

[Osterman 1973]

Student Convocation on APARTHEID

I'm glad to see so many of you out on this cold afternoon to manifest your interest in social justice and particularly in the situation of apartheid, and particularly against the situation of apartheid in South Africa. Let me say first of all, that the issue in question is not whether or not we are against apartheid. I don't know of anyone in America who favors apartheid, certainly not at this University. Apartheid is an evil system, inhuman in its application, and an arrangement that should be eliminated from the face of the earth. The issue then is not whether apartheid is evil. It is. We all recognize that.

The real issue is what to do about it and that is not quite as easy as condemning it.

As university students, it is important that your crusade for social justice be based on studying and understanding, on acknowledgment of the complications of the issue under discussion and leading towards a solution that will be both intelligent, responsible and effective. Anything less would be unworthy of university students. It is easy to chant "divestiture now" but I would remind you that complicated questions and complicated problems are

not solved by bumper stickers and this is a very complicated question and a very complicated problem. Let me back up and attempt to put it into historical perspective, both with regards to the United States and South Africa as well.

Before all of us feel too virtuous, too easily, let me remind everyone that the United States practiced apartheid for 250 years, dating from the arrival of the first slave. Apartheid, United States style, was just as pervasive, just as evil, just as inhuman as is apartheid in South Africa. Let me also remind you that it was only 21 years ago, in the year 1964, that we outlawed apartheid in this country. Let me remind you of what a black in one of the Southern states could not do in 1964. He or she could not have Coke and drink it at a lunch counter, could not enter a good restaurant and order a meal, could not register at a decent hotel, could not enter a bus and sit down, but only in the back, could not go to a movie except possibly in the high balcony, could not drink out of a drinking fountain unless marked colored, could not go to the bathroom, could not enter a store and try on a dress or a suit, could

not get a haircut, could not swim at a public beach, could not go to a white church on Sunday, and so help us Lord, could not be buried in a cemetery if white people were buried there. These are only some of the things that a black American could not do in 1964, and the prohibition was backed up by law in the 13 Southern states. Blacks could not do such things at many places in the North either. Although here, it was custom and not law that prevailed.

When we were able to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964 we ridded ourselves of institutionalized prejudice, but prejudice still remains today. Last night I was speaking to a group of our black alumni. We were discussing how we might double the number of black students presently at Notre Dame. A very real problem that I have been trying to solve by raising a minority endowment of \$7 million, now in place. Almost all of our black alumni said they found it difficult to recommend Notre Dame for black students because when they themselves were here as black students, they never felt quite welcomed by the white majority here. Again, it is as easy to practice virtue at a distance in favor of the blacks in South Africa, but I would remind you that our first obligation is to eliminate prejudice here where we live.

I was very happy and proud to be a part of the effort to rid America of apartheid as one of six members of the United States Commission on Civil Rights, beginning in 1957. We did not get rid of apartheid by waving signs or shouting slogans. It was a good deal of hard work and long involved hearings all across the country to enlighten the white majority population. It was a great deal of legal study in the formulation of laws that would do away with apartheid. Even then we would not have passed the 1964 omnibus civil rights act without great leadership on the part of President Lyndon Johnson.

While it took us 250 years to rid ourselves of apartheid, I think the task will be much more difficult in South Africa, because here we had 200 million white Americans who had to be convinced to grant equal access to public accommodations to blacks, whereas there, there are about 5 million whites and almost 20 million blacks and coloreds.

I have another point that I would like to remind you of today. South Africa is the microcosm since South Africa is our world in microcosm. In South Africa 80% of the population, which is black and colored, has to survive on 20% of the goods of that country, whereas the 20% of population that is white enjoys 80% of the goods. That is the picture of the

world in which we live. We whites tend to think of ourselves as the majority whereas, in reality in our world, 80% of the population is colored and 20% is white. The whites, of whom we are a part, enjoy 80% of the good things of this earth--access to education, housing, medical care, food, communications, money, and all that money can buy. The other 80% of the world's population has to make do on the 20% that is left when we have had our 80%. It translates into a vast third world which has to live on less than \$500 a year, whereas, our poverty level is over \$10 thousand. A billion of them are illiterate, a billion go hungry each day, and 480 million of them are so under-nourished that forty thousand children die each day of mal nutrition and the illnesses that result from it. While we are thinking about social justice in South Africa, let us not forget about social justice in the rest of the world of which South Africa is just a small, part but reflecting the condition of the whole.

Why are we concerned about South Africa in particular? We think it is because South Africa claims to be, like ourselves, a western culture with

western values, mainly Judeo-Christian. Those values are hardly honored by the deep-set injustice and violence and killing that we witness each day in South Africa. Oppression is not a valid part of western culture.

