



RAND
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ROOM FOR GRIEF

IN his message of Christmas greetings to members of the Christian Institute, of which he is the director, the Rev. C. F. Beyers Naude had this to say: "No Christian in South Africa can celebrate this Christmas with unalloyed joy. He must also grieve, while being glad, on account of so much misery, injustice and pain caused to their fellow-men by Christians, frequently in the name of Christ."

This is not a truth of which the average person cares to be reminded in the season of joyousness. Indeed he tends to thrust such disturbing thoughts into the farthest recesses of his mind where he hopes they will not trouble him or spoil his enjoyment of the round of festivities in which he is so busily engaged. Yet if the enduring phrase associated so intimately with Christmas—"goodwill to all men"—means anything at all it surely means concern and compassion for the less fortunate of our fellow-men as well as happiness drawn from the warmth of our friendships. For love is a bitter-sweet and all-embracing thing.

It is not necessary here to catalogue the many instances of the misery, injustice and pain to which Mr. Naude refers. They are part of life around us, so much so that we have almost become oblivious of them. It is enough to mention just two instances which have recently come to light again in startling fashion although they have been there in the background for many long months.

The first is the plight of thousands of Africans in the Limehill resettlement complex and the second is the hardship facing scores of Indian traders and their families who must leave established businesses in Rustenburg and try to start afresh in difficult circumstances in a new area outside the town.

Archbishop Hurley's statement yesterday following a personal visit to the Limehill area confirms fears about the situation obtaining there. He reports there are 64 graves in this comparatively new area, 45 of them of people who died between October 1 and December 10. He also states that the epidemic of gastro-enteritis there "does not seem to be over."

In a country as prosperous as South Africa, in a country which has won world fame for its services to medicine, it is inconceivable that human beings can be shunted around in such an ill-planned manner as to expose them to atrocious living conditions, disease and death. There is no excuse for this whatsoever and the Minister of Health, Dr. De Wet, is to be condemned in the strongest terms for not investigating the situation more carefully. He is now playing holiday golf on the Natal coast. The least he might have done was to stop at Limehill on his way down and see the situation for himself.

So, too, with the Indians at Rustenburg. An administrative procedure is set in motion and what subsequently befalls the people involved seems to be regarded as something that cannot be helped. The decisions are taken. The machinery grinds on. Nothing can be done. Too bad.

It scarcely needs pointing out that what is happening at Limehill and Rustenburg, as in many other places, is the very antithesis of the Christian spirit of goodwill to all men which Christmas is intended to enshrine again in all our hearts. Let us rejoice at this time, to be sure, but let us also, as Mr. Naude says, grieve that we have nowhere near "conquered the powers of darkness, of unconcern, of injustice, of frustration and bitterness" in our land. For if we truly grieve, we shall be strengthened in our struggle against these evils.

Chief Albert Walton Ngqawuzelo Fihla, a Thembu elder, who is looking forward to his 100th Christmas celebrations.



A furniture shop salesman, Mr. William Hlatshwayo, acts as a Santa Claus in a Johannesburg street. He offers a sweet to a little girl accompanying him on a shopping spree. Christmas is a children's day in the townships. On the right a girl is pointing at a dress which she would like her father to buy for her.

Christmas—African style

WE ARE going home, most Africans say when asked how they will spend Christmas. For them, even more than for most other people, Christmas means a time for family reunion.

Every Christmas season thousands of Africans — especially the hostel dwellers — leave the cities for the "homelands" to be reunited with families and relatives separated from them because of labour, Group Areas and influx control regulations.

Not all Africans leave the urban townships for the homelands, of course.

Those with stable families remain.

For Johannesburg's African population preparations for Christmas begin when factories and schools close for the holidays. The workers, with their holiday pay, bonuses and wages in their pockets, spend freely buying Christmas presents for their families.

They tend to buy new household equipment such as furniture and even paint to renovate their houses. Some pay the last monthly instalments on Christmas hampers of groceries and china ware.

Christmas is regarded principally as Children's Day in the townships. Parents buy special dresses and suits for them. Surprise gifts such as toys, candy and greeting cards contained in Santa Claus stockings are left for the children in the early hours of Christmas Day.

