

PRO VERITATE

CHRISTELIKE MAANDBLAD VIR SUIDELIKE AFRIKA

Jaargang II; Nr. 12.

Intekengeld R2 Subscription

By die Houtposkantoor as Nuusblad geregistreer.

CHRISTIAN MONTHLY FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA

April 15 April 1964

Volume II; No. 12.

Registered at the Post Office as a Newspaper.

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer and young Christians in

— PART I —

WE live in an age in which in all parts of the world Christians are becoming increasingly aware of the necessity to pray for each other by joining in the high priestly prayer of our Lord, ut omnes unum sint (John 17:21). We are determined not to be divided by political and ideological barriers of any kind. Thus the writer of these words and her friends are able to join our Christian brothers and sisters in South Africa in prayer — prayer which is informed and made concrete by reading the publications we receive from your country. I hope that this article will help you in South Africa to pray for us in East Germany.

Yes, it is from the heart of the Christian Church in Eastern Germany, the 'German Democratic Republic', that these words are written. But it must be noted that what I have to say is also applicable to the other part of our country, and that it is the same or similar trends of thoughts, which are occupying our minds on either side of the 'iron-curtain'.

Bonhoeffer — prophet and martyr

There is no shadow of doubt that no other theologian of the post-Barthian generation, both before and during World War II, has had the same kind of influence on the life and thought of the young Christians in the Evangelical Church of Germany as has Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

He was killed by the S.S. on the 9th April, 1945, in the concentration camp of Flossenbrück, but in both parts of our country he is very much alive in the discussions and thinking of young people. So to tell of Bonhoeffer's influence is to tell you something of our life and thought.

But Bonhoeffer does not merely belong to Germany and the German Evangelical Church. In the late twenties and thirties he had many official and personal relations with the Anglo-Saxon wing of the Ecumenical Movement. One thinks especially of his correspondence with the late Bishop of Chichester, Dr Bell, and their war time encounter in Sweden, which had a deep influence on the relations between the Church of England and the Ecumenical Movement, both for the 'Life and Work' section of that movement and the German Confessional Church. The German Confessional Church was the true Evangelical Church of Germany during the Nazi era, and resisted the introduction of the Nazi ideology of racism and totalitarian "Führerprinzip" into the Church of Christ. It was Bonhoeffer who, as a representative of the Confessional Church and a personal friend of Dr Bell, played an important part in the formulation and promotion of the 1934 "Message of Ascension-tide" which was concerned with the position of the German Evangelical Church and was addressed by the Bishop of Chichester to the representatives of the Churches on the Universal Council for Life and Work.

Our young people regard this period of Bonhoeffer's life (1931-1934) when he was the Youth secretary of the World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches, as a time of preparation for his later activities, including the writing of his books. It is the Bonhoeffer of the Nazi

Resistance, the Bonhoeffer of the Gestapo-prison, who is mostly read by our young people. This must not be taken to mean that he is chiefly a political image; on the contrary, it is true to say that "Letters and Papers from Prison" has provided the young members of our Church with the equivalent of a Breviary. I personally know several of them who have read this book four or five times and know some of its more important sections by heart. The fragments of Bonhoeffer's "Ethics" are also widely read; he himself considered this his most important book and continued to work on it during the war and up to his arrest.

What is the reason for this passionate concern with Bonhoeffer's thought? Even a cursory knowledge of Bonhoeffer will substantiate the claim that his books, articles, lectures and sermons in every period of his life and theological thought were concerned with the task of preaching the Gospel in the modern world, with the unity of doctrine and action, both of the Church as a whole and of each of its members. As he saw it, only this unity could guarantee the validity of the Christian message in a secularised age.

'Cheap grace' and 'costly grace'

This is why Bonhoeffer fights against the concept of "cheap grace" in German Protestantism (see "The Cost of Discipleship" — the best known of his earlier books). By "cheap grace" Bonhoeffer means that Christians do not think it is necessary to obey the commandments of God given to them by Christ himself in the Sermon on the

This article comes from a Christian worker in Eastern Germany whose name cannot be disclosed for obvious reasons — Editor.

