



In my utopia, human solidarity would not be seen as a fact to be recognized by clearing away prejudice or burrowing down to previously hidden depths but, rather, as a goal to be achieved.

— Richard Rorty (1989),  
*Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*

## Learning *Post-Apartheid*

*The Population Registration Act of 1950 forced all South African Citizens age 16 and older to carry an identity card stating their race. This determined where they could live and go to school.*

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nder the South African system of apartheid, the Bantu Education Act of 1953 established a separate curriculum for blacks that suited the “nature and requirements of the black people.” The author of the legislation, Dr Hendrik Verwoerd (then Minister of Native Affairs, later Prime Minister), stated that its aim was to prevent Africans from receiving an education that would lead them to aspire to positions they wouldn’t be allowed to hold in society. Instead Africans were to receive an education designed to provide them with skills to serve their own people in the homelands or to work in laboring jobs under whites.

When Nelson Mandela was released from prison in 1992 after a quarter century of confinement, the still-ruling National Party promised despite the separate systems to educate blacks so as to enable them to take leadership of

the nation.

Churches saw the government’s promise as a tactic to further delay black empowerment and amid a brewing revolution churches opened schools for blacks rather than wait for the government to act. In response, the government took over the missionary schools — then basically shut them down.

One Christian who took action was Kobus Zietsman, a white dairy farmer and anthropologist, who decided to help educate the children of the black workers on his own ranch.

In 1994, with the help of Texan Jim Mansfield and his

**by Linda Owen**

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Linda Owen

*Jim Mansfield and his daughters Donna Francis (left) and Nancy Parker (center) fill mail bags with books to be sent to South Africa.*

family, Zietsman was able to supply his private school and other schools in his area with books, magazines, and encyclopedias. The relationship between the Zietsmans and the Mansfields began when Jim Mansfield's daughter Susan visited South Africa. Kobus Zietsman's son Coetzee showed Susan the sights in and around Johannesburg including the small Wallop Intermediary School in Clocolan. What Susan saw was a building with one teacher reading one book to children of all ages. There were no chairs, electricity, water, pencils, or educational materials. Students were supposed to be learning both Afrikaans and English without books in the classroom.

When Susan shared with her father what she had seen, he felt called by God to help black South Africans obtain an education. He and his wife Sharon, both retired educators, packed up and shipped books from their own shelves to Wallop School. They solicited more contributions from neighbors, city and school libraries, churches, and bought books at garage sales.

For eight years, Sharon and Jim, who attend Austin Avenue UMC in Waco, Susan (Central UMC in Waco), and older daughters (Alamo Heights UMC in San Antonio) have been sending books and school supplies to the predominantly black schools. The Zietsman family has now received more than 5,000 pounds of books and distributes the donated reading materials to 70 schools in the rural

areas. Books also go to the small library in Clocolan, where they are available for wider use by the community.

Kobus Zietsman died recently, yet the Mansfield clan continues shipping books once a month to his son Coetzee. Each 60-pound bag costs \$40 to \$50 to send by freighter. The goal is to include a book for every age, a reference book, a Christian publication, and a few school supplies in each shipment.

### **Struggle to Reverse Illiteracy**

Prior to the first democratic elections in South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) promised education for the millions of South Africans who had remained illiterate under apartheid rule. The ANC is now finding it extremely hard, however, to live up to those promises. The black-majority government is faced with a monumental task — one that has turned out to be too slow and too costly because of the faltering economy. The biggest problem, though, is that post-apartheid officials must eradicate decades of double standards that they inherited from the old regime.

Although the government has begun nonracial assessment testing, there are still numerous shortcomings in the educational system. The school buildings, built by the United Nations after the 1994 elections, have not received the teachers and supplies that were predicted. Most moneys spent have been in urban communities, while many children in rural areas remain neglected.

In their attempt at reform, officials not only had to abolish inequality in the educational system, but they also had to redress the deliberate unequal investment in education during National Party years. Today schools in traditionally black areas still lack the facilities that schools in the traditionally white areas have. The better schools are open to everybody, but not all parents have enough money to send their children to white areas to attend school. They get them to the nearest school, which is a black school, and the cycle continues.

The standards set by the apartheid system for teachers in white schools were much higher than those for teachers in black schools. While that has now changed, the legacy remains and will take time to address. In the meantime, black children are unable to get the same level of help from their parents that white youngsters get, because 65 percent of blacks were left illiterate under apartheid.

Adding to the problem is the government's focus on the literacy of employed workers rather than on that of unemployed workers, who are the greatest victims of illiteracy. Many of these unemployed were among the 320,000 blacks who dropped out of school when the National Party was in power.