On this day the township streets are bright and gay with smartly dressed children on their way to church or to visit friends and relatives. Husbands and wives exchange gift packages done up in fancy wrappings.

Some housewives make a

point of keeping a bottle of whisky for their husbands to encourage them to stay at home. Often a goat or sheep is slaughtered for Christmas dinner. It has become a tradition that on this day people share food with any stranger who comes into a house to ask for "Christmas."

Plenty of liquor is kept and served even by the most religious families.

Because of police raids on shebeens, people in the townships hope to enjoy a less violent Christmas this year.

The great exodus to the homelands is mainly by train, buses and cars. The emigrants carry huge food parcels, suitcases full of clothing and all

their other acquisitions made during their year's stay in the big city.

The arrival of a parent in the homelands is like the coming of Santa Claus. Children are the first to open their father's luggage. They are delighted to find new clothes, toys and foodstuffs. There is much happiness among all family members being reunited once a year.

Although the spirit of Christmas is the same throughout the Christian world, the festival is often celebrated by means of different customs in the African community.

Some of these customs are rooted in ancient ways of worshipping "uMvelingqanga" —

the unknown God of the heavens.

An elderly Thembu man, from the Transkei, Chief Albert Walton Ngqawuzelo Fihla, who will celebrate his 100th Christmas tomorrow at his Orlando East home, spoke to me about this. He was born of Christian parents but grew up among heathens at Machibini, Lady Frere, in the Transkei.

"Before the arrival of the missionaries," Chief Fihla said, "Africans in this country were not pagans. That is the reason why it was easy for the missionaries to convert them to Christianity."

"We believed in "uMvelingqanga" or "Qhama-

tha" — meaning the God of the heavens," he said.

Because of the great festivals connected with the harvesting season — held about Christmas time — the African people who became Christians found it easy to observe Christmas celebrations. But some of them brought sacred customs observed in ancient celebrations into the Christmas festival, Chief Fihla explained.

It was customary that a goat or sheep should be slaughtered for thanksgiving to "uMvelingqanga" during the harvest celebrations. This custom is still observed by many Africans who are Christians, he said.

As in Scandinavian homes, a

goat made of straw hold place of honour near Christmas tree. For it was animal which pulled the cart which the God of Thor during pagan day celebration.

"Some people slaughter goat and brewed beer. Meat and beer were, however, not served to people. Instead the food was kept somewhere for the dead to join in celebrations," Chief Fihla said.

On Christmas day Christians still make beer and slaughter an animal for the "amadlozi". This directly connected with ancient way of worship added.

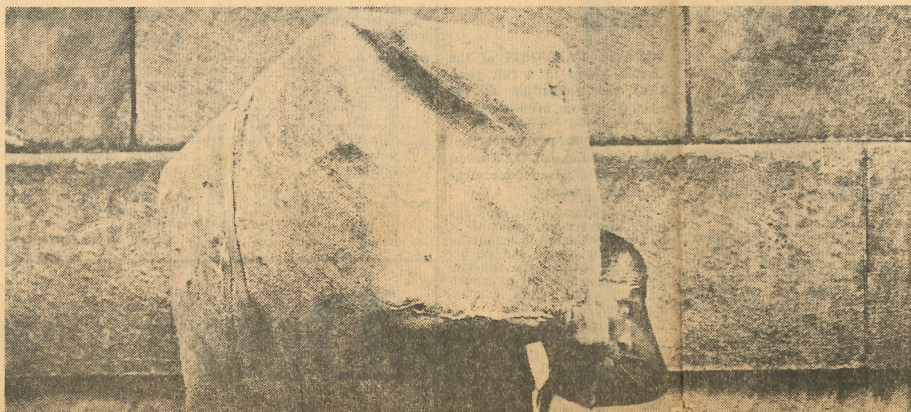
The most important aspect of heathen festivals was the changing of gifts to denote spirit of goodwill among people. They also sent greetings to people unable to join in festivals.

"Thus the Christian tradition of exchanging gifts and sending greetings is not alien to Chief Fihla, said.

What Chief Fihla spoke strongly against, however, was "Father Christmas." He told him an "alien saint" doesn't fit in with the African concept of festivity.

