larger institution. It is as values become more insistent the less important they are, the less they can be justified morally. The part is taken to be greater than the whole, man is taken to be only one kind of man.

I had a most interesting experience a few days ago. You know how easy it is to laugh at the folly of others and how thankful we can be to God that he has made us incapable of seeing our own follies — I accept that blessing from Him and also laugh at the folly of others. I was talking to a man about Church affairs in South Africa, about the simple problem of common worship that has arisen in certain Churches. The man said: "I think we haven't the right to refuse people of the same faith as we are but of different colour from coming into the Church. But mind you, the reason why I am against it is they will flood our Churches." Now that man was so fettered in his sense of values that he couldn't see the blatant lack of logic in that, because as far as I know, clergymen always want to flood their Churches and here we say: "Because we are all equal let us all come, but they will flood our Church." So, our Churches should be flooded only by a certain kind of man, not by the other kind; but, we should pay lip-service to the concept of the equality of man, the equality of believers, by giving them a token invitation, which we hope to God they do not accept! Now what lies at the basis of that? I don't blame that man; I shall come later on to who is to blame. What lies at the basis of that is the crucial parting-point between values, since the most basic evaluation is our evaluation of our fellow-men. The most critical and the most fundamental division is there whether we regard our fellow-men as human beings or as things. We all know the selfish type who lives for himself alone, who regards all men as his tools. He is not very dangerous, because he is found out by all men very soon; but I am speaking of those people who, belonging to the same religious group, the same linguistic or colour group or same political group, slowly begin to think that that part is more valuable than the whole, They slowly begin to think of human beings in terms of two categories. Those who belong to this group, and the rest. And they, without meaning to — it comes so insidiously without meaning to — give a lesser value to those others. The result is that their moral consciousness is limited in its application to only a section of humanity.

But Morally Responsible

I am no philosopher, but I believe that the basis of ethics is that man is morally responsible to his widest possible sphere of experience, that there is nothing in the world that happens to us, to which we are not, in some way, morally related. There are many things I can do, but I must not think they are morally neutral. There are many things that I can do to other people that hurt, but I must not think that those things are morally neutral. I shall be judged on those things, and before doing those things, I must evaluate in terms of moral standards whether they should be done, and doing them, know that I have put and exposed myself in the moral sphere, rejecting certain values, using others, but acting as a moral being, choosing between value and value, consciously knowing what it entails. But that narrows the moral field, it narrows the moral field so much, that a part of the moral consciousness of that man becomes atrophied, it no longer functions. He disregards others who do not belong to his group, to his nation, to his ideology: and I think here of the West and the Communists; to colour, and I think of Black and White, and Brown and Yellow; to his religion, and we all know what hard barriers of value are built between people by religion, that should unite all people. He thinks in terms of those of his own group as human beings and in terms of them, he is a moral being, unselfish, willing to sacrifice himself, willing to do justice, willing to stand for justice, preaching and practising love and meaning it and willing to lay down his life; in every way a moral being, but outside that group, it stops. He may not be wilfully cruel to what is outside him, just as I am not wilfully cruel to the tree in my garden; but if I want to chop down that tree because it suits me, I do so, and I do not regard it as an action that touches my moral life, because it is not a somebody, but a something.

When man becomes a pawn, an instrument of ideology, when he is no longer regarded as a value in himself, but only of value as being of use to me, I think that that is the basic division between all ethical thought. They say even a scorpion protects its young; it is ethical in regard to its young. But to be ethical we must meet the full man, the man whom we wish to educate. The product of our schools (the citizen without whom this country would perish — we must get him and get him in large numbers) is the man whose moral consciousness includes equally all men.

Let me say at once that this conference is not a political conference, and we shall not deal with Politics. But if you may have misunderstood me, let me add that I believe that that taint of partial values, of excluding many people from our sense of ethics, from our sense of morality, allowing us to do injustice, allowing injustice to be done to others, and others to be treated as we would not treat our own type, that taint has touched our country in its totality. It is the greatest nonsense to say that it is limited to a certain political party or to a certain language group.

