

ENGLISH EXTRACT FROM THE AFRIKAANS DOCUMENT:

**The story of the Dutch Reformed Church's**

**JOURNEY WITH APARTHEID**

**1960 - 1994**

**a testimony and a confession**

Produced by order of the General Synodal Commission

of the Dutch Reformed Church (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk)

Note: The numbering of paragraphs follows that of the Afrikaans document. Certain sections have been omitted in the English translation. /Titelpage-  
p1/

---

**Foreword**

The Church of the Lord exists within the world of its time. For the Dutch Reformed Church (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk), this meant that it had to fulfil its God-given calling during the time when apartheid in South Africa degenerated into an oppressive system.

There are currently many voices calling on the Dutch Reformed Church to testify on its role in the apartheid era. Although it was decided not to make a submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, there was great unanimity in the General Synodal Commission of the Dutch Reformed Church that the story of this church with regard to relations between peoples and races in South Africa since the establishment of the General Synod in 1962 should now be told. That story is presented here as a *testimony* and a *confession*. This means that the church's official decisions and actions, and what happened in relation to those decisions and actions over the past few decades, are judged. This chronicle sets out to account for the intentions and consequences of the church's actions, and it is therefore full of words such as: good and right, neighbourly love, abhorrence, thank, confess and apologise.

This document is offered to members, ministers, synods and all other interested parties for their information and study. The intention is that the message contained in it should be echoed in each individual environment, so that it contributes to contrition before the Lord, reconciliation in South

Africa and new opportunities for religious life in the Dutch Reformed Church.

"If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."  
(Rom 12:18)

FREEK SWANEPOEL

Chairman: General Synodal Commission of the Dutch Reformed Church

21 July 1997

Approved for distribution by the Executive of the General Synodal Commission:

Ds F Swanepoel (chairman)  
Prof P C Potgieter (deputy chairman)  
Prof P Coertzen (registrar)  
Dr FM Gaum (secretary) - compiler of this document  
Dr W J Bruwer  
Ds P S Strümpfer  
Ds LW Meyer  
Dr M Botha (consulting) /pp i-ii/

## Definitions

- *General Synodal Commission (GSC)*: This commission is appointed by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church. Among other duties it deals provisionally with urgent matters while the synod is not in session and accounts for its actions to the next General Synod. The GSC consists of the Moderamen of the General Synod, representatives of the various (regional) synods and four representatives from among the church elders. Representatives of the other commissions of the General Synod serve as advisers. The *Executive* of the GSC, comprising the Moderamen and another three members elected by the GSC, acts on the instructions of the GSC and reports to it.
- *Extended Moderamen*: The GSC replaced the Extended Moderamen in 1986. The Extended Moderamen had more or less the same brief as the GSC, but fewer members.

# **1: Testimony or confession?**

## **1.1 What is the purpose of this account of the Dutch Reformed Church's 'Journey with apartheid'?**

1.1.1 This is a time of stock-taking in South Africa. Various organisations and individuals, in their different ways, are looking back over the past few decades, looking at what happened in South Africa during this time, asking about the "why?" and "for what?", and trying to take the best from the past and build the future upon it - or, put more negatively, to learn from the mistakes which were made so that they are not repeated.

1.1.2 Because it is the period known as the apartheid era that is under scrutiny, and because the church - specifically the Dutch Reformed Church (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk) - was involved in a particular way, it is necessary for that church too to look back and account for the tortuous course of the "journey" during the turbulent years behind us. The General Synodal Commission (GSC) of the Dutch Reformed Church therefore resolved "to appoint a person with expert knowledge to record the story of the Dutch Reformed Church with regard to relations between peoples and races in South Africa as it unfolded after the establishment of the General Synod in 1962. Once approved by the General Synodal Commission or its Executive, the document may be made available to any interested party" (*ASK-notule [GSC minutes]*, 21 and 22 May 1997, 6.16.1).

This chronicle is therefore at the disposal of anyone who is interested in it: members, certainly, but also others who want to know how the Dutch Reformed Church thought about things during the apartheid years and what its part was in the course of events.

1.1.3 The journey with apartheid will not be described in minute detail: we are not going to pause at every stone or bush on the way. The direction in which our thinking developed and the most important stages of the journey will be indicated and looked at more closely.

## **1.2 Why is the story being told as it unfolded between the years 1960 and 1994? After all, the story of apartheid began a great deal earlier ...**

1.2.1 This account concerns the Dutch Reformed Church in its widest context that of the General Synod. The unification of the Dutch Reformed Church in a General Synod took place in 1962. /pp 1-2/

However, the coming together of the provincial synods in a General Synod was preceeded - and nearly brought to grief - by the Cottesloe conference of churches in 1960. It is therefore necessary to begin with this conference, and with what led up to and issued from it, in order to understand how the story progressed thereafter. The necessary perspective is provided by references to certain events in the earlier decades of this century.

The record of our journey concludes in 1994 - not just because that year saw the formal, constitutional end of apartheid, but also because the General Synod which took place in 1994 became known as "the Synod of Reconciliation".

1.2.2 This account of the journey with apartheid gives us the opportunity to look back on 34 years of our history which culminated in the greatest transformation imaginable. It is, in many respects, a dramatic tale. Behind the words, sometimes formulated in the all too clinical language of ecclesiastical resolutions, lie many human emotions and motivations: the desire to know what God wants His church to do, and the urge for survival in this country; the responsibility to provide for hearth and home, for kith and

kin, and the knowledge that you should love your neighbour as yourself and that survival without justice is worthless.

- 1.2.3 This document is thus a contribution aimed at casting light, from the perspective of the General Synodal Commission (GSC) of the Dutch Reformed Church, on the history of the three decades between 1960 and 1994. It examines the thinking on apartheid at the time, within the Dutch Reformed Church and outside it, as reflected in resolutions of the General Synod and other ecclesiastical assemblies and in other documents. The GSC believes that this will serve the pursuit of understanding, empathy and historical insight, and that this document might well make a modest contribution towards promoting reconciliation, as the church sees it, in our country.

### **1.3 Is this narrative a testimony or a confession?**

- 1.3.1 Both. We hereby testify that throughout the years, including the 34 years which this document examines, the Lord has used the Dutch Reformed Church in the furtherance of His purposes - and we thank and praise Him for that.

However, we did not always understand His Word correctly for the times in which we lived, and often we did not do what He asked of us. We confess that to Him. Where we offended against our neighbours, we also sincerely confess our sins to them. This we do in the grateful knowledge that if we confess our sins, Jesus Christ, who is faithful and just, will forgive us our sins. /pp 2-3/

### **1.4 What is the status of this document?**

- 1.4.1 The GSC of the Dutch Reformed Church, which directed that this document be produced, has the task, in terms of its rules, of dealing provisionally with matters of an urgent nature and accounting for its actions to the next General Synod (*Reglement [Rules]* of the GSC, 3.2). Owing to the circumstances in South Africa, the telling of this story now, in 1997, has become a matter of urgency. This document has therefore been made available by those in the Dutch Reformed Church who have to deal with such matters while the General Synod is not in session, and they will account for it to the General Synod of 1998. /pp 3-4/

## **2: The journey begins long before 1960**

- 2.1 ...

### **2.2 Did the Afrikaners invent apartheid?**

Van Rooyen points out that although South African racial policy after 1948 became known internationally by the Afrikaans word "apartheid" - a phenomenon which created the impression that the world found this policy so alien that it could only be conveyed in the Afrikaans language the Afrikaners had inherited the policy from the English authorities in South Africa since the 19th century (see Van Rooyen, *Die NG Kerk, apartheid en die Christelike Instituut van Suidelike Afrika*, p 4). Paul Johnson goes further, saying that "all African states practised racial policies", and adding that group differences "led a growing number of African states in the 1960's and still more in the 1970's to exercise forms of social engineering not unlike apartheid" (Paul Johnson: *History of the Modern World*, p 526).

The fact that colour played such an important role in South Africa is not solely attributable to the policy of the country's government since 1948. It is manifestly true "that much of the least attractive part of the present South African political economy stems directly from its earlier history as part of the British and, before that, Dutch empires" (Francis Wilson, as quoted by Van Rooyen, op. cit., p 27).

## **2.3 How can "apartheid" be defined?**

- 2.3.1 There are many possible definitions of apartheid. It has also been said that apartheid cannot be defined, that one has to "feel" it to understand precisely what it is. Prof JA Heyns nevertheless provided a serviceable definition of the concept as it was concretised in South Africa: "Apartheid is a legally regulated political and social pattern of thought and action which, in forcibly separating groups of people, actually envisages the wellbeing of all those involved, but could not, in the process of its implementation, bring about the full realisation of its initial objectives; on the contrary, it not only advantages one population group at the expense of the other, but also wronged individuals" *[translation]* (JA Heyns: *Teologiese Etiek*, 2/2, p 50). /pp4-5/

## **2.4 When was apartheid Scripturally justified by the Dutch Reformed Church?**

- 2.4.1 Formulating a Biblical basis for its views on race relations was already becoming important for the Dutch Reformed Church in the early 1940s.

The view heard at synodal assemblies of the time was that the policy of "rasse-apartheid" (racial separateness) was consonant with principles laid down in the holy Scriptures. Apart from references to, for example, Acts 17:16, the history of the Tower of Babel, the events at Pentecost and texts about the "purity" of the people of Israel, the Scriptural basis had not yet been spelt out clearly. Hence the urgent need for a direct Biblical justification of "rasse-apartheid".

- 2.4.2 The first official attempt by an assembly of the Dutch Reformed Church to put apartheid on a Scriptural basis was in 1943, when the Council of Churches (the council in which the provincial Dutch Reformed Churches were represented before their amalgamation into a General Synod in 1962) made the following statement: "This assembly has taken note of the increasing agitation for colour and racial equality in our country, but wishes to point out that in truth, according to the Bible, God brings nations into being thus (Gen 11: 1 -9, Acts 2:6, 8, 11), each with its own language, history, Bible and church, and that the salvation of the native tribes in our country should also be sought in sanctified self-respect and God-given national pride" *[translation]* (*Handelinge [Proceedings]*, Council of Churches 1943, p 22).