A minister of the Methodist Church described Father Christmas as a commercial salesman who had no place in the Christmas celebrations.

"I wish to live for the century," Chief Fihla said, "because Christmas has always meant something special to it is time for goodwill among people, even those who are not Christian, take part in it. It is time for joyousness."

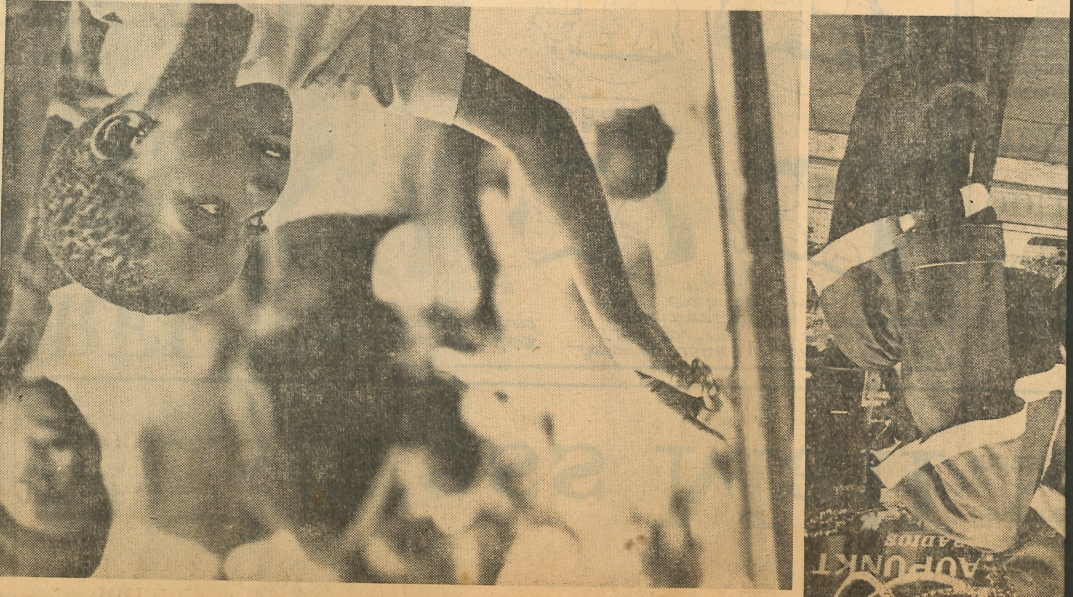


It is back home for this African man on his way to entrain at the Johannesburg Station. He is carrying a big box of gifts wrapped in a sack. His children will open the parcel when he arrives home.

SEIFSA survey is, noteworthy because of its basis on "normal" and

African style

is a Santa Claus in a Johannesburg street. He offers a sweet to a little girl accompanying her mother and friends play in the townships. On the right a girl is pointing at a dress which she would like her mother to buy her.



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"Some people slaughtered a goat and brewed beer. The goat was kept somewhere for the dead to join in the celebrations," Chief Rihia said.

On Christmas day some Christians still make home brew and slaughter an animal for the "anadlot". This is for the "anadlot". This is ancient way of worship, he added.

The most important aspect of heathen festivals was the exchanging of gifts to denote the spirit of goodwill among people. They also sent greetings to people unable to join in the festivals.

"Thus the Christian tradition of exchanging gifts and sending greetings is not alien to us," Chief Rihia said.

What Chief Rihia spoke out strongly against, however, was "Father Christmas." He termed him an "alien saint" who doesn't fit in with the African concept of festivity.

A minister of the Methodist Church described Father Christmas as a commercial salesman who had no place in the Christmas celebrations.

"I wish to live for the next time for joyousness."

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Because of the great festival connected with the harvest season — the African Christmas time — the African people who became Christians found it easy to observe Christmas celebrations. But some of them brought sacred customs observed in ancient celebrations into the Christmas festival. Chief Rihia explained.

It was customary that a goat or sheep should be slaughtered for Christmas gifts. This custom is still observed by many Africans who are Christians, he said.

As in Scandinavian homes, a spirit of Christ- throughout the festival is not pagans. That is the reason why it was easy for the missionaries to convert them to Christianity," Chief Rihia said.

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By
JOYCE
SIKAKANE



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