Mount and think that they can rely on the redemption and forgiveness of all their sins merely in virtue of their faith in Christ, and without the necessity of an absolute obedience to him. They are not aware of the fact that the grace of God 'cost' our Lord's death on the Cross, and that is, therefore, 'costly grace' and not 'cheap grace'. On the other hand, the Christian who has understood that God's grace is 'costly grace' cannot live his life in a "devil-may-care" kind of way as if nothing had happened; he is bound to follow his Lord on the narrow path which leads to righteousness (Matt. 7:

14), and this is a path of "faith expressed in action". Again many of the convictions expressed at the time when he was in frequent contact with representatives of the Anglo-Saxon world indicate that Bonhoeffer thought that the preaching and teaching of English and American Churchmen is not sufficiently grounded in Biblical Theology — thus they are not fully able to come to grips with social, national and international questions, in spite of their goodwill and readiness to help.

Bonhoeffer always tried to live by these insights himself, to discover the exact will of our Lord and to live a truly Christian life in the real world of the 20th century.

War and peace

During the time of his frequent ecumenical contacts no international question excited Bonhoeffer more than the question of war and peace. Between 1928 and 1939 his papers and addresses repeatedly return to this theme. For instance 1932 at the Youth Conference of the World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches held at Gland on Lake Geneva, he said: "The Church of Christ stands for peace between people, between nations, between classes and races. But the Church knows also that there is no peace where justice and

Germany.

truth are absent. A peace which oppresses justice and truth is no peace, and against such a pseudo-peace the Church of Christ must protest. There exists a sort of peace which is worse than fight and struggle. But the fight and struggle here must be in the spirit of love to the adversary, a fight of the Holy Ghost, not of the flesh . . ."

Bonhoeffer energetically denied that this struggle for truth and justice would involve war. He used an example from the sphere of worldly justice: you have to try criminals in court to secure justices but this does not imply the lawfulness of torture; the practices of the court must rest on the Law of God. In the same way, war is not allowed as a means of promoting justice and truth.

In August 1934, at a Youth Conference in Fanø (Denmark), Bonhoeffer read the introductory paper. The following is a summary of his thoughts on this subject:

"In one word, 'war', we have the enemy of our work for peace.

1. We must understand what war is: a. War is a conscious action, which has as its source the conscious decisions of the human will which is fully responsible for it;

● Continued on page 2

Die beoefening van geestelike gemeenskap tussen lidmate van die Moederkerk en die lidmate van die N.G. Sendingkerk

DS. W. J. VAN DER VYVER*

HIERDIE onderwerp het vir die Kerk vandag aktueel geword. Dat die Kerk dit dan ook erns meen met die saak, blyk ook uit verskillende besluite en uitsprake gedurende die laaste dekade. Graag lewer ek hiermee dan 'n bydrae om die beoefening van geestelike gemeenskap tussen lidmate van die Moederkerk en die N.G. Sendingkerk te bepleit vanuit die Sendingkerk.

Ek lewer my pleidooi dan:

1. Op grond van ons geskiedenis tot ongeveer 1881;
2. Op grond van resente besluite en uitsprake van die kerk;
3. Op grond van die praktiese uitvoerbaarheid daarvan;
4. Op grond van die Heilige Skrif

Ek plaas die prinsipiële grond laaste, nie omdat dit van minder belang is nie, maar omdat ek met opset eers die geskiedkundige materiaal na vore wil bring, en verder ook omdat ek nie hier beoog om breedvoerig aandag te gee aan die prinsipiële aspekte nie.