- 2.4.3 In 1947 - the year before the watershed House of Assembly election - an important report on this matter came before the Council of Churches. This document, drawn up by Prof EP Groenewald, was the first comprehensive attempt to link pure principles from God's Word with the reality of a practical historical situation in South Africa (see PB van der Watt: *Die Ned Geref Kerk 1905-1975*, p 88).

Groenewald emphasised that (1) the Scriptures taught the unity of the human race; (2) the dividing up of the human race was a conscious act by God; (3) the Lord wished separate peoples to maintain their separateness ("apartheid"); (4) apartheid extended

over every aspect of a people's life - national, social and religious; (5) respect for the principles of apartheid enjoyed God's blessing; (6) in Christ a higher spiritual unity would come about; (7) the stronger had a calling in relation to the weaker (Van Rooyen, op. cit., p 54).

The Council of Churches adopted Groenewald's report without problems, as did the Natal and Free State Synods subsequently, but the Transvaal Synod did not. Dr (later Prof) BJ Marais seriously questioned the Scriptural grounds advanced by the report. It was his view that apartheid could probably be supported for practical reasons, but that the Bible did not present apartheid as a fixed prescription for the regulation of society. After initially not wishing to adopt the report, the Transvaal Synod did, in fact, affirm the Scriptural basis of racial apartheid two days later, after further debate on the matter./pp 5-6/

- 2.4.4 A little later the Cape Synod declared that the Scriptures contained no explicit injunction on separate, differentiated development, but that there was nothing in conflict with it in the letter or spirit of the Scriptures either (Van der Watt, op. cit., p 91).
- 2.4.5 This did not provide a final answer to the demand for a Biblical justification of the Dutch Reformed Church's standpoint on race relations. By that time, however, apartheid was incontrovertibly church policy, as is evident from a remark in the leading article of *Die Kerkbode* on 22 September 1948: "As a church we have ... striven constantly for the separation of these two national groups (white and black). In this regard one can correctly refer to apartheid as church policy" [translation].
- 2.4.6 In 1954 the Council of Churches appointed an ad hoc commission to look into the Scriptural justification of racial apartheid once more. Their report was released at the beginning of 1956. As it turned out, the report did not try to argue that separateness was a Biblical premise or imperative, and it acknowledged the role of practical circumstances in shaping the policy of the church.

"The principle of pluralism in the creation and in the world of nations, and the pluriform ecclesiastical outlook of Calvinism, which allows for the existence of separate national churches, constitutes the ideological basis of the report," [translation] writes Van der Watt (op. cit., p 100).
- 2.4.7 Several books which appeared at this time, together with continuing debate in the ecclesiastical and public press, kept alive the issue of whether apartheid could be Biblically justified. Prof BB Keet's book *Suid-Afrika - waarheen?* appeared in 1955, Prof PV Pistorius's *Die Trek is verby* in 1957 and Prof AB du Preez's *Eiesoortige ontwikkeling tot volksdiens* in 1959. While the first two authors rejected the policy of separation as unscriptural, Du Preez commended it as the only just policy in South African circumstances. In a lecture at Stellenbosch at the beginning of the academic year in 1958, and also in 1961 as co-author of the book *Grense*, Prof FJM Potgieter expressed himself strongly in favour of the Scriptural justification of the apartheid policy. He wrote: "On these two pillars, the concept of pluriformity and the right to self-determination of the different nations in the habitations which God gave as their inheritance on earth (Deut 32:8 and Acts 17:26), rests the policy of apartheid" [translation] (*Grense*, p 30).

- 2.4.8 It is important to point out that various Dutch Reformed theologians who maintained that apartheid was not a Biblical imperative or presumption were nonetheless prepared to accept it as a practical structural arrangement. /pp 6-7/

Dr Ben Marais wrote in *Die kleur-krisis en die Weste* (1952): "We cannot accept any direct basis from the Scriptures for the policy of apartheid ... we can, at best, make inferences and draw parallels in general terms" [translation]. But in the practice of our Christian social principles, says Marais, we must take account of the nature and state of the real world in which we live. The concrete situation, the real world within which the Christian is called to live as a Christian, will largely determine the application of our Christian principles. "Our own position in South Africa, in my view, offers more than sufficient justification for a policy of separate development ... provided that the further requirements of Christian fraternity are 'not denied and that such a policy is inspired by Christian love and not by racial selfishness or a feeling of racial superiority" [translation](p 291-297).

Ds David Botha wrote in *Die opkoms van ons Derde Stand* (1960) that "at this stage apartheid is certainly the obvious practical policy for the whites and the black people, because there are overwhelming centrifugal forces in all spheres of interest. But between the whites and the coloured people [an apartheid classification denoting mixed race] it is the centripetal forces which are overwhelmingly powerful ..."[translation] (p 149).

Prof Bennie Keet wrote in *Vertraagde Aksie* (1960) that apartheid, in the sense of a division of the country, could have been an option a hundred years ago, but it could only take place now with the greatest injustice to one side or the other (p 6).

## 2.5 **Did the Dutch Reformed Church urge the government to adopt or amend apartheid laws?**

After 1948 the Dutch Reformed Church frequently urged the government to implement the policy of apartheid, and many laws were instituted with the approval of the church. Van der Watt mentions the following laws which appeared in the statute book, or were amended, after representations from the Dutch Reformed Church (op. cit., pp 84-86):

- 2.5.1 Act no 55 of 1949, which prohibited mixed marriages between individuals of different race groups, was instituted chiefly as a result of sustained pressure from the Dutch Reformed Church (from as early as 1915). Later the church decided that the Bible did not explicitly oppose mixed marriages, but that they were still "extremely undesirable" (1978).
- 2.5.2 The Group Areas Act of 1950 (with subsequent amendments), which provided for separate residential areas for the different population groups, was adopted with the approval of the Dutch Reformed Church. In later years the Dutch Reformed Church criticised the indiscriminate enforcement of this Act and requested that it be applied with discretion.
- 2.5.3 The Dutch Reformed Church commended legislation that provided for more land for black people and the improvement of "Bantu education". /pp 7-8/

2.5.4 In terms of section 29(c) of the Native Laws Amendment Act of 1957 - and specifically the so-called "church clause" - non-whites could be prohibited from attending church services in predominantly white areas. Following representations from the Dutch Reformed Church, amongst others, the section concerned was amended to put beyond all doubt that the Bill did not envisage interfering with the individual's freedom to worship, "provided that such freedom is not abused to disrupt good order in society." *[translation]*

## **2.6 How, in the view of the Dutch Reformed Church, was the policy of apartheid to be implemented?**

2.6.1 In 1963, at the height of the apartheid era, Keet, an outspoken critic of apartheid, declared: "I think the Dutch Reformed Church leaders are very honest in their standpoint" (in an interview with The Rand Daily Mail, quoted by Van Rooyen, op. cit., p 61). Leading figures in the Dutch Reformed church were not only honest in their view that apartheid was the solution to the race question in South Africa, but also firm in their belief that the policy should be implemented fairly.

2.6.2 Prof G Cronje, a Pretoria sociologist known as one of the architects of apartheid, wrote in Die Kerkbode as long ago as 1940: "Social justice must be fostered. Next to love, justice is surely one of the most important principles in the teachings of Christ. It is God's will that justice be done ... The social subjugation and enslavement of human beings is no less unjust and no less contrary to the will of God than would be the subjugation and enslavement of a people" *[translation]* (letter in Die Kerkbode, 5 June 1940).

2.6.3 A uphill battle continued against accusations of the malicious oppression of people of colour - "but our church never made this a battle *against* people of colour. On the contrary, it was a battle *for* them, an attempt to serve their interests best ... White guardianship is not so much a right as a high calling ... because we have not just a policy, but a message: the everlasting gospel" *[translation]* (TN Hanekom: "Eintlik 'n sendingkongres", Die Kerkbode, 19 April 1950).

2.6.4 At a missionary congress in Bloemfontein in April 1950, the imperative of fairness was emphasised again. In his opening address Prof GBA Gerdener appealed for the correct attitude towards those of colour - an attitude of tolerance, goodwill and fraternalism. Throughout the congress there were calls for the improvement of health services and hospitals for black people, and also for better food supplies, more health education, medical training and the effective combating of disease. At that stage there were about 78 mission hospitals under the control of the Dutch Reformed Church (Van Rooyen, op. cit., p 64). **/pp 8-9/**

## **3: An important stop: Cottesloe**

### **3.1 Where does the Cottesloe church conference fit into the story of apartheid?**

3.1.1 The tragic riots at Sharpeville in March 1960, in which 60 people were killed, and the resultant state of emergency led the World Council of Churches to contact its member churches in South Africa. amongst these churches were the Dutch Reformed Church of the Transvaal, the Dutch Reformed Church of the Cape and the Church of the Province of Southern Africa (the Anglican Church). The Dutch Reformed Church and the

Anglican Church were involved in an unedifying ecclesiastical dispute. The Archbishop of Cape Town sent the World Council of Churches an ultimatum: either the Dutch Reformed Church had to be expelled from the World Council of Churches on account of its stance on apartheid, or the Anglican Church would be obliged to withdraw from that body.

- 3.1.2 In spite of the many obstacles put in its path by the Anglican Church as well as the Dutch Reformed Church, the World Council of Churches succeeded in calling a conference of churches, and eventually 80 delegates of the South African member churches (including the Dutch Reformed Church of the Cape and the Dutch Reformed Church of the Transvaal) and six representatives of the World Council of Churches met for the conference, which was held at the Cottesloe hostel of the University of the Witwatersrand between 7 and 14 December 1960.\*)

\*)The Transvaal Dutch Reformed Church was represented by ten people: AM Meiring, UB Naude, FE O'Brien Geldenhuys, CB Brink, AB du Preez, EP Groenewald, JA van Wyk, SS Tema and J Selamolela (both of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church of the Transvaal) and B le Battie (of the coloured congregation in Johannesburg).

