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SCOM 381

### Analysis

Tutu's letter shows numerous attempt to create a sense of common ground in the face of divisive oppression. Despite the systemic forces keeping the white minority from recognizing their shared humanity with black South Africans, Tutu demonstrates that they share more than what divides them. When considering Tutu's rhetoric, the implications of an open letter format as his medium must be recognized. Tutu speaks directly to the Prime Minister, but he is also addressing the public, namely the white minority. Even identifications made with Vorster specifically are based on values that can be generalizable to the white community in South Africa. Tutu emphasizes that Vorster is a reasonable man committed to justice and reconciliation, which translates as a message to white South Africans at large that they are not being maliciously attacked, but that their best interests are being spoken to. In this letter, white South Africa at large can be seen as an "eavesdropping audience," holding agency and influence in their government while not being the immediate recipient of the letter. With this in mind, Tutu seeks to identify with his audience by demonstrating shared interests, and uses this consubstantiality to make powerful arguments about the injustice at hand. The elements of personal values (i.e. family life and faith), race, and national security are framed by Tutu's repeated use of the phrase "I am writing to you, Sir..." which is mostly used to signal an introduction or emphasis of a consubstantial appeal. After Tutu's appeals of identification are expounded, the division which intrinsically accompanies consubstantiality will be examined.

#### ***Identification Based on Personal Values***

A significant portion of Tutu's consubstantial appeals seek to create identification based on family values and religion. These identifications demonstrate shared interest and commonality on a level that connect with widely held personal beliefs. A summation of these appeals is found in the second paragraph which says, "In short, I am writing to you as one human person to another human person..." (Tutu, 1976, p. 7) To demonstrate this common humanity, Tutu first appeals to the family life of his audience.

Tutu's first move in creating this identification with his audience is to point out Vorster's role as a family man. He first recognizes that as a father and grandfather, the Prime Minister has experienced all of the "joys and anguish of family life." (Tutu, 1976, p. 7) He goes on to utilize an emotional appeal, citing some of these joys and anguishes and recognizing that his audience has most likely had these experiences as well. Tutu states that he too is "devoted to a happy and stable family life," and therefore creates a common ground, the indispensable role of family, on which a dialogue can be based. (Tutu, 1976, p. 7) In making this appeal, Tutu states that he also sees this family life as foundation of a functioning society. The argument Tutu intends to make is that his perspective on society, and any recommendations he makes, is based on a shared vision for a healthy and happy South Africa. Resistance to apartheid was seen as threat to the white community's way of life, and Tutu his emphasis on family as a vehicle to demonstrate a common goal of a stable life for South Africans of all races. Those who challenge hegemonic forces are often portrayed as trying to void society of order or rob their country of its foundational principles, so Tutu proactively challenges these assumptions by aligning his personal interests with the white community.

Appeals based on religion are also prominent in Tutu's identification with Vorster. While these appeals do serve a similar purpose to those based on family values, they also make a deeper claim about the heart of the issue. He writes:

"I am, therefore, writing to you, Sir, as one Christian to another, for through our common baptism we have been made members of and are united in the Body of our dear Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. This Jesus Christ, whatever we may have done, has broken down all that separates us irrelevantly—such as race, sex, culture, status, etc. In this Jesus Christ we are forever, bound together as one redeemed humanity, black and white together." (Tutu, 1976, p. 7)

By pointing to their "common baptism," he forces Vorster to face the fact that they both have willfully identified themselves with a set of beliefs that groups them together as one, declaring all races to be one humanity. If Vorster claims to hold his faith as a guiding principle, he is already consubstantial, or of one body, with Tutu and the black Christian population. These principle beliefs which they share, as Tutu demonstrates, are directly contradicted by any divisions that the State upholds between peoples. By identifying himself with black Christians, as he does at the start of the letter, and then creating identification with white Christians on the basis of their faith, he shows that the two groups cannot be justly separated into two bodies. This use of consubstantiality functions on a level that forms an argument about the root of the issue; the hypocrisy of apartheid and the dissonance between belief and action. This dissonance is best summed up at the conclusion of the letter, in which Tutu cites a prayer that has been frequently offered at their Cathedral. The prayer is a plead to God for to bring about justice and peace in Africa through the leaders of the nations and the public alike, again using the consubstantial nature of the Christian Church to expose injustice and hypocrisy. (Tutu, 1976, p. 12-13)

### ***Identification Based on Race***

Tutu's rhetoric takes an interesting turn when he begins a paragraph with "I am writing to you, Sir, as one who is a member of a race that has known what it has meant in frustrations and hurts, in agony and humiliation, to be a subject people." (Tutu, 1976, p. 7) The implication of this statement, of course, is that his race has been oppressed by the South Africans of European descent. It would be expected then, that he would argue that white South Africans had never experienced what black South Africans have endured. Instead, Tutu points out that white South Africans, specifically the Afrikaner people, have struggled against oppressive outside forces and fought for their freedom. (Tutu, 1976, p. 7) By creating this comparison and identification, Tutu demonstrates that the struggle against apartheid is no less justified than the Afrikaners' struggle against British colonialism.

