

Editorial

The triumph of good is complete

As I began to write this editorial, I found myself in a commercial jetliner over the English Channel—at the same time South Africans, all South Africans, were voting in that country's first free democratic elections. The triumph of good was palpable even before the election results were known, for it mattered less who won than that all could participate in the choice. Now, the majority population can, after years of struggle against oppression, look forward to markedly improved standards of education and improved medical and dental care.

When I wrote an editorial titled "Beauty and the Beast" some years ago, I, and many others I am sure, did not expect to see "one man, one vote" in South Africa until well into the next century. Too great was the determination of the South African Nationalist government to fight to maintain power and control over the disenfranchised black majority population. But without the vote, the majority of South Africans would continue to be denied appropriate educational opportunities, and adequate health care—two rights that form the basis for civilized existence.

The editorial "Beauty and the Beast" attracted more attention, both pro and con, than any other editorial I have written in my years as Editor-in-Chief of *Quintessence International*. Many respondents had strong, personal and emotionally charged views on the beastly problems of that beautiful country. In my visits to South Africa I met people holding views so disparate that it seemed impossible that they could come together in a matter of a few years. Some saw the plight of the black majority as one of being used and abused for the benefit of a small minority of whites who, as a result, lived at a higher standard of living than any other people in the world. Others exposed their deviant point of view by rationalizing that blacks were not in need of social programs such as formal education or dental care because they should only aspire to become servants or laborers and thus would not need any education and would not value dental care.

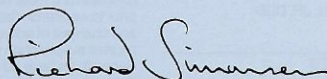
Perhaps now we can all understand each other a little better. All South Africans, and all of those who are interested in human rights and democracy, should pull together to assist in providing black South Africans,

who have been denied equal access to education and health care for so long, with an opportunity for improved education, with an opportunity for gainful employment, and with universal health care that is of at least a basic standard. Gone are the days when the only dental care offered to blacks was extractions and dentures while most whites obtained dental care of a standard that was the highest in the world.

Improvement in the lot of the majority black population in South Africa, most of whom are poor and were, until now, without hope, will not come overnight. Those who participated in the struggle have come forward to help build the bridges between the races. Next must come improvement in the quality of basic education for the disadvantaged, and support for all the dental schools to provide training for those who will form the core of the profession in the new South Africa. Many around the world stand ready to help.

It was no coincidence that these changes in South Africa have come about in the years when instantaneous global communications and global pressures in the form of sanctions have become possible. As I edited, some days later, what I wrote above, I was watching the Cable News Network in Shanghai, China. I watched from my hotel room in awe as thousands stood in line in South Africa for hours to exercise their right to vote for the first time in their lives. It was heartwarming to learn that the elections took place without the violence and bloodshed that many feared. A profound transformation to democracy has taken place. Aside from the right to vote, the most important gain from the events of the past year for many South Africans is, perhaps, attaining the dignity and respect that all people of the world deserve, no matter their sex, race, religion, ethnic heritage, or choice of lifestyle.

The triumph of good is complete.



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