1.) Op grond van ons geskiedenis tot ongeveer 1881

Sedert die volksplanting aan die Kaap is die bekeerlinge uit die slawe en Hottentotte by die Gereformeerde gemeente alhier ingeskokkel. Eredienste is gesamentlik bygewoon; doopsbedieninge het gelyktydig plaasgevind; kofkasieklasse is gesamentlik gehou; be-

vestiging van lidmate het by dieselfde geleentheid geskied en Nagmaalsvieringe het rondom dieselfde tafel plaasgevind.

Die gekleurde Christene was dus op gelyke voet met die blanke Christene behandel, hoewel daar vroeg reeds spesiale sitplekke vir die nie-blankes was. Hoewel afsonderlike bearbeiding ook reeds teen die einde van die 18de eeu plaasvind, bly hulle nog lidmate van dieselfde moederkerk. Die bedoeling was klaarblyklik nie om deur afsonderlike bearbeiding hulle uit die kerklike gemeenskap van die blankes uit te sluit nie. Die volgende besluit van die eerste vergadering van die Ring van Kaapstad is insiggewend:

„Dat men volgens den leer des Bijbels en den geest des Christendoms verpligt is zoodanige personen (van de kleur) tegelyk met geboren Christenen tot het Avondmaal toe te laten.”

● Vervolg op bladsy 2

Die beoefening van geestelike gemeenskap (vervolg)

Aan die begin van die 19de eeu vind ons 'n treffende beskrywing van 'n gesamentlike Nagmaalsviering te Caledon, waar ds. M. C. Vos destyds predikant was.

Ook die Sinode van 1829 staan daarop dat die Nagmaal gelyktydig gevier moet word, sonder onderskeid van kleur of afkoms.

Die Sinode van 1837 versoek verder dat genoegsame sitplekke vir heidene wat die dienste besoek, gelaat moet word. Ook word die nie-blankes uitgenooi om die katekisasieklas by te woon. Dit is derhalwe duidelik dat daar tot op hierdie datum nog geen afsonderlike aanbidding was nie. Daar was geestelike gemeenskap binne een kerkverband en in dieselfde kerkgebou.

Stockenström-gebeure: Besluit 1857

Maar dan kom 1855, toe daar in die gemeente Stockenström probleme ondervind word, nie met gesamentlike bywoning van eredienste nie, maar met gesamentlike viering van die Nagmaal. Die aantal blanke lidmate, wat hulle by die oorspronklike gemeente wat uit Hottentotte en Kleurlinge bestaan, gevoeg het, wou hê dat hulle afsonderlik met die Nagmaal bedien moes word. Die Kerkraad het egter geweier omdat dit in stryd sou wees met die Nagmaalsformulier, die geloofsartikels en baie Skrifuurplekke. Uiteindelik het die saak voor die Ring van Albanie geding met die gevolg dat die Ring aanbeveel het dat die Nagmaal afsonderlik aan die blankes bedien word, nadat die Kleurlinge bedien was. Hierdie besluit was ingrypend in die lig van die byna 200 jaar wat verby was. Nadat die saak ook voor die Sinode van 1857 geding het, is die volgende besluit deur die Sinode aangeneem:

„De Synode beschouwt het wenschenlijk en Schriftmatig, dat onze ledematen uit de Heidenen, in onze bestaande gemeenten opgenomen en ingelijfd worden, overal waar zulks geschieden kan; maar waar deze maatregel, ten gevolge van de zwakheid van sommigen, de bevordering van de zaak van Christus onder de Heidenen, in den weg zouden staan,

de gemeente uit de Heidenen opgerigt, of nog op te rigten, hare Christelike voorregten in een afzonderlijk gebouw of Gesticht genieten zal.”

Die Sinode handhaaf dus dat daar nie Skrifuurlike gronde vir skeiding is nie, maar laat dit wel toe op praktiese gronde. Die Sinode het hierdie reëling as van tydelike aard beskou. Die geskiedenis sou egter so anders verloop. Die skeidingsproses wat reeds by Stockenström begin het, sou na 1857 sig al meer laat voel. Die weë tussen die blanke en nie-blanke lidmate het maar al verder uitmekaar gegaan.