I was in Cape Town some time ago, and a man 'phoned me and said he was a prominent English-speaking person there. He reproached me very strongly and bitterly, saying that I, whom he thought much of, allowed, without protest, and could even say, accepted, what was a cruel injustice to him as an Englishman. I asked what they had done to him, and he replied that it was this Republic. I answered regretting I could not discuss that then, but that I had not brought it on him. And then he said: "There is another thing, too — that you should stand for the rights of Natives when you know very well that the Act of Union of 1909 was made by the British Parliament and it was clear from that Act that Natives were not to be given rights in this country. How dare you do that?" That man was sincere when he asked: "Can you see the cruel injustice of the Republic?" but it was wrong to give rights to others who were outside his moral sphere. That is an extreme case which has touched all of us, touched the souls of all those who protest against injustice. It has not only done that, but has reacted on those whom we have excluded. It is a strange thing when you realise that you are outside the moral sphere of somebody else, yet exclude him from your own moral sphere. That is a natural and psychological thing to do, but what is more, hatred, suspicion and vengeance always outlive those things that brought them into being.

The men, the people, the section, the group and the party that do injustice to some other group of people or party, may repent of their injustice, but they have sown the wind and the whirlwind will destroy them. They have sown dragons' teeth and they will be destroyed. It is all over then, bar the shouting. Give enough injustice,

practise enough discrimination, exclude sufficiently from your moral sense, use people sufficiently as things and not as human beings, and then stop . . . the fatal dose has been administered, and you can wait because it will come back on you, it will come back on others.

Sowers and Reapers

And that is the terrible thought, that we are the sowers and our children the reapers, and we have to educate them in such a way that they will be able to bear the punishment that should have come on us, in such a way that humanity, humaneness and justice may have some hope of survival. I feel ashamed to belong to this generation. I don't know what the next generation will make of it, but they will have the right to look back on us and say: "The sins of our fathers are visited upon us." And I don't mean revolution, bloodshed and the fear of having our throats cut. That could perhaps, under certain circumstances, be the least of all troubles, since some people sometimes even cut their own throats. But it is this — to survive as moral beings in the face of a hatred that has some justification; to survive morally in a co-existence in which we live with a person who has our local exclusive idea of morality that knocks up against the world very strongly. He knocks up against those around him, against those whom he has excluded from his moral sphere; but more than that, he knocks up against the rest of the world, who do not approve of what he is doing. The strange thing is that the rest of the world may have its own spiritual form of immorality and lack of ethics, but they haven't got our type, and they don't like it. And it is always a pleasure for a man to condemn those who are guilty of a thing of which he himself is not guilty. The world is condemning us for the simple reason that we are one of those little places in the world where the whole is still regarded as less than the part and where men are divided. Men are always divided into lesser and superior men — I don't believe in equality of mankind — but the inequality is based on innate merit and endeavour. In terms of that, man will always be unequal, but they are never unequal and not unequal in the world today in terms of irrelevant factors. When the world condemns us, the world often not knowing what it is condemning, condemns us not only for what we do, but also for what we are not guilty of, with the result that we, instead of asking ourselves why we are out of step with the whole Western world, grasp onto those things of which they accuse us and of which we are not guilty. It is like a man who has committed two murders and three robberies in one evening and they accuse him of that and of parking his car wrongly. He hasn't got a car and so he says: "I am being unjustly accused, I haven't got a car," and the result is that the walls are built up even more. To me, that is the great danger facing us in South Africa — that we are building walls and allowing other people to build walls that cannot be broken down by fact or logic or by national reasoning. Walls of prejudice, walls of values, these are things we can't argue about. Now that is the social structure in which we in South Africa live.