The Cape Dutch Reformed Church delegation also consisted of ten people: AJ van der Merwe, WJ van der Merwe, TN Hanekorn, FJM Potgieter, PA Verhoef, CH Badenhorst, AP Smit, PES Smith, AJ van Wijk and WA Landman. /pp 9-10/

- 3.1.3 In one of the discussion groups during the course of the conference Bishop Bill Burnett of the Anglican Church put the following question: "Can the delegates of the Dutch Reformed Church just tell us, once and for all, in a few short sentences, precisely how they see apartheid and what they mean when they say that they also support it in their ecclesiastical work?" [translation] Dr FE O'Brien Geldenhuys answered thus: "I shall try to say why the Dutch Reformed Church follows a policy of separateness in its ecclesiastical work - and I am not speaking of the political situation. People differ. They have different needs. They live at different levels of understanding, of civilisation, of knowledge. If you want to reach them with the gospel, you therefore have to approach them in their own language, their own idiom, their own milieu. For this reason our church has always observed the principle in its missionary policy that one should try to understand the person and make the gospel comprehensible to him in the world in which he lives" [translation]. Dr RS Bilheimer, joint chief secretary of the World Council of Churches, responded: "if Dr Geldenhuys means that one should present the gospel differently to different people so that they can better understand it ... that the reason for the difference in approach is therefore that people differ in important respects ... then I can agree with that one hundred percent!" [translation] (FE O'Brien Geldenhuys: *In die stroomversnellings*, p 51.)

- 3.1.4 At the end of the conference a declaration was issued as the finding of the meeting. Afterwards there were major differences of opinion on the voting procedure followed to arrive at this declaration, as there were on the resolutions themselves. In his book *Cottesloe* AH Lu:ckhoff says that these resolutions were of monumental significance for all the member churches, but in particular for the Afrikaans churches (p 82). The following were amongst the most important resolutions:

- *Witness of the church*: "At a time of rapid social change, the church has a special responsibility to witness fearlessly within society."

- *Mixed marriages*: "There are no Scriptural grounds for a prohibition on mixed marriages. The welfare of the community and pastoral responsibility demand, however, that the necessary consideration be given to certain factors which may make such marriages undesirable."
- *Job reservation*: "The current system of job reservation must give way to a fairer system which protects the interests of all involved."
- *Land tenure and co-determination*: "It is our conviction that the right to own land wherever he is domiciled and to participate in the government of his country is part of the dignity of the adult person, and for this reason a policy which permanently deprives non-whites of the right to co-determination in the government of the country of which they are citizens cannot be justified."
- *Political status of coloureds*: "(a) It is our conviction that there can be no objection in principle to the direct representation of the coloured population in Parliament. (b) We express the hope that consideration will be given to the implementation of this principle in the foreseeable future." [translation] /pp10-11/

3.1.5 The Cottesloe declaration led to great tumult in Afrikaner ranks and intense controversy in the daily newspapers and church press. Many church councils adopted resolutions denouncing Cottesloe, and there were even public meetings -and the church's delegates were sharply criticised. Leaders such as Dr AP Treurnicht, editor of *Die Kerkbode*, and Dr JD Vorster took a particularly strong stand against the conference. Treurnicht wrote that Cottesloe did not represent the voice of the church as a whole and that the debate on matters such as the coloured vote was far from over. According to Vorster, the resolutions of the conference created the impression that they largely comprised criticism of government policy and conduct, while all the good things offered to coloured and black people by the policy of separation had not been recognised (cf. Van der Watt, op. cit., p 108).

Even the then Prime Minister, Dr HF Verwoerd, entered the debate when, in his New Year's message on 1 January 1961, he said that he regarded Cottesloe as an attempt by foreigners to interfere in South Africa's domestic affairs, that the declaration was no more than the opinion of a few individuals from the Dutch Reformed Church, and that *the church* had, in actual fact, not yet spoken - that would only happen when the synods made their voices heard.

"With this statement," writes Lu:ckhoff, "Verwoerd drew a red line through Cottesloe. He polarised the government and specifically the National Party against the church's leadership" [translation] (p 116).

3.2 ...

3.2.1 ...

### 3.3 Did the provincial synods reject the Cottesloe resolutions?

3.3.1 Prime Minister Verwoerd was, of course, quite right when he suggested in January 1961 that the church had not yet officially pronounced on the Cottesloe conference, and that only the synods could do so. The various synods and synodal commissions met during the course of 1961 - and each and every one rejected the conference

resolutions. The Cape and Transvaal Synods declared "emphatically that the policy of differentiation is Scripturally based, offers the only realistic solution to the problems of race relations in our country and therefore best serves the interests of all population groups" *[translation]*. The general tenor and the joint testimony of the Cottesloe declaration were unacceptable to the synods because they "impugn and undermine the policy of separate development" *[translation]* (cf. FM Gaum: *Die kerk en die toekoms van Suid-Afrika*, p 50).

3.4 ... /pp 11-12/

3.5 ...

### 3.6 **How did the consequences of the Cottesloe conference affect the Dutch Reformed Church's relations with other churches in South Africa?**

3.6.1 The reaction of the Dutch Reformed Church to the pronouncements of the Cottesloe conference caused a deep rift between the Dutch Reformed Church and many other recognised Protestant churches in the country. The Transvaal and Cape Dutch Reformed Churches resigned from the World Council of Churches and, when most other mainstream churches in the country came together in the South African Council of Churches, the Dutch Reformed Church (and the other Afrikaans sister churches) stood apart.

Van Rooyen says that the split was purely ideological: in the main it was about the fact that the Dutch Reformed Church supported the "traditional policy" while the English churches rejected it (Van Rooyen, op. cit., p 133). In this regard Prof Ben Engelbrecht remarked: "How political forces could succeed in driving the wedge so deeply between churches and Christians in our country will always remain a baffling mystery" *[translation]* (BJ Engelbrecht: *Ter wille van hierdie wêreld - Politiek en Christelike heilsbeleving in Suid-Afrika*, p 25). /pp 12-13/

## 4: **The journey after Cottesloe**

4.1 ...

4.2 ...

### 4.3 **How did the Christian Institute (CI) affect the Dutch Reformed Church?**

4.3.1 The Christian Institute of Southern Africa was established in August 1963. The aim of the institute was stated as "an attempt to allow Christians to reflect, converse and pray together and to demonstrate their unity" *[translation]* (Pro Veritate, 15 October 1963).

There was undoubtedly a link between the establishment of the CI and the Cottesloe conference, where the various churches recognised anew the need for and good sense of a dialogue amongst themselves. Ds CFB Naude was appointed director of the CI. When it was announced that he had accepted the full-time post of CI director, Naude preached a sermon to his Aasvoelkop congregation based on a text which would later become his refrain: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

4.3.2 Right from the beginning the Dutch Reformed Church wanted nothing to do with the CI and its activities. The Extended Moderamen declared in 1963 that it could not approve

of the establishment and continued existence of the CI "because it is clear that (it) will inevitably come into conflict with the racial and ecumenical perspective of the Dutch Reformed Church" [translation] (Die Kerkbode, 27 November 1963). In October 1966 the General Synod rejected the CI as a heretical tendency which undermined pure doctrine, and asked office bearers and members to withdraw from the CI out of loyalty to their church "and to remain steadfastly true in their love for their own church as an institution of God through Jesus Christ" [translation] (*Handelinge [Proceedings]*, General Synod 1966, pp 459, 564 and 565). A proposal that members who stubbornly continued to be members of the CI should be censured was rejected because it was thought that the assembly's resolution implied censure in any case (cf. Dr JD Vorster's statement to Die Transvaler, 24 October 1966).

#### 4.3.3 ... /pp 13-14/

4.3.4 Anyone reading the history of the Dutch Reformed Church and the CI in the 1960s with an open mind would have to concede that it was seen in the ranks of the Dutch Reformed Church largely as a struggle against forces threatening the national policy of apartheid. In the years following its rejection of the Cottesloe resolutions, the Dutch Reformed Church was even more convinced that apartheid /separate development represented the route to solving the problems of relationships in South Africa.

4.3.5 It is also true, however, that over time the CI, just like Pro Veritate, became increasingly radical and militant and that its activities warranted criticism. Its "Christian" umbrella covered all manner of things, and the power and influence of outspoken atheists in the organisation had the result that virtually all of the Afrikaans theologians who had at one stage been sympathetic towards the aims of the institute distanced themselves from it long before the CI was declared illegal in 1977. Initially the CI particularly wanted to play a part in bringing about a change of attitude in the ranks of the Afrikaans churches towards race relations in South Africa. Within just a few years of its inception, however, the CI had become so radical that it exercised hardly any influence over the thinking of the Dutch Reformed Church in particular - another reason being that the CI under the leadership of Naude became known for stirring up hostility towards South Africa overseas (cf. B Engelbrecht, A Geyser: *Journal of Theology for South Africa*, September 1988, p 5).

### 4.4 Did Cottesloe stimulate or stifle reflection on racial issues within the Dutch Reformed Church itself?

4.4.1 After the rejection of the Cottesloe conference resolutions, the Dutch Reformed Church continued to study race relations in the country in its own way. As early as 1965 a commission submitted eight reports to the Cape Synod, the first of which was entitled "Ras, volk en nasie in die lig van die Skrif" [Races, peoples and nations in the light of the Scriptures]. (The policy document ultimately approved for the Dutch Reformed Church by the General Synod in 1974 would be called *Ras, volk en nasie en volkereverhoudinge in die lig van die Skrif* [Races, peoples and nations and relations amongst peoples in the light of the Scriptures].) There were two clearly opposing lines taken in the eight reports presented to the Synod in 1965. "This was owing to the fact that the commission was equally divided between those who aligned themselves with Cottesloe and those who distanced themselves from it," [translation] suggests Kinghorn (op. cit., p 129).

