

DELIBERATIONS OF THE CHURCHES, JOHANNESBURG,
7TH TO 14TH DECEMBER, 1960.

FURTHER EXPLANATION BY THE DELEGATION OF THE N.G. KERK,
CAPE PROVINCE, AND THE AVAILABLE DELEGATES OF THE N.G.
KERK, TRANSVAAL.

(Issued on 27th December, 1960).

By reason of the uncertainty which apparently exists with regard to the recent discussions in Johannesburg, we are most anxious to give the following further explanation:-

1. REASON FOR THE CONFERENCE:

Since the second World War particularly the racial question in South Africa, as elsewhere in the world, has increased in size and seriousness. The unavoidable result of this was a fermentation of ideas in all fields of public life: ecclesiastical-religious, cultural, social and also political circles experienced its influence, as is apparent from the continual exchange of ideas and great differences of opinion on the principles and questions discussed. For this reason the unjustified viewpoint that there was complete agreement on these matters before the conference at Cottesloe, Johannesburg, must most definitely be refuted. This Church deliberation is also not the cause or beginning of a difference in opinion on racial matters; at the most it can be seen as an expression of it.

The immediate reason for the deliberation was, however, the recent state of emergency in our country in which one of the member churches of the World Council found cause to ask for a Commission of Enquiry by the World Council. Neither the Dutch Reformed Church nor the World Council supported the idea but instead wanted a discussion to be held among all the member churches under the guidance of the World Council.

2. WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES:

The Nederduitse Gereformeerde Churches have in the past few years contributed towards the world wide study of Christian responsibility especially in the areas of rapid social development which also affect the Churches in South Africa very essentially. Because of our participation in these studies we could hardly refuse to take part in these discussions, especially in view of our longstanding ecumenical affiliations.

The N.G. Churches' affiliation with the great ecumenical organisations dates from the end of the previous century with our entry into the Presbyterian World Alliance. In recent years we have become a member of both the Reformed Ecumenical Synod and of the World Council of Churches which are discussion fellowships of Protestant Churches believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Even if we were not members of the World Council, we would nevertheless be obliged to give account of our attitudes and responsibilities on the same questions in our relationship with other Churches with Reformed articles of faith, as has already happened at the Reformed Ecumenical Synods at Amsterdam 1949, Edinburgh 1953 and Potchefstroom 1958 and the Presbyterian Alliance in Sao Paulo 1959.

The N.G. Churches, together with the other South African churches, asked the World Council to take the initiative for the convocation of the discussions and to appoint an unbiased chairman from outside because the relationship of the Churches with one another, after a series of statements of Churches over and again in the press, had reached a breaking point and all direct contact had been broken.

In addition to this it has given our Church the opportunity of stating our viewpoint clearly with regard to certain decisions reached at Evanston concerning segregation (about which we had serious reflections).

We wish to state further that the chairman of the discussion as well as the other members of the World Council who acted as chairmen of the study groups did so in a very unpartisan and fair manner. In conclusion we representatives - as far as the N.G. Churches are concerned - and not the World Council, must accept responsibility for the findings which to a great extent resulted from the memoranda of the two Dutch Reformed Churches concerned and which were drawn up independently of one another.

We took part in the discussion with the knowledge of our calling to deliberate with fellow-Christians from other Churches on the grounds of the Bible, even if we differ radically on the questions of the day.

At the same time the relationship of the N.G. Church with its sister churches (Coloured, African and Asian), as well as our responsibility in the field of mission work in this time of racial tension, made the abovementioned conference a necessity.

3. PREPARATORY STUDY:

In the preparatory study the standpoint of our Church was taken into account, as formulated previously. In this connection we wish to refer to the following:-

(a) Our declared mission policy, 1935

(b) The Church Congress of the Federated N.G. Churches in South Africa at Bloemfontein (1950) where, among other things, the following was stated:

(i) "It must be remembered that no people in the world which are at all worth their salt, will always be satisfied without any or even

an indirect say in the constitutional and socio-economic organisation of the country in which decisions are taken about their interests and future. To expect such a thing of the Africans is not only unfair to them but will in the end lead to the greatest disillusionment and struggle."