There is little doubt that political corruption, embezzlement, and poor administration have hindered progress. Nobel Peace Prize laureate Desmond Tutu has criticized the new administration for adopting the lavish lifestyles and high salaries of the previous regime. In contrast, South Africa spends a minuscule 0.8 percent of its education budget on non-formal education, adult basic education, and other training such as sewing and carpentry.

These problems leave South Africa with an adult illiteracy rate of 15 million people, one of the highest in the world. Given the current economic climate and the lack of facilities, the provision for school libraries is not a priority for the government. Presently less than one-third of the schools have any sort of library or even part-time librarians. The teachers' use of daily resources is very limited and most books are borrowed from friends or brought from home.

### **Is Education Enough?**

Last year Minister of Education Kader Asmal announced a noticeable improvement in reading and writing skills and an overall pass percentage of 61.7 percent. Still, he admits: "Those schools that are predominately located within disadvantaged and rural communities face numerous socio-economic problems that affect their overall performance."

Restoring true educational opportunities to all South Africans will take time. Reeducation of pupils and teachers will have to take place. There also has to be an investment in facilities in schools in black areas for which there is little money at the moment. "We must remember that the Bible tells us that 'you cannot make bricks without straw,'" says Asmal.

During the violent reign of apartheid abuses, General Conferences condemned their racism and encouraged our government "to cease all collaboration with the government of South Africa until it abandons its policy of apartheid" (1984, 1988, 1992). However, after our nation, among others, imposed sanctions on South Africa and apartheid policies unraveled, churches fell victim to "post-

**...[Human solidarity] is to be achieved not by inquiry but by imagination, the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers. Solidarity is not discovered by reflection but created. It is created by increasing our sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and humiliation of other, unfamiliar sorts of people.**

— Richard Rorty (1989),  
*Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*

apartheid fatigue."

The United Methodist Social Principles and Social Creed state our beliefs in the rights of all individuals; in improvement of the quality of life; and in the rights and dignity of racial minorities. We believe that all children have the right to a quality education and we support "innovative methods of education designed to assist every child toward complete fulfillment as an individual of worth" (162c).

More Mansfield - Zietsman teams can make a difference in the education of disadvantaged blacks. According to Zietsman, for a poor family or a family with one or more parents unemployed, buying school supplies would take a substantial part of their income. It is not uncommon to see parents take their children out of school because they don't have money for fees and supplies.

The Mansfield's efforts have recently extended to a college scholarship program. This year, the Mansfields had their first graduate, Teko Stephen Hlaphoó, who will be supported through his first year of college. Under the existing system, if a student does well during the first year, the government may pay for the remaining education. For

only \$2,500 per student, per year, those who dream of a better life can achieve what once was impossible for black Afrikaners.

Elementary schools (grades 1-7) like those on Zietsman's ranch are certified by the government; but secondary schools are found in the more populated areas. Teko's desire for an education meant getting up at four a.m. to do his chores, then walking 15 miles to the secondary school in Clocolan.

The program, *Books for Africa*, has been praised by the Free State government, for "giving the children a hope for the future." The Zietsmans play an important role in providing books for struggling schools in the Free State, but students and administrators in other provinces also welcome school materials. Furthermore, financial assistance for the Books for South Africa Ministry will provide higher education for upcoming graduates.

School supplies and used books are most in demand (not new books or money because most of it would never arrive). "Help through the government will be slow. By sending books to black schools and libraries, we're making things go faster. By paying for a single black child's first year in college, we're making things go faster. We've achieved what we have by just taking care of a need and knowing that God will solve the rest."

Financial contributions for Books for South Africa can be sent to Jefferson Bank, attn. Phyllis Trager, 6021 Broadway, San Antonio, TX 78209. Please designate for postage or for scholarship.

For more information on Books for South Africa contact: Nancy Parker at [parker@idworld.net](mailto:parker@idworld.net); Coetzee Zietsman at [clapperboard@ovation.co.za](mailto:clapperboard@ovation.co.za). †

## FOOTNOTES

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David Macfarlane. "Adult *Out of abysses of illiteracy, Through labyrinths of Lies, Across waste lands of Disease... We Advance*"

—Melvin B Tolson, black American poet

## Defining our Terms

**Racism** is the combination of the power to dominate by one race over other races and a value system that assumes that the dominant race is innately superior to the others. Racism includes both personal and institutional racism. *2000 Book of Discipline* (§162)

**Prejudice** is a positive or negative *attitude* toward a person or group, formed without just grounds or sufficient knowledge. All ethnic groups possess some prejudices.

**Discrimination** is *unequal treatment* of people based on their membership in a group. To discriminate is to treat a person, not on the basis of their intrinsic individual qualities, but on the basis of a pre-judgment about a group.

**Institutional racism** is the combination of prejudice and power — those established laws, customs, and practices that *systemically* reflect and produce racial inequalities in society, whether or not the individuals maintaining these practices have racist intentions.