If you'll forgive some personal references, my first involvement with South African apartheid was in the year 1958, a time when most of you were not yet born. During a visit to one of the universities there, I attended a Lecture at Cape Town University on "the moral justification of apartheid." Professor Olivier, who gave the Lecture later, drove me to Stellenbosch University, the heart and center of apartheid. On the way he asked me how I liked his Lecture. I told him that he had convinced me that there was no possible moral justification for apartheid. Once we arrived in Stellenbosch, we gathered with the directors of the apartheid think tank, an organization called SABRA, the South African Bureau of Race Affairs. They asked me if I was acquainted with their work, and I said yes. They then asked me what I thought of their publications and I said that I could only judge them as a man schooled in philosophy and theology.

Philosophically, I told them that I thought their writings were irrational, which is the worse one could say of philosophy, and theologically, I found them blasphemous. Needless to say I wasn't very popular from then on.

I went back to South Africa twenty years later in 1978, with a group of American educators. I did not find much change, except cosmetic differences. During that visit we spent several weeks meeting with the most important educators, business leaders, and government officials. It was a very dreary few weeks, and I was happy to get on the airplane to leave from what seemed weeks long depressing discussions. I cannot say that I left with much hope of improvement despite our frank condemnation of the direction in which they were going.

We must consider today, the important question of what to do, and especially what we can do as a university. You may not know it, but we have been doing a good number of things, which I would like to review briefly with you.

For the past several years I have been a member of the Board of Directors of the South African

of the South African Educational Program run in connection with the Institute of National Education in New York. Derek Bok, president of Harvard, is our Chairman. We are supported by corporations operating in South African, by foundations, and by government. Budget from the government this year is \$6 million. We are also supported by 200 universities who grant tuition remissions for more than 400 students who have come here under the program. ALL but one of them have succeeded in their academic programs here and only one has refused to return, to South Africa. If they return we work for the Local American businesses to see that they receive positions commensurate with the education they have received here. This is building a strong leadership for the future, something that the universities by their nature are committed to do.

Several years ago when I was Chairman of the Rockefeller Foundation, I set up a commission endowed with more \$1 million and chaired by Franklin Thomas, who subsequently became President of the Ford Foundation. I must say that his distinguished

commission produced what is still a classic book on the situation in South Africa and what actually might be done about it. I hope that all of you could read this book to inform yourselves more thoroughly about the problem and its complications.

Last summer we were visited by Dean Muelder of Cape Town University. While praising the South African educational program mentioned above, he said that it did not touch regimented theological students who tended to be the leaders in the liberation movement such as they were in our own country during the Civil Rights Revolution. I told him that he could send us some theologians right away, and I would take the problem up with the Board of Directors of the South African Education Program. The Directors were totally sympathetic to the task and its importance, but said that they could not spend government or company money for theological education. However, David Smock, our executive director, was able to obtain \$1 million from the Ford Foundation. This past week Bishop Tutu and I have addressed a letter to the 25 best theological schools in America asking them to receive these students and grant them free

tuition if we can take care of other expenses. We already have a few such students at Notre Dame.

I was in South Africa for the first time, 27 years ago. I met a young student Leader at Witswatersrand University. He visited us at Notre Dame last summer and I found that he is now a federal judge. As a student he had been a courageous and inspired Leader against apartheid, something more difficult to do there than here, given the power of their government to suppress individuals to speak against government policy. In the course of our discussions, I suggested that he send us one of his top young lawyers to study at our Center for Civil Rights at Notre Dame, so that he might learn something from our own civil rights movement and the success it enjoyed during the '60s. We hope to have this young lawyer with us soon. Just a few weeks ago when the Rev. Alan Boesak was jailed, a number of us in higher education and the foundations were concerned for his safety since he was being held incommunicado, and there had been a number of murders in South African jails of late. We quickly formed what became known as the "Gang of Eight". It was made up of President Bok of Harvard, President Boland of Princeton, President Kennedy of Stanford and

myself on the side of higher education. We were joined by President Hamburg of the Carnegie Corporation, President Thomas of the Ford Foundation and President Lyman of the Rockefeller Foundation. The eighth member was Cyrus Vance, our former Secretary of State, and a member of the board at Yale. Together we formulated, signed, and made public a strong admonition to the South African government asking them to release Alan Boesek immediately and to begin talking to the moderate black leaders in South Africa. Two days later Alan Boesek was released although still banned, and we were informed by the State Department that our strong admonition to the South African government had helped.

It then seemed a good idea to keep our group together and enlarge it and to move forward in doing whatever we might to alleviate apartheid in South Africa with the influence of our universities behind us. We added the Presidents of Yale, Chicago and Michigan to our group, as well as several other influential Americans. Two weeks ago we met in New York and touched base with new efforts on the part of the business community which is doing business in

South Africa. They formed a similar group of top business executives under the Leadership of Roger Smith of General Motors and Mike Blumenthal of Burroughs. Together their group called upon President Reagan in the White House portuned him to take a much stronger stand against apartheid than that which has characterized our government and his Leadership thus far. He came out with an official statement a few days later, not as strong as one would wish, but the first of its kind. There is a good chance that a group of these business Leaders may go to South Africa shortly and visit with the government there to impress upon them the importance of eliminating apartheid. Our group will stay in touch with them and encourage them.