- 4.4.2 The report was adopted by the synod with a considerable number of amendments, and served as a point of departure for the study undertaken at general synodal level which led to the adoption in 1974 of *Ras, volk en nasie ... (RVN)* as a policy document. amongst the conclusions of *RM* was that the Old Testament taught the church to "avoid the modern tendency to obliterate indiscriminately all diversity between peoples" *[translation]* (point 11), and: "Subject to specific circumstances and conditions, the New Testament allows for the regulation of the coexistence of different peoples in one country on the basis of separate development" *[translation]* (point 13.6). /pp14-15/

The document emphasised that "the commandment that one should love one's neighbour provides the ethical norm for the regulation of relations between peoples" *[translation]* (point 13.8). Elsewhere it states: "A constitutional system based on differentiated development for different population groups can be justified in principle in terms of the Scriptures. Here, however, the commandment that one should love one's neighbour must always constitute the ethical norm for the regulation of sound relations between peoples" *[translation]* (point 49.6).

- 4.4.3 With the adoption of *RVN*, the Dutch Reformed Church was convinced that the policy followed by the then government could be "Scripturally justified". While the church emphasised the fact that the policy should be implemented with the commandment to love one's neighbour as the ethical norm, it is nevertheless disappointing that the misery caused by the application of the policy in the black and coloured communities was not the subject of critical inquiry. The fact that migrant labour, for example, resulted in the disintegration of families, the separation of legally married couples, neglect of family life and moral decay is mentioned (point 54.2), but the issue is not pursued.

- 4.4.4 An entire section of the draft report dealing with black people in the cities was deleted because it encroached on the realm of politics. And on mixed marriages the synod decided that they were not merely "undesirable" but also "unsanctioned" (point 65) - in other words, unscriptural.

- 4.5 ...

**4.6 Did the Dutch Reformed Church at any stage receive government money to publicise its views on national issues?**

- 4.6.1 In 1974 the Department of Information approached the Dutch Reformed Church and offered to make money available confidentially to enable the church to open an ecumenical office for its General Synod. The department needed assistance in evaluating ecclesiastical information collected by its offices overseas. In particular they needed effective counter-arguments for the streams of negative propaganda against South Africa emanating from the World Council of Churches. This did not mean that the church had to follow orders from the department, and it approached its work in terms of its own discretion and in a strictly ecclesiastical fashion (cf. FE O'Brien Geldenhuys, op. cit., p 74). This funding also enabled the Dutch Reformed Church to publicise its views, such as those contained in *RM*, for instance, to a wide audience. /pp 15-16/

- 4.6.2 The fact that the Dutch Reformed Church received and used money from secret government funds in its ecumenical work was known to only a few people in the church (the members of the Moderamen), and was from the outset a source of concern and

unease amongst them (cf. O'Brien Geldenhuys, op. cit., p 75). The thinking was that the government assistance would be limited and temporary, and that the case could be made that the money thus released would be put to better use by the church than it would have been if used by the department concerned in other ways. These church leaders were also unaware of the fact that the ecumenical office of the Dutch Reformed Church was but one of more than a hundred organisations receiving money through the then Department of Information.

- 4.6.3 When the information bombshell exploded in 1978, the fact that the church had been using secret government money for some time also came out. The Extended Moderamen issued an explanatory statement, and the director of Ecumenical Affairs, Dr O'Brien Geldenhuys, said in a subsequent statement that it had been an error of judgment "to accept, for church work, funds over which, as I now see, there could be a question mark" *[translation]*. Geldenhuys wrote later that this episode had provided "greater clarity on the critical distance which the church should always maintain between itself and the state, and on the dangers which arise when the boundaries between church and state become blurred" *[translation]* (op. cit., p 77).

4.7 ...

**4.8 Did the Dutch Reformed Mission Church also make its voice heard in this period?**

- 4.8.1 Appeals to the Dutch Reformed Church "from outside" to turn on its tracks and repudiate apartheid where the order of the day towards the end of the 1970s. The 1978 synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church had already expressed itself clearly in this regard, and one of the most noteworthy appeals came in 1980 from Die Ligdraer, official organ of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church. This journal wrote on 16 August 1980 that through its missionary policy the Dutch Reformed Church was, in fact, the formulator and propagator of a constitutional and economic apartheid policy. It wrote: "The Dutch Reformed Church honestly believed that it was the only policy which could serve the highest interests of the whites and the non-whites, and that as a defence against racial conflict, it would be a lasting solution to our social and political problems.

"The fruits of the policy, however, are the quintessence of ambivalence, of good and evil, of opportunities for self-realisation intertwined with circumstances of gross dehumanisation, of large-scale material and technical progress coupled with unbelievable deprivations in human values. For this reason the members of the (black and coloured) churches have experienced the apartheid policy, with all the benefits it has brought, as extremely oppressive." *[translation]* /pp 16-17/

Therefore, wrote Die Ligdraer, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church asked the Dutch Reformed Church to turn on its tracks and repudiate the policy of apartheid, and to help bring about the repeal of the Mixed Marriages Act, section 16 of the Immorality Act and the Group Areas Act.

4.9 ...

**4.10 Why could 1982 be seen as a "decisive year"?**

- 4.10.1 In certain respects 1982 was a decisive year. In September that year the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church reconfirmed its 1978 decision that apartheid (separate development) was a sin, that the moral and theological justification thereof was a mockery of the gospel and that its consistent disobedience to the Word of God was a theological heresy. The Synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church declared in 1982 that its resolution of 1978 implied that it had no choice "but, with the deepest regret, to accuse the Dutch Reformed Church of theological heresy and idolatry in the light of (the Dutch Reformed Church's) theologically formulated stance and implementation thereof in practice" [translation] (*Handelinge [Proceedings]*, Synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, 1982, pp 604 and 706). The apartheid situation in South Africa and the stance of the Dutch Reformed Church on it, declared the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, created a *status confessionis*. This decision of the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church was in line with a resolution adopted by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WLRC) earlier the same year when it suspended the membership of the Dutch Reformed Church (cf. 4.13).

#### 4.11 **What is a *status confessionis*?**

- 4.11.1 In a letter to the Dutch Reformed Church the Dutch Reformed Mission Church elucidated a *status confessionis* by saying "that we regard this as a matter on which it is impossible to differ without seriously endangering the integrity of our communal confession as reformed churches" [translation] (cf. Die Kerkbode, 4 April 1984).

Strictly speaking, wrote DJ Smit, the expression *status confessionis* means "that a Christian, a group of Christians, a church or a group of churches judges that a situation has arisen, a moment of truth has come, in which nothing less than the gospel itself, their most basic confession concerning the Christian gospel, is at stake, so that they feel obliged to testify and act against that situation" [translation] (cf. GD Cloete, DJ Smit: *'n Oomblik van waarheid*, 1984, p 22).

- 4.11.2 A *status confessionis* does not always necessarily imply a new article of faith, but in the case of the apartheid issue the Dutch Reformed Mission Church judged in 1982 that it had to proceed to the formulation of a confession. /pp 17-18/

A draft confession was submitted to the Synod. It was adopted as an article of faith four years later by the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church under the title "The Confession of Belhar" and also in 1994 by the first synod of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, at which the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and the larger part of the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa amalgamated.

#### 4.12 ...

#### 4.13 **What did the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) decide regarding apartheid in 1982?**

- 4.13.1 In the same year in which the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church declared that the apartheid situation in South Africa and the stance of the Dutch Reformed Church on it created a *status confessionis*, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), of which the Dutch Reformed Church and the Dutch Reformed Mission Church were members at that stage, took a similar decision.

The WARC is the oldest and largest reformed ecumenical body in the world. On the basis of the view that the Dutch Reformed Church - and the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika, which was also a member had attempted to justify apartheid by misusing the gospel and the reformed confession, their membership was suspended. This suspension would remain in force until the two churches proved through their utterances and actions that their disposition had changed.

4.13.2 The General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in October 1982 was shaken by the WARC decision, and although the majority of synod delegates requested that the Dutch Reformed Church withdraw completely from the WARC, the two-thirds majority required for such a decision could not be obtained. In July 1997 the Dutch Reformed Church was still a "suspended member" of the WARC.

4.14 ...

4.15 ...

4.16 ... /pp 18-19/

4.17 **How did the General Synod of 1986 move away from RVN?**

4.17.1 With the adoption of the policy document *Kerk en Samelewing 1986 [Church and Society 1986]*, the General Synod of 1986 firmly moved away from certain views contained in RVN and also fell into line with the resolutions taken by the Western Cape Synod three years earlier.

Concerning apartheid, the following was resolved:

- "In South Africa the idea and policy of separate development, with the ideal of territorial separation, evolved in the course of history. This was seen as a component of the whites' guardianship of the other groups, and had as its purpose the optimum development of all groups.
- "Following the reflection that has taken place through the years in church periodicals, conferences, committees and synods concerning the policy which has become known as apartheid, the conviction has gradually grown that a forced separation and division of peoples cannot be considered a Biblical imperative. The attempt to justify such an injunction as derived from the Bible must be recognised as an error and be rejected.
- "The Dutch Reformed Church is convinced that the application of apartheid as a political and social system by which human dignity is adversely affected, and whereby one particular group is detrimentally suppressed by another, cannot be accepted on Christian-ethical grounds because it contravenes the very essence of neighbourly love and righteousness and inevitably the human dignity of all involved.
- "The suffering of people for whom the church has concern must, however, not be attributed solely to the system of apartheid but to a variety of factors such as economic, social and political realities in which persons of different communities have not been accepted by one another. To the extent that the church and its members are involved in this, it confesses its participation with humility and sorrow.