Identification based on a common struggle demonstrates to the white eavesdropping audience that black South Africans are operating with the same determination for autonomy that the Afrikaner history is based on, thus validating anti-apartheid movements as fights for freedom, not tyranny. But, Tutu alludes to a simple truth that just as the Afrikaners stopped at nothing until they achieved their goals of autonomy for their people, black South Africans will never become satisfied with life in the homelands. This identification of the black race with the Afrikaner people is made clear in its intention when Tutu acknowledges that eventually the Afrikaners "emerged victorious." (Tutu, 1976, p. 7) The consubstantiality established in on the basis of race ensures a message that the black majority will eventually win out and gain their freedom through whatever means necessary. This aspect of Tutu's rhetoric is then inherently linked to his identification based on a shared concern for national security and the threat of violence.

### *Identification Based on National Security*

This aspect of Tutu's consubstantial appeals runs eerily throughout every argument he makes. The letter as a whole, in some sense, can be seen as a grave warning for the future safety of the South African nation against bloodshed and civil war. At what can be seen as the climax of the letter, Tutu declares:

“I am, writing to you, Sir, because I have a growing nightmarish fear that unless something drastic is done very soon then bloodshed and violence are going to happen in South Africa almost inevitably. A people can take only so much and no more.” (Tutu, 1976, p. 10)

At the time, tension was high and inevitable violence loomed in the back of the country's mind as the frustration of the black majority became more and more apparent. Tutu's identification is largely based on this fear. Tutu identifies himself with the audience as a rhetor by demonstrating that he shares their concerns and has witnessed the consequence of such actions first hand. By sharing accounts of his own experiences with large scale violence as a weapon against oppressive forces, he develops ethos as one who has seen what his audience may inevitably be bringing about. An emotional appeal operates within this argument, by using graphic descriptions of the violence he has seen. (Tutu, 1976, p. 11)

When he identifies with his audience's concern for their own safety, which they may not have even known they had, he puts himself on their side as one who does not want this violence, and is then able to offer a solution based on his knowledge of the black community in South Africa. The solution is not to double down on Vorster's police-state policies, nor is it to try to appease the people by making superficial demonstrations of goodwill. What will keep their nation safe from civil war is for the white community, and governing officials such as Vorster, to

take meaningful steps to demonstrate that change is beginning. This charge to repeal discriminatory legislation and install racially representative leadership can be seen as the argument that all of Tutu's identification builds to. When he aligns his interests with his audience on the basis of race, he is then able to make these requests with the authority to say that they are not only best for his people, but for all people of South Africa.

### *Division*

Burke's theory of consubstantiality asserts that whenever identification creates a "we," it always consequently creates a "them." Though Tutu's message is focused on identifying with Vorster and the white public of South Africa to create a common ground, it is based on a split with another group, the right-wing that he alludes to when speaking about Vorster's position of power. (Tutu, 1976, p. 12) He makes the point that the Prime Minister, because of his popularity with white South Africans, he has no reason to fear a "right-wing backlash" as Tutu refers to it, and that if he does not do something, this right-wing will likely be wiped out in violence. (Tutu, 1976, p. 12) Throughout the letter, the common ground that Tutu is making is a more centered space that acknowledges Vorster's political action, but ignores his right-wing allegiance and speaks to him as one human being committed to justice. By creating this division between Vorster and the right-wing camp of South Africa, he is able to cut to the core of the issue a nonpartisan issue of humanity. Once there has been an established commonality in values (i.e. family life and religion), racial history, and national security, the right-wing is painted as a group who would ignore their consubstantiality in order to push their agenda.

## Works Cited

Tutu, D. (1976). A Growing Nightmarish Fear. In J. Allen (Ed.), *Desmond Tutu: The Rainbow People of God* (pp. 6-13). New York, New York. Random House, Inc.