Advisory Councils

I agree that the proposed Education Advisory Council can have a disastrous effect. I also agree that it is a characteristic of all totalitarian ideologies, of all those ideologies that regard men as something and not as a somebody, as a member of the Aryan race, as a worker, as a this or a that, instead of an individual being with dignity of his own individual existence, and with an ethical and metaphysical relationship to a world that transcends this world and transcends society, so that man has dignity apart from Society in his individual existence. All totalitarian ideologists try to grasp hold of education in centralised control, to prescribe what sort of man they want, in the same way that they would go to Iscor and prescribe what sort of railway lines they want, what the measure and weight should be and how they are to make them. I believe the laws are dangerous, but I believe the greatest danger facing us is the fact that we grow up in this environment, and our children assess their natural experiences in terms of the repetition of those experiences. They see over and over again that if you take a stone and let go, it drops. A baby of a few months old, if he had to see you let go of a stone and the stone went up, would not be surprised becauses he has not yet been conditioned to know that the thing will fall. We accept those things normally and naturally that we know. We know that a stone falls, that you hurt yourself if you put your hand on the stove, that day follows night, winter on summer. These things are accepted by us, because we have been conditioned that way. At the same time, from our childhood days, we have been

conditioned that some men are inferior, and it is easy to know whom. You must look at their colour, and that is all, then you know. It is a terrible thing for us to grow up in a situation where we know of no better.

Incidentally, I was asked to speak of education for tomorrow, and I interpreted this to mean education for the citizen of tomorrow, for the society of tomorrow. What proof have we that this situation will remain as it is? If it does remain, or if it doesn't remain, where will the horror be the greater? If it does remain, and becomes entrenched in us from generation to generation that some men are to be totally or partially excluded from our moral sense, that they can be treated as things, group areaed, job-reserved, raided, done anything to, placed here and there, moved like pawns not as human beings with a dignity that transcends society, a dignity that will remain when we are all dead, with the moral relationship to a world beyond this world, but as a pawn in our hands — if that should continue we should be conditioned from age to age and generation to generation, and our moral world would become atrophied and we would bring into the world children suffering, if I may put it so, from congenital moral atrophy. Could anything be worse? Then where does our nation go to? Who is hurt most — he who excludes, or he who is excluded? I would not care to say. I would only know that dark future would face us if that were the case. I believe the situation cannot remain, but if it doesn't remain, what then? What kind of society have we in our homes, in our schools, in our newspapers, in this conference, Black people are also parents. If we prick them do they not bleed? I am not blaming you, but even here we are conditioned to know that talking of education you will see people of your own colour only. We who wish it otherwise know that this is the situation in which we live; we are conditioned to that.

Training for a New Situation

How are we going to train our children to be prepared for another situation? How are we going to educate our children to be prepared for a situation where merit would be decided on endeavour, effort and hard work? At the moment I think, the greatest blot on our education is that we are training our children to rule in terms of the aristocracy of race, and that aristocracy is tottering so that it will not survive our generation. What is that education worth to them? That is why I believe that our standards should not be lowered, but should be made higher. Life should not be made easier, it should be made more difficult. I see my son going to play cricket twice a week, and I sometimes wonder whether I should allow him to do so, because that is not life as it will be. It will be different. It will be different in terms of hard endeavour and let me accuse here, not only our present Government, but also all the Governments we have had since Union. Let me accuse them of this too, that they have bred and are breeding a weak White race without strength of purpose, without the necessity to develop astuteness, cleverness and knowledge of hard work. It is difficult for a White man to starve in South Africa; it is as difficult for a White man to starve in this country as it is for a Black man to maintain even a reasonably decent standard of living. It won't remain like that, and when it is all thrown into the boiling pot, where will our children be? Born to rule when there are none to rule, born to command when no command can be given, born to luxury when luxury has to be bought with effort and hard work.

Not only that, but the situation in which we live — we pay for that with our souls, either by advocating it or sharing it — 95 per cent of the White population of South Africa is guilty of at least one of the two, if the percentage is not higher. If a man criticises that system in which you and I partake, in terms of which we probably have a standard of living twice as high as we deserve, then that man is accused of undermining Christian civilisation. That to me is one of the most foully illogical things in the world, that we can maintain Christian Civilisation by means which cannot stand the test of Christian morals, and that if moral atrophy is objected to, they say we object to Christian Civilisation.