- "The Dutch Reformed Church declares that it is prepared to co-operate in the Spirit of Christ to seek a solution which will enable every sector of the South African society to attain the highest possible level of wellbeing." [translation] (*Kerk en Samelewing 1986*, par 304-308)

4.17.2 Concerning marriage, the following was resolved, *inter alia*:

- "The Scriptures do not forbid racially mixed marriages. In its pastoral work, however, the church must give due warning that social circumstances, as well as ideological, philosophical, cultural and socioeconomic differences and other factors, may cause serious tensions. Where such marriages do take place, those involved must receive pastoral guidance in all aspects of marriage." [translation] (*Kerk en Samelewing 1986*, par 368) /pp19-20/

4.18 ...

4.19 **What was the consequence of the resolutions of the General Synod of 1986 as contained in *Kerk en Samelewing 1986*?**

4.19.1 The resolutions of the General Synod of 1986 - particularly those which declared "the membership of the Dutch Reformed Church open" (*Kerk en Samelewing 1986*, par 270) and that "services of worship and other meetings are open to all visitors who desire to listen to the Word in fellowship with other believers" [translation] (*Kerk en Samelewing 1986*, par 273) - caused great commotion. Eight months after the synod, this led to schism.

The Afrikaans Protestant Church (AP Church) was founded, partly as a consequence of the fact that the demand by aggrieved members for the repeal of "all resolutions contained in *Kerk en Samelewing 1986*" and for an express injunction that "membership of the Dutch Reformed Church be reserved for white Afrikaners, and also for whites who associate themselves with white Afrikaner society" [translation] was rejected (according to a report in *Die Kerkbode* of 1 July 1987).

4.19.2,3,4,5 ...

4.20 ...

4.21 **How did the Dutch Reformed Church express its doubts about the application of national policy to the government in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s?**

4.21.1 It is not correct to assume that in the years between 1960 and 1990 the Dutch Reformed Church seldom if ever expressed criticism concerning national policy to the government at an official level. The feeling, however, was that more could be achieved through confidential discussions with members of the government behind closed doors. In the minutes of the Commission for Liaison with the Government (a subcommission of the Extended Moderamen and later of the GSC) cases are mentioned of representatives of the Dutch Reformed Church raising their doubts to government ministers about the enforcement of, for example, the Group Areas and Immorality Acts. There were also frequent discussions with the government concerning detention

without trial. However, the church was hesitant to insist on the repeal of the Acts concerned and usually simply requested that they be applied with compassion and humanity. /pp 20-21/

## 5: Arrival at Rustenburg

### 5.1 Did the comments received on *Kerk en Samelewing 1986* result in a revision of the policy document?

5.1.1 ...

5.1.2 ...

5.1.3 The revised document, *Kerk en Samelewing 1990*, reiterated that "the church may not prescribe political models to the government, but it will, by virtue of its prophetic function, continue to test every existing and proposed political model against Biblical principles and norms" [translation] (par 275).

5.1.4 A fairly comprehensive resolution was adopted on apartheid (par 278-288). It reads:

- "In the evaluation of *apartheid* the church is confronted with strong and emotionally-laden differences. While a part of the white population considers it a just way to protect the identity and the best interests of the different population groups in the country, others perceive it as a racist and oppressive system which protects and promotes the interests of the white minority to the detriment of the majority of the population. Consequently, numerous churches condemn it as unchristian and sinful. Apartheid is condemned by states and political institutions worldwide as a form of racism and a transgression against humanity.
- "The Dutch Reformed Church realises that the ideal and policy of apartheid took form and shape over a long period in our history. There were also honest and noble intentions by those concerned to achieve the optimal development of all population groups within the framework of their own cultural traditions.
- "It would also be unreasonable to brand as wrong and bad everything which took place within the political structure of apartheid and to deny the positive developments achieved in various fields.
- In principle the right and freedom of peoples to preserve and promote their own cultural and other values are acknowledged as integral to human rights, provided that the rights and freedom of others are not affected thereby, and the biblical demand to love one's neighbour and to accept one's fellow man are not negated./pp 21-22/
- "The Dutch Reformed Church, however, acknowledges that for too long it has adjudged the policy of apartheid on the abovenamed grounds too' abstractly and theoretically, and therefore too uncritically. The Dutch Reformed Church had not sufficiently perceived that apartheid as a system had *inter alia* in its struggle against integration also received an ideological and ethnocentric basis. The right and freedom to remain true to one's own cultural heritage was extended to become a political ideology of apartheid as a system for the protection of the white minority's own interests to the detriment of others. Love for one's own often took the shape of racism and was expressed in legal and structural terms.
- "While the Dutch Reformed Church over the years seriously and persistently sought the will of God and His Word for our society, the church made the error

of allowing forced separation and division of peoples in its own circle to be considered a Biblical imperative. The Dutch Reformed Church should have distanced itself much earlier from this view and admits and confesses its neglect.

- "Gradually it became clear to the Dutch Reformed Church that the policy of apartheid as a political system in practice went much further than the acknowledgment of the right and freedom of all peoples and cultural groups to stay true to their own values. Apartheid began to function in such a way that the largest part of the population of the country experienced it as an oppressive system which through the forced separation of peoples was in reality favouring one group wrongfully above the others. In this way the human dignity of one's fellow man became adversely affected and was in conflict with the principles of love and righteousness.
- "Any system which in practice functions in this way is unacceptable in the light of Scripture and the Christian conscience and must be rejected as sinful. Any attempt by a church to try to defend such a system biblically and ethically must be seen as a serious fallacy, that is to say it is in conflict with the Bible.
- "The Dutch Reformed Church wants to state clearly that it condemns all forms of discrimination and the suppression of peoples and wholeheartedly desires that all will be free to share in the privileges of the fatherland and will receive reasonable and equal opportunities to acquire prosperity and riches.
- "The church has, above all, compassion for the poverty and suffering of large numbers of people in our country and declares that it is prepared to co-operate in an ecclesiastical way in attempts to relieve the present need and to make it possible for all people in our country to have a better future.
- "The church, however, is convinced that a satisfactory political solution is necessary for the social problems which exist at present, and therefore urges all political leaders to co-operate in a responsible way to find a political dispensation which will ensure freedom, justice and a decent existence for all." /pp 22-23/

## **5.2 Was the Dutch Reformed Church parroting the decisions taken in 1990 by the then Government?**

- 5.2.1 The resolutions by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church as set out above followed eight months after the speech on 2 February 1990 by the then state president, Mr FW de Klerk, when he unbanned several political organisations and thereby announced the end of the apartheid era in South Africa. It might seem that the Dutch Reformed Church was following in the tracks of the National Party with its decisions on apartheid, amongst other things. However, it is a fact that the Dutch Reformed Church had, as indicated, already clearly articulated its views in this regard in 1986, and they were taken further in 1990. In addition, the recommendations on changes which were to be proposed in respect of *Kerk en Samelewing* 1986 had already been finalised on 6 November 1989, some considerable time before the sitting of the synod scheduled for October 1990. It would therefore be unfair to allege that in taking these decisions the church was merely falling into line with what the government of the day had already done.

At the same time, there was broad concurrence, and also interaction, as thinking on societal issues developed, and it is true that certain convictions were arrived at more or less simultaneously at various levels of the Afrikaans community.

### **5.3 On whose initiative was the Rustenburg Conference of Churches convened?**

- 5.3.1 The Conference of Churches at Rustenburg took place in November 1990. In some respects it was an event comparable to the Cottesloe conference 30 years before. The initiative for such a meeting of South African churches came from the state president, Mr FW de Klerk, who was following up a suggestion from Prof Heyns, moderator of the Dutch Reformed Church General Synod of 1986. In his 1989 Christmas message De Klerk said that he would like to hear what the churches jointly had to say to the government and the country about the situation in South Africa. It soon became obvious that his involvement in convening such a conference would be a problem for some churches. He then stepped back and a committee of Christian leaders was formed under the chairmanship of Dr Louw Alberts and Pastor Frank Chikane. They succeeded in getting representatives of 80 churches in South Africa to the conference in the Bushveld. The four official delegates of the Dutch Reformed Church were Prof PC Potgieter, moderator of the General Synod of 1990, and Drs P Rossouw, DJ Hattingh and FM Gaum. Two Dutch Reformed Church academics, Profs JA Heyns and WD Jonker, attended the conference as speakers. /pp23-24/

### **5.4 How did the "Rustenburg confession" of the Dutch Reformed Church come about?**

- 5.4.1 At the end of his speech, Jonker, of the Theological Seminary at Stellenbosch, declared: "I confess before you and before God not just my own sin and guilt, and my personal responsibility for the political, social, economic and structural injustices under which you and our entire country are still suffering, but I also venture to do so vicariously on behalf of the Dutch Reformed Church, of which I am a member, and for the Afrikaners. I am at liberty to do so because at its last General Synod the Dutch Reformed Church declared apartheid a sin and acknowledged guilt for its own omission, in that it did not long ago warn against apartheid and distance the church from it." *[translation]*

After Jonker's speech, Archbishop Desmond Tutu of the Anglican Church said, of his own accord, that he accepted the confession of guilt and had no doubts about its sincerity.

- 5.4.2 Potgieter, leader of the Dutch Reformed Church delegation, told the conference the following day: "The delegation of the Dutch Reformed Church wishes to state unequivocally that we fully associate ourselves with Prof Jonker's statement on the position of this church. In fact, he was conveying the decisions of our General Synod in Bloemfontein. We would like to see the Synod's decisions as the basis for reconciliation with all people and all churches.

"The question of restitution after confession has also been raised. The minutes of our Synod show clearly that we have already begun a process of restitution, both in our

relationship with our own Family of Dutch Reformed Churches and in our relationship with South African society as a whole." *[translation]*

After Potgieter's declaration Tutu went to the podium, as he had the previous day, and said that he had been subjected to a great deal of criticism for accepting Jonker's confession of guilt. He had been asked what authority he had to do that.

