

Robert Sobukwe to Benjamin Pogrund, 18th July 1967 (Ba5-52)

My dear Benjie,

You will please overlook the fact that I am using a ball-point instead of the expensive fountain pen you sent me. I find that ball-points flatter my hand much more than a fountain pen does.

I have received the radio: a real beauty! It is cracked along one of the “legs.” I am told it arrived in that condition. But the performance has not been affected in any way. And what a glorious performance it gives. The cord was a five feet affair and I have had it lengthened by a further fifteen feet to enable me to have the radio in the kitchen where I do my studying in the evening.

I am glad you did not have the additional lead you had thought of arranging to enable me to play outside. This is a lovely set, Benjie, and I want it moved as little as possible. I am, therefore, keeping the battery-operated set for use outside. In fact, as a rule, I have the radio playing during the day only when I listen to sport commentaries. The chair and the radio belong in civilised surroundings – in a polished lounge, as I said in an earlier letter.

Thanks a lot old chap. And thanks for the books, also. You must have spent a pretty fortune on them. My shelves are bursting at the seams, so I’ll have to ask that you don’t send any more for the time being. When Veronica¹ arrives we’ll discuss the position and she will let you have her recommendations.

You amaze me Benjie. Christianity originated in Europe, indeed! Don’t you know that Jesus and all twelve of his disciples were Jews? In fact, except for Judas the Iscariot who came from the South, they were all Galilleans [sic]. And the first thousands of converts were Jews. When Paul set out to proselytise the Gentiles the Christians were already established as one of the thousand and one sects which the disputatious Jews were throwing up. The Dead Sea Scrolls² find a very strong affinity between Jesus and the Essenes.³

I have been reading Stephen Neill’s history of the Christian Church⁴ – “red in tooth and claw”,⁵ bearing out Epstein’s⁶ contention that Christianity, unlike Judaism, has been spread by the sword and not by the pure strength of its message.

¹ Veronica Sobukwe, Sobukwe’s wife.

² The Dead Sea Scrolls (also known as the Qumran Caves Scrolls) are ancient Jewish religious manuscripts found in the Qumran Caves in the Judaeian Desert, near Ein Feshkha on the northern shore of the Dead Sea. Scholars date these scrolls from the last three centuries BCE and the first century CE.

³ The Essenes were a Jewish sect or brotherhood who lived in Palestine from about the 2nd century BCE to the end of the 1st century CE.

⁴ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (1964).

⁵ From Alfred Lord Tennyson’s, “In Memoriam.”

⁶ Isidore Epstein, *Judaism*, (1934).

Well the Middle East war is over.⁷ Already victorious Israeli heroes are individually and severally telling us what lessons are to be drawn from the conflict. Unfortunately the lessons are merely a rationalization of prejudices. I would have felt happier if Levi Eshkol⁸ didn't have a Dayan⁹ to put up with. As one correspondent has said, Dayan is no Churchill. I am afraid he is allowing the ululations of the victorious heroes to go to his head. And yet the touch that is needed is the toning down of the humiliation under which the Arabs smart. Somebody has said a man will forgive you, after some time, for defrauding him or even taking his wife away from him, but no man will forget or forgive a humiliation. Eshkol has the personality and the ability, I think, to wash his enemies' wounds.

What are you doing for a living now? I believe at the time of your arrest you had resigned your position on the "Rand Daily Mail." I liked your replies in court.¹⁰

It was very painful for me to read about Pat's death.¹¹ I hadn't known, you see, that he was ill. And now comes Kagan's death. He was my "personal physician", you know i.e. if I may use that pompous phrase.

Incidentally, I haven't received the Literary Supplement articles you said you were sending and the examination papers haven't arrived yet. However, there is still plenty of time.

You remember I wrote you that somebody was sending me books from the U.S.A. Well I have just heard from his wife in Lusaka that AB has been arranging that.¹² These are not the books from Lincoln University: they are a separate batch on African Prehistory.

I am waiting to hear how the party went off. By the way, in addition to the twenty nine books you sent, I received about five, including Koestler's latest: *The Act of Creation*. I was told these had been sent by Ernie.¹³ My thanks to him.

Well Benjie so much for now. Thanks for making Veronica's trip possible in May. I love and respect her more with each passing day. She is a mixture of vulnerability and toughness.

Love to Jenny. "Tell Ragesh..."¹⁴ Keep your head up high, boy.

⁷ Refers to the Six-Day War between Egypt and Israel, 5-10 June 1967.

⁸ Levi Eshkol, Israel's Prime Minister between 1963 and 1969.

⁹ Moshe Dayan, Israel's Defense Minister during the Six-Day War.

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¹¹ Patrick Duncan, a member of the Pan-Africanist Congress.

¹² Refers to Laretta and Abednego Bhekabantu ("AB") Ngcobo. Laretta Ngcobo was a novelist and activist and AB was a 1956 Treason Trial defendant, and later Treasurer-General of the Pan Africanist Congress. The pair went into exile in 1963, first to Swaziland and later to Zambia.

¹³ Ernie Wentzel, a human rights lawyer and member of the Liberal Party of South Africa. Wentzel and his wife, Jill, often assisted Sobukwe during the time he was in prison.

¹⁴ This is a line from Howard Fast's novel *My Glorious Brothers*, which Sobukwe had previously quoted in a letter of June 1, 1966, to Pogrund. Rabbi Ragesh is a figure in the novel who helps the Maccabbees to resist the incursions of the Greek-Syrian empire (See Hook, 2019).

Yours affectionately,

Bob.