That is the problem that faces the educationist today, especially the parent. That is why I am glad that my audience is not, with due respects to our Chairman, a collection of Professors of Education, but ordinary parents, parents who may not know the theory, but who love their children, who have a sense of justice, who wish those children to carry that sense of justice with them and wish those children to survive; parents who would not let their child go alone at night somewhere, even in a civilised city, because they are afraid that something might happen, and who — I think I am right — would not be willing to let their child go into

the next generation unequipped for a new life — where moral horizons would have to be so wide as to include all humanity or that child will perish: a generation in which that child will have to work harder than you and I can know, we have not experienced anything like it — if he wishes to maintain himself as he is today. How are we to equip our children for that? I don't think there is an easy way out, but I think the first essential is that before we indulge in the very popular modern pastime of criticising the Nationalist Government, we must examine our own hearts to see how far we are tainted with that moral atrophy. We must clear ourselves of it, but that clearing is not immediate quick action. It is something slow, because it is ingrown in us. We have been born and live with it: we have treated the others, the Blacks very well, very kindly, very condescendingly in a very superior fashion, we have even been sorry for them when they are ill, and we have helped them, but we have never thought that they can share the things we share. Let us in the first place purge our souls of that, before we take it on ourselves to criticise others; but above all, before we argue what sort of education is best, and what salary the maths. teacher should get, and what law there should be and what the School Board should say here, and what the Education Department should have the right to do there, and what subjects should be taken for matriculation. These things are important, but even if we have them, we shall perish unless we equip our children with a system of values that will fit them for the generation that is to come, for which we are not fitted. Why do we fear what lies in the future? Because we have been conditioned to live in what is the present and we know it cannot keep. Why is the world surprised at our fear of the future? Because the world does not share in the moral atrophy that has become part of our national heritage.

This is the first step to clear ourselves. The second is to instil in our children in school, at home, in society, the places where we move, by our example even more than by our words, broader values. Let the child see in you that your heart is great enough to include in its responsibility all humanity. Let them know that that is the ideal. Give me the child, it has been said, until he is five years old, and you can keep him from then on because he has been formed — that may be an over-simplification and an overstatement, but I believe that the schools cannot take over what should happen in the home. And I would even say this, that whatever happens in the schools, it cannot undo what is happening at home, if at home we have the right attitude, the right moral attitude.

I am not pleading for morality as such; I am pleading merely for survival, for I believe that unless we can settle this problem, our chances of survival are nil. In the changed world that is knocking at the door and the old world that is coming to an end, we are unequipped, and the equipment we must have seems to be above us — it seems to be the simple virtues of humility and justice.

That is all I wish to say, but to close on this note, let me say that I spoke of the uniracial character of this meeting, into which I shall not go at present. I do not blame you for it; laws, tradition and ingrained customs make it impossible for it to be otherwise, but let me plead here in the name of justice and in the name of survival, for education for our non-Whites. Unless we can educate them and educate them not only in knowledge — because the time will come when they will have the right to use whatever knowledge they have as you and I have the right at the moment — but also educate them in a sense of broad values. We have ingrained in them the same moral atrophy of which we are guilty, for the simple reason that hatred breeds hatred, sectionalism breeds sectionalism, and group loyalty. We have forced them to hide themselves behind their walls and perhaps we cannot penetrate them any more, but we can take the example of the Congo and Nigeria. In Nigeria where there was a benevolent attitude, the change-over from colonialism to freedom was so quiet that one doesn't even know about it, and in the Congo the opposite was the case, and we all know what has happened there.

Let us not think of the African problem; let us not think of the colour problem in South Africa; let us think of the human problem, the problem of each one of us who has to make the great decision, the opening of the heart to justice, and the willingness and eagerness to instil that sense of justice in our children. THAT is education. If we have that, we shall survive. If we cannot get that, we shall not deserve to survive.