Some church figures also felt that the guilt of the Dutch Reformed Church could not be forgiven so easily, he said. But he had no doubts: if guilt was confessed, the Lord would forgive - and Christians should forgive one another similarly. Up to seventy times seven, said the Lord Jesus.

## **5.5 ... /pp 24-25/**

### **5.6 What was the reaction in Dutch Reformed Church ranks to the "Rustenburg confession"?**

5.6.1 The Rustenburg conference caused great disquiet in ecclesiastical ranks (just like Cottesloe three decades earlier) and this led to a special meeting of the General Synodal Commission. The GSC criticised both Jonker and the Dutch Reformed Church delegation to the Rustenburg conference because in their statements they "had not referred to the full context of the synod's decisions" and explained: "This could have caused confusion amongst members." *[translation]*

5.6.2 In its statement after the meeting the GSC reiterated the resolution on apartheid by the General Synod and said: "The General Synod came to the conclusion that in the light of the Scriptures and Christian conscience, apartheid - and this would also apply to any other system which functioned similarly in practice - was unacceptable and, being sinful, should be rejected. The GSC wishes to point out that the General Synod was judging apartheid within a qualified context and rejected the apartheid thus defined as sinful." *[translation]* (Die Kerkbode, 14 December 1990)

5.6.4 As a result of the prominent media coverage given to the Rustenburg Conference of Churches and what followed, these events became, in the public mind, the time and place of the Dutch Reformed Church's confession of guilt for apartheid, rather than the General Synod a few months earlier, where it actually happened officially. In a certain sense the Dutch Reformed Church's "journey with apartheid" ended with the "arrival at Rustenburg".

5.6.5 A leading article in Die Kerkbode of 16 November 1990 described the confession of guilt as follows: "For the Dutch Reformed Church the confession of guilt at the General Synod of 1990, and its communication to the Rustenburg Conference of Churches, was a moment of liberation.

"Now everyone who needs to know does know: the official Dutch Reformed Church acknowledges that apartheid is a sin and confesses that its part in enforcing and upholding apartheid was wrong.

"Confessing one's guilt is never easy: not to God, nor to one's husband or wife or child, nor to another people or another church. But, as long as it is done in the name of Christ, one will always receive forgiveness from God and, fortunately, often from other

people as well - and even from other churches. This happened last week at Rustenburg in a moving, unforgettable way. The fact that Archbishop Desmond Tutu - often regarded, on account of his highly controversial statements, as an archopponent of the Dutch Reformed Church - played a part made it all the more remarkable.

"The Dutch Reformed Church knows that confession of guilt inevitably leads to restitution - the putting right of the wrong that was done. The church already began to attend to that with some of its resolutions at the General Synod of 1990. This will continue in future. Meanwhile, we shall also continue to thank the Lord for the many good and right things done by the Dutch Reformed Church in the past, things which truly served to honour and glorify His Name." [translation] /pp 25-26/

## **5.7 Were ecumenical doors flung open to the Dutch Reformed Church after the Rustenburg conference?**

5.7.1 Although many churches were willing - and eager - to hold bilateral discussions with the Dutch Reformed Church after the Rustenburg Conference of Churches, one important ecumenical door remained closed: that to the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), which still upheld its suspension of the Dutch Reformed Church's membership. In March 1993, however, the WARC sent a delegation to South Africa to consult with South African member churches and with the Dutch Reformed Church in Johannesburg.

The purpose was "to obtain first-hand information about the process of unification which has started in the family of Dutch Reformed Churches ... Above all, the papers and discussions addressed themselves to the question of whether or not the Dutch Reformed Church has complied with the requirement of the WARC general council in Ottawa, 1982" (Milan Opocensky: Introduction to *Farewell to apartheid?*, p 5).

5.7.2 The Dutch Reformed Church delegation (Profs PC Potgieter, JA Heyns and PGJ Meiring and Dr FM Gaum) reacted at the end of the consultation with a statement which attempted to bring fresh clarity on the Dutch Reformed Church position on apartheid. This statement, which was endorsed by the General Synod of 1994 (*Handelinge [Proceedings]* of the General Synod 1994, p 443), includes the following:

- "The DRC has acknowledged that apartheid, as it was theologically justified and supported by the DRC, has largely contributed to a situation of unequal, unjust distribution of economic resources, which has led to the serious discrepancy in income, standard of living, unequal education and training between White and Black. The DRC has above all, compassion for the poverty and suffering of large numbers of people in our country and declares that it is prepared to co-operate in an ecclesiastical way in attempts to relieve the present need.
- "The per annum expenditure of the DRC for subsidising the ministry of the other members of the DRC family, rose from R17 405 397 (1986) to R22 743 429 (1990) to approximately R26 280 000 (1992).
- "There has been a notable willingness within the Family of Dutch Reformed Churches to work together in addressing especially the enormous poverty and unemployment in SA. An assignment of the 1982 General Synod of the DRC, to

strive towards a mutual Diaconate across its own borders, seems to be suddenly viable ...

- "Many congregations of the DRC throughout SA are involved in the creating of informal settlements and they are busy helping the people to escape from their 'poverty culture' by means of food and clothing and even legal assistance. The consulting rooms of the social workers of the DRC are open to all people in need. A lot of effort goes into the training of volunteers in the initiating of community development. **/pp 26-27/**
- "The DRC is committed to the dismantling of the system of apartheid in both church and politics. In our frequent discussions with political leaders we are candid about it and we have handed our General Synod's 'Declaration of Christian Principles' to, amongst others, Pres FW de Klerk, Mr N Mandela and Dr M Buthelezi.
- "Lastly, we want to assure this consultation that the DRC is committed to the unity of the DIRC family. We agree with the statement that this is the acid test whether the DIRC has finally distanced itself from the racism of apartheid and we are willing to be part of this process."

5.7.3 At that stage, however, the WARC was not yet persuaded that the suspension should be lifted. (The matter will again be on the WARC's agenda at its general assembly in Debrecan, Hungary in August 1997.) **/pp 27-28/**

## **6: To the "Synod of Reconciliation"**

### **6.1 Why can the General Synod of 1994 rightly be called the "Synod of Reconciliation"?**

6.1.1 At its General Synods in 1986 and particularly 1990 the Dutch Reformed Church formulated its stance on apartheid clearly. Whoever perceived a lack of emotion and drama in the ecclesiastical language of the synod found it in ample measure at the Rustenburg Conference of Churches, where the decisions of the 1990 General Synod were, so to speak, trumpeted throughout the world.

6.1.2 But there remained those who doubted the earnestness and sincerity of the Dutch Reformed Church. Even they must surely have been convinced by the decisions and actions of the General Synod of 1994. This synod, at which Ds F Swanepoel was elected moderator, was not dubbed the "Synod of Reconciliation" by the press for nothing.

6.1.3 On 13 October 1994 the president of the Republic of South Africa, Mr NR Mandela, visited and addressed the General Synod. He said, amongst other things: "Apartheid was a scorched-earth policy against the majority of people in our country. Apartheid was fundamentally wrong and sinful. I do not say these things in order to rub salt into the wounds, because I am aware of the long struggle in the Dutch Reformed Church concerning apartheid and the profound inner struggle which many members have gone through. *Kerk en Samelewing* was an important milestone, but it was not the beginning of the long road which has brought you to this synod, neither can it be the end, because the quest for enlightenment and truth always continues ... With the Dutch Reformed Church's acknowledgement that apartheid was wrong, a special prophetic task now rests on your shoulders. Having searched your own hearts, you must now join

hands with all the rest of us to ensure that the Reconstruction and Development Programme succeeds" *[translation]* (*Handelinge [Proceedings]* of the General Synod 1994, p 536).

- 6.1.4 In an unopposed motion after Mandela's speech the General Synod assured him of their unceasing prayers and continued: "The Synod has noted with interest the Government's White Paper on the Reconstruction and Development Programme for South Africa.

"it is also the desire of the Dutch Reformed Church that dynamic work will be done to bring about a radical improvement in the living conditions and future opportunities of people in South Africa who have been deprived of so much for many years. The Dutch Reformed Church will therefore study the RDP thoroughly and indicate, in the near future, how it can make a meaningful contribution to reconstruction and development./pp 28-29/

"The Synod expresses its earnest hope that the Government's policy will make ample allowance for the upholding of those Christian values which are of paramount importance to so many people in this country." *[translation]* (*Handelinge [Proceedings]* of the General Synod 1994, p 443)

- 6.1.5 Prof B J Marais and Dr CF Beyers Naude visited the General Synod on different days. Both received a hearty welcome, and the following resolution of the Synod was presented to them: "In view of the charge of political expediency on the part of the Dutch Reformed Church, the General Synod directs members' attention to the fact that throughout the years past there were always members, office bearers and even ecclesiastical assemblies that were critical of apartheid and of the church's decisions in that regard. The General Synod acknowledges with regret that in the past the church often dealt with such persons in an uncharitable and inappropriate way" *[translation]* (*Handelinge [Proceedings]* of the General Synod 1994, p 374).

- 6.1.6 The General Synod of 1994 adopted an important resolution on unity in the Family of Dutch Reformed Churches which also bore the stamp of reconciliation:

"1 . It is with great pleasure that the General Synod takes note of the progress made in the most recent discussions aimed at finding a way of giving the process of church unity greater momentum.

2. The General Synod expresses its earnest desire

- to co-operate with the other members of the Family of Dutch Reformed Churches in establishing one denomination on the basis of an approved church ordinance;
- to co-operate in the appointment of a joint commission to begin drawing up a draft church ordinance for this prospective denomination" *[translation]* (*Handelinge [Proceedings]* of the General Synod 1994, pp 440-442).

- 6.1.7 In a leading article published after the sitting Die Kerkbode wrote: "The ninth General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church which ended last week in Pretoria was

characterised by a spirit of reconciliation and was undoubtedly one of the most remarkable synod sessions since the first meeting of the General Synod in 1962.

