

FOCUS ON SOUTH AFRICA



The Federal Republic of South Africa, with a population of over 42 million living in an area of 470,462 square miles, has been much in the news over recent decades. Few will not have heard of Nelson Mandela, the country's first black president.

Until 1991, South African law divided the population into four major racial categories: Africans (black), whites, coloureds, and Asians. Although this law has been abolished, many South Africans still view themselves and each other according to these categories. Africans compose about seventy-five percent of the population and are divided into a number of different ethnic groups. Whites compose about fourteen percent of the population. Coloureds are mixed-race people, primarily descending from the earliest settlers and the indigenous peoples. They constitute about nine percent of the total population. Asians descend from Indian workers brought to South Africa in the mid-nineteenth century to work on the sugar estates in Natal. They constitute about two percent of the population. A great challenge for evangelism is the fact that thirty-five percent of the population is under fourteen years



of age with only four percent over sixty-five. There are eleven different official languages, but English is becoming ever more widely understood.

Most of today's black South Africans belong to the Bantu language group, which migrated south from central Africa, settling in the Transvaal region. The Nguni, ancestors of the Zulu and Xhosa, occupied most of the eastern coast by 1500. The Dutch settlers came in the 1600s, many seeking religious liberty. Their descendants became known as Afrikaners and most of them are connected with the Dutch Reformed Church.

In 1795 the British took over the Cape. Between 1824 and

1838, a number of Afrikaner farmers (Boers), discontented with British rule, trekked deep into the interior and established two major Boer republics, the Transvaal and the Orange Free

this influx led to the Anglo-Boer Wars of 1880-81 and 1899-1902. British forces prevailed and the republics were incorporated into the British Empire.

In 1948, the National Party began to enforce a policy of racial separation known as "apartheid" (separateness). Nelson Mandela and other anti-apartheid leaders were convicted and imprisoned on charges of treason. A few years after his release, the country's first non-racial elections were held in 1994, resulting in Mandela's installation as president of a new Federal Republic of South Africa. The transfer to majority rule occurred without as much violence as had been expected.

The religious makeup of the country is estimated to be nominal Christian, 68% (includes most whites and coloureds, about 60% of blacks and about 40% of Indians); Muslim, 2%;

Hindu, 1.5% (60% of Indians); and traditional and animistic beliefs, 28.5%.

Dramatic change has been the keynote of the new South Africa. Sadly not all of it has been for the



State. The discovery of diamonds at Kimberley in 1870 and of large gold deposits in the Transvaal in 1886 caused an influx of European (mainly British) immigration and investment. Boer reactions to

good. There are many problems. While South Africa is the richest, most developed country in Africa (it is the world's largest producer of platinum, gold, and chromium) unemployment is at a staggering 30%. Violent crime and organised criminal activity are at high levels and continue to escalate in a frightening manner. The Lord's servants, especially those who labour in dangerous areas, need our prayer support.

Urban areas such as the black township of Soweto, where black Africans have congregated to seek employment, are difficult fields with rampant materialism, a breakdown of tribal and parental authority, violence, and immorality. Soweto is in the city of Johannesburg, which also contains poor white areas. Extremely serious problems with drugs and immorality have won Johannesburg the unenviable reputation of being the crime capital of the world. The drug problem is increasing. Not only is cocaine consumption on the rise but it is claimed that the country is the world's largest market for illicit methaqualone, usually imported illegally from India through various east African countries. A pastor friend of mine told me personally of visiting a white family of twenty-eight members, all of whom were drug addicts.

Recent government studies have highlighted the startling increase of debt problems among the urban African population since majority rule. Loan sharks have sprung up at an alarming rate, understandably adding to the crime problem. Western youth-culture with its pleasure seeking and "anything goes" mentality has had a devastating effect on the rising generation.

Islam is spending vast sums in an effort to extend its influence in South Africa. Syncretism is another challenge Christians must face. The new president, Thabo Mbeki, has called for Africans to "rediscover and return to their spiritual roots." This approach has the support of apostate Christian theologians who advocate what they call "African Theology." Consequently, there is an antagonism toward any statement of absolute truth. It is popular to praise all religions as equally valid. Under the guise of "freedom of



Nelson Mandela at rally on February 11, 1992, Soweto, South Africa.

expression" it is allowable to promote things like abortion and homosexuality but not the exclusive statements of Scripture. As one Fundamentalist pastor in South Africa stated, "The Country is now in a post Church era."

Freedom of speech, religion, assembly, and association are guaranteed under the constitution. However, recently some Christian

leaders have been concerned that proposed new legislation might affect gospel witnessing. The fear is that to speak or print something such as John 14:6 ("I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me") could be classified as discrimination against other



Johannesburg, South Africa

religions. Similarly, calling sinners to repentance, or stating that homosexuality is an abomination before God, could be classified as "hate speech" and be punishable by law. To make matters worse, there has been a marked decline in evangelicalism, with few

prepared to oppose the Charismatic movement and the rampant use of the *Alpha Course*.

In view of the serious moral and spiritual need of the country every faithful Bible-preaching ministry is vitally important. That includes our radio programmes. *Let the Bible Speak* has been carrying the gospel over a large part of South Africa for over twenty

years. The Lord has blessed it to the conversion of sinners and the consolation of saints. Our separated witness is essential to encourage believers to stand for "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). And our constant presentation of the glorious gospel of Christ is

essential to reach the multitudes blinded by materialism.

Originally our programmes aired over a station in South Africa, but in recent years we decided that we could cover the Republic and other countries as well by using Radio Africa 2, located in Equatorial Africa. We receive frequent responses from listeners in South Africa from all nationalities and social classes. Years ago a high court judge wrote to say how much he had enjoyed hearing our presentation of the gospel. Others from the opposite end of the social scale have been just as enthusiastic.

Pray for South Africa and for the ministry of *Let the Bible Speak*, "that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified" (2 Thess. 3:1). ■