In the same spirit the following decision was also passed:

- (ii) "No man's rights may be ignored, nor may there be any question of everlasting subordination in any field of life. In the light of Rom. 15:1 and Cor. 8:9-13, the stronger have a duty towards the weaker. However, the Bible also shows that the lesser have a duty towards the greater (for example, a child towards a parent or guardian). The rights and opportunities of people must keep pace with the growth of their sense of responsibility and duty, with self-determination in view."
- (c) The Report of the Ad Hoc Commission of the Federal Council of Churches in 1956 which was accepted by all the Synods of the Federated N.G. Churches and which repeatedly enjoyed publicity in the press and which was even distributed by the State Information Service.
- (d) The decisions of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (1958) at Potchefstroom in which all the Federated N.G. Churches as well as the Reformed Church of South Africa took part.

As long ago as October of this year the preparatory study material had been formulated. It was drawn up by about 50 professors, ministers and missionaries, and served as the basis for discussion. In it the standpoint was set forth with regard to:-

- (i) the position of the urban African;
- (ii) the future of the Coloured;
- (iii) job reservation, etc.

At that time the memoranda of the other churches had not yet come to hand. In this respect the similarity of the memoranda from the Cape and the Transvaal, which were drawn up independently of one another, was remarkably striking.

4. THE BIBLE AS THE BASIC STARTING POINT:

The Study Commissions took into account fully the facts of the Bible with regard to the basic aspects of the questions with which we were busy, as for example the unity and diversity in the creation and re-creation as revealed in the diversity and pluriformity of peoples and churches. In this respect we refer especially to the principles of the Bible as formulated and adopted by the Federated Ecumenical Synod (1958) as well as the report

of the Ad Hoc Commission which was accepted by all the Synods of the Federated N.G. Churches and both of which appeared in print.

The Church is called to apply the principles of the Bible to all fields of life and to test all facets of life by those principles. The plea that the calling of the Church is restricted to the preaching of the Gospel, on the grounds of which others have wished to excuse themselves from this difficult task, is such an obvious denial of the prophetic calling of the Church that it needs no argument to refute it. We agree, in fairness, that the Church has no right to prescribe political policy but it definitely does not relieve the Church of its responsibility of acting as the conscience of the state. Or must we take it that a prophet like Jeremiah acted beyond the limits of his command when he protested with his whole soul against a political alliance with Egypt because he realised the detrimental religious and moral effect it would have on his people? So today it remains the responsibility of the Church, with the necessary respect and also with the necessary honesty and courage, to test the policy of the state, as embodied in its legislation, against the fundamental truths of the Word of God.

At the same time it remains true that the Church must limit itself in its declarations only to those aspects which concern the honour of God and one's relationship towards one's neighbour. The representatives of the N.G. Churches endeavoured to do this in the decisions which they endorsed.

As examples we refer to the following decisions:

(a) The Rights of Africans who have no other permanent home:

One of the reasons why the Bloemfontein Conference, 1950, pleaded so strongly for complete territorial separation was the realisation that the granting of rights, including political rights, could not in the end be withheld from any adult and responsible person. It would be in conflict with the above mentioned scriptural principles and is morally indefensible. This standpoint of the Church is well-known and has been emphasised repeatedly since 1950, inter alia, in an interview at the beginning of 1955 with the former Prime Minister. If complete territorial separation is not possible, then it must be realised that those who are permanently housed in white areas cannot have these rights withheld from them.

Those who do not agree with this must now offer very clear moral grounds in defence of their standpoint. This responsibility may not be shirked. It is not a question of a political formula or an inadmissible hold of the state but a question of justice. The denial of this cannot, in our opinion, be compatible with the Christian conscience.