"Not only was the hand of reconciliation extended to people such as Prof Ben Marais and Dr Beyers Naude, but a reconciliatory spirit was also displayed by Prof Evert Kleynhans, a former moderator, who in recent years had frequently expressed strong opinions on some aspects of the Dutch Reformed Church policy document *Kerk en Samelewing 1990*. Dr Sarel Eloff, known for his conservative convictions, played a mediating role and made an important contribution which helped enable the General Synod to take crucial decisions on unity in the Dutch Reformed Church Family.

"Similarly, the visit of President Nelson Mandela to the General Synod reflected the spirit of reconciliation" *[translation]* (Die Kerkbode, 28 October 1994). /pp 29-30/

## **7 The Dutch Reformed Church and the Security Forces**

### **7.1 Did the Dutch Reformed Church support the then Government in the war on South Africa's borders in the 1970s and 1980s?**

- 7.1.1 In the 1970s and 1980s the Dutch Reformed Church was convinced that the war being waged on the country's borders - and later also, in a sense, internally - was a just struggle. Ds CP Naude, chaplain general of the SA Defence Force from 1983 to 1990, writes: "No believer can justify a war. The whole theory of a just war is highly fallible and, in virtually all cases, is applied subjectively from a specific perspective. Defensive war, however, is accepted worldwide as a necessity. In the case of South Africa, the threat was also supported by forces aiming to promote the Communist expansionism of the Soviet Union and its ally Cuba, and others. The outspoken atheism of these forces was, by implication, a threat to religious freedom." *[translation]* (From a written answer to an enquiry, 23 June 1997).
- 7.1.2 Ds JA van Zyl, chaplain general from 1996 to 1983, concurs: "For me as a Christian, the war was justified because, in our view, it was being waged against an anti-Christian philosophy which would have wiped out, or at least harmed, Christian civilisation in South Africa. For us, the war was about the upholding, survival, protection and promotion of the Christian faith." *[translation]* (From a written answer to an enquiry, 23 June 1997).
- 7.1.3 Ds C Colyn, chaplain general of the SA Police Force from 1975 to 1990, gave the following answer to the above question: "When I look back and have to express an opinion on the struggle of that time, I realise that it was a tremendously dangerous, stressful and, for many, traumatic time. We were involved in a revolutionary struggle in this country. The SA Police were placed at the forefront of this struggle to maintain law and order and to fight off the 'onslaught' against South Africa. If this struggle, which we experienced as a violent and bloody 'onslaught', is now being referred to lightly as a mere freedom struggle, then that is an oversimplification of a very complex situation in which many people, including many members of the SA Police, made the supreme sacrifice. South Africa was involved in, and was the focal point of, Communist attempts at expansion and world domination, and this ideological struggle was seen by some South Africans as a solution to our country's political problems. /pp 30-31/

"Because revolution and anarchy with a high level of violence form part of the Communist ideology, the SA Police had to act against this 'onslaught'. I associated myself whole-heartedly with this action of the SA Police and I do not apologise for that. The Chaplains' Service played a spiritual role during this struggle by spiritually preparing our men and women to perform their task in difficult circumstances. My chaplains and I were very close to our people, and by means of border visits, the distribution of literature, spiritual work, visits to the homes of policemen maimed in the struggle, interviews and personal contact we tried to put the 'pain' and 'grief' of the struggle into a spiritual perspective and to communicate to them the comfort as well as the inspiration of the Gospel.

"Personally, I buried too many policemen and dealt with the pain of too many grieving families to have another view of the struggle now." *[translation]* (From a written answer to an enquiry, 20 July 1997). /pp 31-32/

7.1.4 Van Zyl, Naude and Colyn served in the Chaplains' Services as ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church. Their answers to the questions reflect their personal views.

**7.2 Where the chaplains-general aware of covert activities by the Defence Force/Police?**

7.2.1 Van Zyl states: 'I was not aware of covert activities in the RSA which were unchristian, destroyed human life and contravened Christian legitimacy. I would certainly have raised my voice against them if they had come to my notice.'

7.2.2 Naude writes: "Because the 'need to know' principle was applied strictly in the SADF, as it is in all effective forces, the chaplain general was by definition not involved in the planning and execution of covert operations. I was therefore not aware of them.

"The covert activities which have been 'revealed' at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recently are difficult to evaluate because the accusations have not -thus far, at any rate - been tested and do not actually involve the SADF. Where SADF members have been charged in court, they have been found not guilty." /pp 31-32/

7.2.3 Colyn writes: "if I had known of covert activities by the Police Force, they would no longer have been covert activities. The security forces in every country of the world have covert activities. Particularly when a country's survival is threatened, and things happen such as those which happened in South Africa, covert activities are essential. Because I understand the necessity of covert activities in a threatened situation, I have no objection to them in principle. Illegitimate actions by individual members of the Police Force, such as those currently alleged, are not necessarily part of covert activities. In my view one should guard against condemning an entire Police Force if individual members of that force allegedly overstep the mark. If the allegations that members of the Force were guilty of such offences are true, that is sad. If I had been informed, and if I had known of improper activities of the kind now alleged to have been committed, I would not have hesitated to present my Christian testimony.

"Sadly, though, it appears that the church too, in its attitude and utterances, has been swept along by the sensational way in which reports of alleged offences by members of

the Police are conveyed in the media, when those allegations cannot be tested by cross-examination and the leading of evidence."

**7.3** ... /pp 32-33/

## **8: Years of service**

### **8.1 How has the Dutch Reformed Church served the community over the past few decades?**

- 8.1.1 If the full story of the Dutch Reformed Church's role during the apartheid era is to be told, some attention must obviously be given to the church's service in and to the community over the years.
- 8.1.2 In a sense, the Dutch Reformed Church formally began its ministry of compassion in 1827, when it founded "Een School voor de Blinden en Doven" at Worcester. Over the years 8 schools for the blind, 11 schools for the deaf and a school and after-care centre for the deaf and blind have been erected for all population groups. At one stage there were about 78 mission hospitals under the control of the Dutch Reformed Church. In the then Transvaal, the hospitals at Nkhensani, Tshilidzini, Meetse-A-Bophelo, Bakenberg, Letaba and Magalakwena all owe their existence to the great missionary revival in individual congregations.
- 8.1.3 In the 1950s the Dutch Reformed Church ran 8 homes for the aged. By 1990 there were 113. Eight homes for the chronically ill were built, as well as a hospital for recovered and convalescing lepers. The church has 23 children's homes around the country. Three industrial and agricultural schools have been erected.
- 8.1.4 The Dutch Reformed Church reached out to Africa. Eight hospitals have been erected in Botswana, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Zambia and three institutions for lepers in Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Zambia. Three schools and after-care centres have been built in Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana, a children's home in Zambia and two schools for the deaf in Zimbabwe and Zambia.
- 8.1.5 The Dutch Reformed Church has been intensely involved in community service since the 1960s, and by 1990 was already running 23 service centres. Since 1992 some of the Dutch Reformed Church children's homes have begun to set up satellite children's homes in disadvantaged areas. The Abraham Kriel Children's Home, for instance, operates a large satellite children's home in Soweto.
- 8.1.6 Community development has been given concentrated emphasis since 1993, and 319 social workers in 108 social work offices across the country are directly involved with squatter camps and disadvantaged areas. /pp 33-34/
- 8.1.7 The church's institutions and services are open to all population groups. The social workers provide services to all the people of South Africa. Sixty percent of the professional time of Dutch Reformed Church social workers is spent on statutory matters, and these services are widely regarded as indispensable. In total, these services provided by the church amount to about R245 million per annum, of which the state subsidises approximately 47%.

- 8.1.8 Virtually all Dutch Reformed Church congregations are directly involved in community development. Job creation projects, literacy classes and training in life skills are at the top of the list. This informal service by the church is obviously difficult to quantify, but amounts to millions of rands every year.
- 8.1.9 As for "missionary work" - which has to be understood in broad terms, as it embraces the proclaiming of the gospel within the country and outside it as well as related charitable services and inter-church aid - about R12 million was spent on this in 1982, R23 million in 1987 and R30 million in 1994. Today missionary work is also done jointly by the Family of Dutch Reformed Churches (the Dutch Reformed Church, the Reformed Church in Africa and the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa).
- 8.1.10 "The remarkable story of the missionary work of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa and other African countries has yet to be told in full," said a German journalist visiting South Africa a few years ago. "We must take proper cognisance of what generations of missionaries have done to lead tens of thousands of people to Christ, to help establish strong, indigenous congregations and churches, to build schools and hospitals, to give their service of love to the blind, the deaf, the crippled, the poor, the hungry, the aged and the young, to train ministers and spiritual workers, to provide Bible translations and other reading matter, to employ radio and television in the cause of evangelisation ..."

(Details from: JJ de Klerk ea: *Die Diens van Barmhartigheid en die Ned Geref Kerk*, Cape Town, 1990; brochure: *Die oes is groot*, Cape Town, 1987, and further information supplied by the ministry of compassion and mission offices of the Dutch Reformed Church) /pp 34-35/

## 9: **A look back on the journey with apartheid**

### **26 theses**

- 9.1 The insight which the Dutch Reformed Church gained that "the church may not prescribe political models to the government, but it will, by virtue of its prophetic function, continue to test every existing and proposed political model against Biblical principles and norms" [translation] (*Kerk en Sarnelewing* 1990, par 275) was the result of years of grappling with this issue, and came after the Dutch Reformed Church had travelled a long road with the apartheid albatross around its neck.
- 9.2 It was precisely the zeal with which the Dutch Reformed Church wanted the Scriptures to pronounce on all the relationships and circumstances of life that led it to seek Scriptural endorsement for one specific political model as being the one true, divinely ordained model for this country. At a stage there was broad consensus in Dutch Reformed Church circles that separate development - with neighbourly love and justly applied - was a Biblical imperative for the regulation of our society.
- 9.3 It can be accepted that there were good intentions amongst those who wanted to justify apartheid/separate development Biblically, and those who saw it as a practical solution for a complex situation. On the one hand they wanted to do what they believed the Bible required of them. On the other hand they wanted justice to be done to all the different peoples constituting our South African society.

