

SOUTH AFRICA'S CLIFTON BEACH CONTROVERSY

and the thirst for POLITICAL SPECTACLE in an election year

Compiled by Mike Burnard



Background

"The contentious clearing of beach-goers on the popular Clifton 4th Beach in Cape Town (South Africa) has garnered international headlines with the incident spilling over into public debate about racism, 'politicking' and animal rights [a sheep was sacrificed on the beach to "drive out racism"] ... Among the beachgoers apparently forced off the trendy beach on 23 December were the ANC's Western Cape secretary Faiez Jacobs and Fatima Shabodien, the country director of global humanitarian and social justice nongovernmental organisation Action Aid." (*News24, Mail & Guardian*)

The motivation for the beach clearance has been lost amidst claims and counter claims and it is no longer clear what exactly transpired on 23 December. What is clear is that a variety of influences – the media, political figures and a variety of social media platforms – has resulted in numerous protests, legal suits and calls for intervention from the Public Protector.

Political posturing or a symptom of a broken society?

It's an election year in South Africa and the Clifton 4th Beach controversy is seen by many as the grand opening of the '2019 SA Election Games'. Why were we surprised?

Professor Johnathan Jansen aptly commented after the debacle that the whole incident, and the events and accusations that subsequently followed, was more about our **thirst for political spectacle** than our desire to address injustice and racism. *"To be crude, to kill, to be outrageous in performing our outrage, this is what we have become,"* said Professor Jansen. *"This had nothing to do with anyone's culture or custom. It is the dark side of our broken humanity. Sadly, inequality and racism will continue once the spectacle has been performed. Our strategies for change must be smarter, deeper and more enduring than these occasional bouts of anger performed while parliament is in recess,"* he concluded.

A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE FROM A POLISH PRIEST

How should one approach a year where one could face political mudslinging and electioneering on a daily basis, and the racial slurs of some (fortunately not all) politicians who hope to either gain or maintain power? I would like to draw my inspiration from **Father Jerzy Popieluszko** and I pray that all who confess Christ will do the same.

Chuck Colson (in *God's Strategy for Overcoming Evil*)¹ relates that Father Popieluszko was a young Polish pastor, pale and unimpressive in physique but filled with the Holy Spirit and powerful in his convictions. His sermons were "neither fiery nor eloquent", but the strength of his messages stirred the Polish people to overthrow their Communist oppressors. His theme was always the same: **THE CHRISTIAN IS CALLED TO OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD.**

Oh, how we need this in a year where tensions will run high and the temptation to repay insult with injury will be ever so enticing.



¹ <http://www.breakpoint.org/2018/12/baby-vs-world-2/>

“Father Jerzy was a young man, pale and gaunt, and his sermons were neither fiery nor eloquent. Yet his monthly masses, dedicated to the victims of Communist persecution, attracted tens of thousands of Polish people. He never preached revenge or revolution. He preached the power of good to overcome evil.

It was a passion that dominated his own life, as well. In 1980, martial law was declared in Poland. Tanks and troops clogged the streets until the entire country was one vast prison. Jerzy hated the occupation as much as his countrymen, but he fought it using God’s weapons of overcoming evil with good. On Christmas Eve, Jerzy slogged through the snow handing out Christmas cookies to the despised soldiers in the streets.

And even in his death, Jerzy was victorious. In 1984, he was kidnapped by the secret police. The nation was electrified. In churches and indeed in factories across Poland, people gathered to pray. Steelworkers demanded his release, threatening a national strike. Fifty thousand people gathered to hear a tape of his final sermon.

*Then the blow fell: Jerzy’s body had been found floating in the Vistula River. He’d been brutally tortured, his eyes and tongue cut out, his bones smashed. Yet the gentle pastor had taught his people well. After his funeral, hundreds of thousands of Polish people marched through the streets of Warsaw right past the secret police headquarters carrying banners that read, ‘**We forgive**’.”*

They were assaulting evil with good.



The cycle of hatred and distrust in South Africa (and elsewhere - the US, Britain, Syria, etc.) can only be broken when we fight evil with good, hatred with love, slander with blessing, and animosity with forgiveness. These were the non-negotiables that Christ taught His followers in Matthew 5. Taking an eye for an eye will only result in a nation of blind people, and fighting racism with racism will only accentuate our differences and prevent us from reconciling in a Christ-like manner and reflecting Kingdom principles that differ so vastly from this world.

May we, as the body of Christ, become instruments of healing. In a year of ‘political spectacle’, may we, as ambassadors of His Kingdom, be found fighting – fighting evil with good by seeking justice for all, even at the cost of our own comfort, our own safety and our own security.

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