(b) No objection in principle to direct representation of the Coloured people in Parliament:

A great deal that has been said under (a) above is also applicable here.

In this connection it must be pointed out that the memoranda of the churches concerning this matter had been drawn up and had been sent out before the statements by the Prime Minister appeared.

The delegation realises the necessity for advisory councils and the preparation of the Coloured people for their responsibilities. What was said as far back as 1950 with regard to the Africans (and quoted above) is even more applicable here. The final say on the well-being of the Coloured is not held by advisory councils but by Parliament, and this right cannot always be withheld. Those who disagree must furnish the moral grounds for their standpoint. This responsibility, too, may not be evaded.

(c) Mixed Marriages:

This matter came under the attention of the study commissions after it had been discussed at various ecumenical gatherings over the last few years and after it had been referred by the Reformed Church in the Netherlands to the Reformed Ecumenical Synod at Potchefstroom in 1958. It remains today very real in discussions on race relations throughout the world.

The decision of the Conference in Johannesburg has generally been interpreted as though the delegates of the N.G. Churches were in favour of mixed marriages. Such an interpretation is clearly in conflict with our Church's declared policy with regard to differentiation as set out by our delegations.

Our delegation stated clearly that in this matter the well-being of the Christian community, as well as pastoral responsibility, demand that thorough attention be given to legal, social and cultural factors which make such marriages undesirable in our situation.

(d) Common worship:

With reference to this decision that no one who believes in Jesus Christ may be excluded from any Church on the grounds of his colour or race, it must be noted that the practical application of this principle must always take place with due consideration for proper order in the Church of Christ. This was clearly emphasised by the delegations of the N.G. Churches.

This matter, too, has received the attention of the Church for quite some time as appears, among other things, from the addendum of the Ad Hoc Commission (1957):

"We accept therefore, the existence of the different Churches according to each indigenous group. But where circumstances demand it, no one will be

excluded from common worship only on the grounds of race or colour."

This published statement covers only a part of the complete and fruitful discussions which took place, and when judging the significance of the discussions this must be taken into account. In connection with a few points which led to questions arising, we wish to point out that they were matters on which the Church had for some time been pondering and on which it had expressed its views. We also wish to point out that these things must be understood in the light of the statement by the delegates of the N.G. Churches of the Cape and the Transvaal which, inter alia, contained the following:-

"We wish to confirm..... a policy of differentiation can be defended from the Christian point of view, that it provides the only realistic solution to the problems of race relations and is therefore in the best interests of the various population groups. We do not consider the resolutions adopted by the Consultation as, in principle, incompatible with the above statement."

Then, too, at this Conference mention was made more than once of the positive results which this policy had already achieved. The N.G. Church's appreciation of what the Government has already done in this respect, and is still doing, is known well enough and has been declared repeatedly.

IN CONCLUSION:

The memoranda which the representatives of the N.G. Churches of the Cape and Transvaal laid before the Consultation must be seen as the fruit of serious and deeply-penetrative study in advance by extensive study commissions composed of responsible leaders of the two N.G. Churches. But at this state they must not be taken as the official decisions of the two N.G. Churches concerned. It has already been said unequivocally in a statement which accompanied the topics for study which were laid before the Church Consultation, namely, that it rested with the Synods of the two Churches whether they would grant church sanction to these findings or whether they would alter or reject them on the basis of God's Word. Before the Synods have themselves expressed their views, it serves no purpose to attach an official N.G. Church stamp to the findings of the Church Consultation, neither

by those persons who condemn the findings nor by those who applaud them.

Furthermore, we wish to point out that it was decided a long time before the Church Consultation that two conferences of Ministers of the Gospel would be arranged during February 1961 in the Cape and in the Transvaal to discuss further the matters dealt with by the study commissions.

The delegations will report further to the General Synod of the Transvaal N.G. Church in April and the Synod of the Cape N.G. Church in October 1961 respectively.