- 9.4 Unfortunately, however, the policy of apartheid was allowed to degenerate into an ideology which had to be put into practice at all costs, even against the will of most people in the country. People became pawns in a game of chess, and their innate human dignity was not fully recognised. Even after it became obvious that the ideal of independent states for the different peoples was unattainable, the discrimination and injustice of forced removals were allowed to continue.
- 9.5 For many years the Dutch Reformed Church continued to view this intricate situation all too theoretically. Too often its approach was: "If a policy of separate development can be implemented with neighbourly love and righteousness, it can be Biblically justified". The church did not take enough trouble to establish *whether*, in practice, this policy complied at all with the stated norms of love and righteousness. /pp35-36/
- 9.6 While, in a sense, the Dutch Reformed Church took the lead in establishing the apartheid concept, it was the National Party that later adopted it as a political policy. Because the members of one were, in many cases, also members of the other, there was an interaction between church and party/government. This is understandable, but the result was that the church did not always maintain the desirable critical distance in relation to the government.
- 9.7 The concept of separate states for separate peoples did not appear out of thin air - it exists elsewhere in the world (Europe) and also in our own region, with Lesotho and Swaziland being the most obvious examples - and a social arrangement of this kind is clearly not wrong or bad as such. The problem comes when such an arrangement is forced on people and even advocated by the church as a Biblical imperative.
- 9.8 Also in relation to the ecclesiastical dispensation, it is not wrong if the Word of God is brought to people in their own language and cultural context, or if the church, precisely by virtue of its "universality", chooses to take on the colour of its surroundings. On the contrary. But the unity of the church cannot be subordinated to its diversity. If, in this regard, the church's diversity is virtually the only part of it which is visible, and visible unity steadily disappears into the background, the world will be less and less inclined to believe the church's message.
- 9.9 It was on account of its profound and justifiable identification with the destiny of the people whom it served in the first instance - the Afrikaners - that the Dutch Reformed Church often tended to put the interests of its people above those of other people. The church was concerned for the survival of the Afrikaners and did not always pay the same attention to the desperate circumstances endured by other people from day to day.
- 9.10 The church must acknowledge to its members, old and young, that the guidance given by ecclesiastical assemblies in respect of societal matters over the past decades was sometimes sadly lacking. For that we are deeply and sincerely sorry.
- 9.11 The Dutch Reformed Church thanks the Lord for those cases in which the guidance of ecclesiastical assemblies was good and right, and He bestowed His blessings on the church's activities in many areas - as is evident from the details elsewhere in this document.

- 9.12 It must be said that there were also cases in which sound guidance from the church was unfortunately not followed by all members and assemblies.
- 9.13 The Dutch Reformed Church has always treated the Word of God most seriously, and has consistently striven to proclaim and apply its pristine essence. However, the church did not always hear the Word of the Lord correctly. That must be confessed.

However, the church commits itself afresh to the service of the Lord, so that in the years ahead, with greater zeal and dedication than ever, it can seek God's will for the members of the church, and for the country and all its people, while maintaining a critical approach to its own interpretation of the Word. /pp 36-37/

- 9.14 Christ provides us with the outstanding example of a servant who thought not of Himself, but of others. If, in the past, the Dutch Reformed Church was tempted to think of itself as a great and "powerful" church, the situation has clearly now changed to such an extent that the church has to see itself differently. The servant model now fits best - and that, after all, is what Christ expects of His church.
- 9.15 The Dutch Reformed Church's heart goes out to those in our country who suffered in past decades because of the system which prevailed. The church sometimes raised its voice in protest and sometimes in compassion, but often too softly. For that we apologise.
- 9.16 Clearly, however, the suffering, hardship and poverty endured by people in South Africa over the past few decades or more cannot be ascribed to apartheid alone. A variety of social and economic realities contributed to their plight. During this time South Africa, in fact, enjoyed relative prosperity in which everyone could share to a greater or lesser degree. The fact that at the end of the apartheid years South Africa was, economically speaking, a ray of hope in Africa - in spite of sanctions and boycotts - cannot be left unsaid in an evaluation of the period that lies behind us.
- 9.17 The Dutch Reformed Church has to acknowledge that there were numerous occasions when its prophetic voice should have spoken more clearly to the then government, many of whom were members of that church. On occasion the Scriptural guidance which the church gave to the government fell short. It is also true that the church unfortunately sometimes allowed itself to be taken in tow by political leaders.
- 9.18 In future, the Dutch Reformed Church will ensure that its prophetic voice is as clearly audible as possible to the government. The church will give the government the honour that is due to it and support it spiritually, so that it can govern well and there can be peace and order and less crime in our fatherland.
- 9.19 The Dutch Reformed Church wishes to continue its work with commitment, and thanks the Lord for the opportunity to do so in this country. The church has a special responsibility towards our people, and towards the peoples amongst whom it has laboured for three and a half centuries, and wishes to continue that work. At the same time the church will strive to bring the gospel to even more people, and looks forward to welcoming them as members of the church of the Lord.

- 9.20 The Dutch Reformed Church will proceed with its endeavours to bring about greater unity in the church, specifically in the reformed tradition, because we believe that the Lord demands of His church that it become more visibly unified. **/pp 37-38/**
- 9.21 In various ways, for purposes of the church's pastoral ministry to members, the Dutch Reformed Church, with other churches, became involved in the struggle/war of the 1970s and 1980s. In its actions the Dutch Reformed Church showed that it regarded this as a just struggle, particularly because at the time the atheistic ideology of Communism displayed a great thirst for expansion, with South Africa as one of its targets. The church did not regard the war as an attempt to maintain an unjust system in South Africa.
- In those years the Chaplains' Services did good pastoral work in difficult circumstances.
- 9.22 Ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church who were chaplains general of the Defence Force and the Police Force at that time have testified that they were not aware or informed of covert actions against which they should have protested. With hindsight, it is clear that the Dutch Reformed Church should have made more urgent and penetrating enquiries about the various activities of the Security Forces.
- 9.23 Similarly, the Dutch Reformed Church should have made more serious enquiries about what was happening and what was permitted in South Africa under the blanket of the various states of emergency.
- 9.24 It is with shock and revulsion that we now take note of alleged unchristian deeds committed by some members of the Security Forces. Such deeds cannot be condoned, even taking into account the circumstances prevailing at the time. If these allegations prove to be true, profound abhorrence must be expressed.
- 9.25 Similarly, profound abhorrence must be expressed at the misdeeds of freedom fighters and others that have come to light which, if proven to be true, are ethically and morally unjustifiable.
- 9.26 The Dutch Reformed Church has completed its journey with apartheid. It has cast off the albatross from around its neck, once and for all. We thank the Lord for a fresh opportunity, together with other Christians in South Africa, to go into the future, to help build up the church of the Lord, to help make this country a good home for all those who call it their fatherland, and to seek the will of the Lord in South Africa. **/pp38-39/**

## **10: A new journey: the journey of reconciliation**

**10.1** ...

### **10.2 What has the Dutch Reformed Church done since 1990 to promote reconciliation?**

- 10.2.1 The wide-ranging Rustenburg Conference of Churches in 1990, which was held at the initiative of the then state president, Mr FW de Klerk, was the outcome of an idea raised by the moderator of the 1986 General Synod, Prof JA Heyns, during discussions between a Dutch Reformed Church delegation and the president. Events at that

conference contributed to the reconciliation of churches which had been alienated for years.

- 10.2.2 The involvement of Dutch Reformed Church officials and members, specifically the late Prof Heyns, Dr Louw Alberts and Dr Antonie Gildenhuys, in peace initiatives in the early 1 990s is well known.
- 10.2.3 In the past few years the Dutch Reformed Church has observed several days of prayer for peace and reconciliation in the country - sometimes on its own, but more frequently in co-operation with other churches.
- 10.2.4 On the occasion of his address to the General Synod of 1994 President Mandela referred to "the constructive role which the leadership of the Dutch Reformed Church played during the turbulent period leading up to the election of 27 April 1994. " "Your readiness to caution some of your own members against racism and reckless war talk was an important contribution to the miracle of South Africa's peaceful transition to democracy. You are an integral part of South Africa's unique testimony in a world in which so much violence and intolerance still prevails," *[translation]* he said.
- 10.2.5 In 1993 the Dutch Reformed Church held a peace congress in Pretoria in which prominent political and religious leaders took part.
- 10.2.6 After nearly 50 years, South Africa is again involved as an observer at the South African Council of Churches, where it, together with other churches, is playing a role in the building of bridges and in reconciliation initiatives. /pp39-40/
- *Ecumenism*: Liaison and co-operation among churches in order to promote the unity of the church of Christ.
  - *Church council*: An ecclesiastical assembly, consisting of elders and deacons from a local congregation, which looks after the affairs of that congregation and takes decisions affecting it.
  - *Moderamen*: The four office bearers whom the synod appoints with specific mandates: the moderator is chairman of the synod and, in the case of the General Synod, also of the General Synodal Commission; the assessor is the deputy chairman; the registrar gives guidance on matters relating to ecclesiastical ordinance; and the fourth member is the secretary ("skriba").
  - *Presbytery*: The ecclesiastical assembly at which the representatives of church councils in a particular area meet to deal with matters in which they all have an interest, but which cannot be resolved at church council level.
  - *Synod*: The ecclesiastical assembly at which the representatives of church councils of a particular denomination meet to deal with matters of common interest which cannot be resolved at church council or presbytery level. In the case of the General Synod, the constituent (regional) synods send delegates to the assembly, which normally meets every four years to deal with matters of general interest to the denomination which cannot be resolved at church council, presbytery or synod level. /pp ii-1/