It seemed that we should also see what we could do to strengthen university efforts in South Africa itself. So we have invited the best university Leader there, Stuart Sanders, principal of the University of Cape Town, and Jakes Gerwel, Director Designate of the University of West Cape Emma Colored University near Cape Town. We have invited them to make a trip to America and we will meet with them next Wednesday in New York. We also are making important contacts with the State Department, so that they will know the seriousness of our concern. In

addition to this, we are keeping close contact by telephone with Bishop Tutu and the other top South African Leaders, so that they might also advise us as to our best course of action. It could well be that we will also send a strong delegation to talk to the South African government later this year. That seems promising of good results.

This brings us to the question of what we can do here at Notre Dame and on other individual campuses. There are of course many opinions, among the most simple of simple solutions, already followed by some universities in an effort to avoid actually student and faculty difficulties, has been to divest themselves of their South African investments. While this seems to be a simple solution one must ask the question, then what? The answer to this is fairly simple too. Investments that are sold will be picked up by those who care little about apartheid in South Africa and the schools that have divested will have zero influence in the corporations involved. That will be the end of the problem as far as the university is concerned and people can pack up their signs and feel good about it. In fact, if I were to

declare right now that we are to divest ourselves of all of our company investments, tonight I'm sure that all of you would cheer me and I would feel very good, and then we could put the problem to rest. But then what? We would have removed ourselves from any solution, although we might feel virtuous about a symbolic act that will be soon forgotten. I learned long ago that there is no real virtue in doing what is easy, or popular, or cheap in its cost, unless one is convinced that it is also morally justified as an effective move against injustice.

If there is enough static against corporations doing business in South Africa, I think it is quite likely that many of them, since this is a small part of their business, might well remove themselves from the scene in South Africa. Again, one might ask what then? Again, the answer is fairly simple. Their businesses will be picked up at 50¢ on the dollar by West German and Japanese interests who could not care less about apartheid. Again, just as divestment means an end of influence here, removal of American

companies from South Africa means an end of influence there. One might Legitimately ask, are the people we are concerned about helped or hurt by this process?

In any event, I'm sure that pressure for divestiture will continue because it is an easy answer, and it does in many ways remove the problem of our concern. I'm not sure there would be the same enthusiasm if I were to suggest that we stop driving General Motors and Ford cars and stop using our IBM computers. That would cost a bit more than shouting "divest now."

Specifically, here at Notre Dame, we discussed this problem six years ago during one of our Board of Trustees meetings. At the time the Trustees instructed me to write the chief executive officers of 29 companies in whom we were investing and who had operations in South Africa, to query whether or not they were subscribing to the Sullivan Principles. We quickly heard from 28 of these chief executive officers assuring me that they were indeed adhering to the Sullivan Principles and that they appreciated

our concern. The 29th company president told me that it was none of my business what he was doing in South Africa. We promptly divested that particular stock. We also initiated the policy at that time not to invest in any banks which were loaning money to the South African government which represented a rather a direct and immediate tie with apartheid.

I should perhaps make a point here that it is our Board of Trustees which is entrusted with the responsibility for University investments. I am a member of that Board and do make my point of view heard, but it is the whole Board who makes decisions. They delegate the immediate work of investments to an investment committee, one of our six Board committees, and that committee reports to the whole Board.

At our Board meeting last May, the Board commissioned a special committee to once again look into the whole matter of South African investments. The Chairman said that he himself would chair this committee, and he appointed not only members of the Board but also faculty members, including Prof. Walshe, and student members, including those delegated to this task by the student government.

They have had a meeting already and are working on a statement to present to the Board at our October 25th meeting. Do not take this meeting, this report and recommendation, to be the end of the matter, but a continuing link in a discussion that will be ongoing for some years ahead. I have no idea of what the final conclusion will be, since it may well be overtaken by the fact if American companies withdraw from South Africa and leave the field to those less interested in social justice there.

I'm sure that a discussion of all this will continue here, and that is as it should be in a university. I'm also sure that the Board of Trustees is responsive to thinking and concern of our faculty and students, although, in the last analysis they must make their own decisions since it is their responsibility. I'm not greatly impressed by recent actions of several other American universities who have opted for divestiture since, as I said, it will avoid student and faculty difficulties and will not cost them anything substantial anyway. I do not find that a particularly outstanding practice of responsible leadership for justice, although one can

certainly recognize it as an obvious and popular procedure. University Leaders with whom I have been working seem more responsible, more reflective, more determined to make a difference, and more serious in exercising what leverage exists in this difficult and thorny problem, with a difficult and thorny government 9,000 miles from here.

So there we are. We recognize the difference of opinion, and also recognize the right of those who declare themselves to think otherwise as a legitimate exercise within the University. I have through my lifetime been seriously concerned about social justice here in this country and abroad, and I've spent a good deal of my life trying to do something about it in a practical and effective way. I do not intend to do less in this particular problem. At least, I thought it only fair to let you know where I stand today, even though I do not have the final responsibility for decision on this matter.