Uiteindelik kom die stigting van die N.G. Sendingkerk in 1881 toe nie-blankes die geleentheid kry om tot 'n afsonderlike kerkverband toe te tree. Alle gemeentes het nie by hierdie kerk aangesluit nie, want daar was nie dwang toegepas nie. Tog sou ná 1881 die weë van die blanke en Kleurling-Christene nog verder uitmekaar gaan, omdat kontak met mekaar al moeiliker geword het. Die gevolg sou wees dat geestelike gemeenskap met mekaar al meer iets van die verlede geword het.

En vandag leef ons eenvoudig bymekaar verby, veral in die stadsgebiede. Ons weet min van mekaar; ons stel min belang in mekaar; ons raak al meer vervreemd van mekaar. Die verhouding is grotendeels dié van stiefmoeder en stiefkind teenoor mekaar — dit ontbreek aan wedersydse warme liefde vir mekaar.

Tog is dit duidelik dat die moederkerk nie onverskillig staan t.o.v. die onderlinge beoefening van geestelike gemeenskap nie. Dit blyk veral uit die besluite ten uitsprake gedurende die laaste dekade hoedat met die probleem geworstel word. Daarom wil ek verder pleit vir die beoefening van geestelike gemeenskap.

2.) Op grond van resente besluite en uitsprake van die kerk

Eerstens vestig ek die aandag op die beleidsverklaring van die Raad van Kerke in 1956:

„Dat, waar historiese ontwikkeling op sendinggebied deur die eeue

onder die druk van omstandighede tendense van onchristelike eksklusivisme vertoon en so die beoefening van ware Christelike gemeenskap tussen Christene van verskillende rasse belemmer het, dit geskied, nóg deur kwaadwillige gesindheid teenoor nie-blankes, nóg met die goedkeuring van die ampelike leiding van die Kerk, maar gesien moet word as die resultaat van onbeheerbare omstandighede en van algemene menslike swakheid.”

Die Raad erken dus dat die beoefening van geestelike gemeenskap skade gely het. By implikasie pleit die Raad dus vir so'nige gemeenskap.

Uit die rapport van die Kommissie oor Rasseverhouding van die Gereformeerde Ekumeniese Sinode van 1958 haal ek die volgende aan:

„... die Kerk moet deur sy lering en voorbeeld sy lede opvoed en voorberei vir die beoefening van Christelike gemeenskap met gelowiges uit ander rasse.”

Die Uniale Sendingkongres gehou te Kroonstad in 1960 het o.a. die volgende besluit geneem:

„Die kongres neem met dankbaarheid kennis van die aangeleenthede wat daar telkens kom vir samesprekings tussen moeder- en dogterkerke en versoek die verantwoordelike kerkbesture om meer sulke aangeleenthede te skep. Sulke geleenthede kan gevind word in gesamentlike konferensies, biddae, en byeenkomste vir onderlinge versterking en spesiale geleenthede wat in 'n plaaslike gemeente mag voorkom.”

Duidelik word die behoefte aan geestelike gemeenskap hier gevoel.

In hierdie verband moet die aandag ook gevestig word op die bevinding van die Kerkeberaad van Cottesloe in 1960, waar oor ons onderwerp die volgende besluit geneem is:

„Niemand wat in Jesus Christus glo, mag uitgesluit word uit enige Kerk op grond van sy kleur of ras nie. Die geestelike eenheid van alle mense wat in Christus is, moet sigbaar tot uiting kom in handelinge van gemeenskaplike aanbidding en getuïenis, in ge-

meenskap en konsultasie oor sake van gemeenskaplike belang.”

Besluit Kaapse Sinode 1961

Ten slotte vestig ek die aandag op die besluit van die Kaapse Sinode in 1961 in verband met kontak tussen lidmate van die moeder- en dogterkerke:

„Die Sinode wil dan ook alle gemeentes van ons Kerk aanmoedig om, met die nodige versigtigheid en Christelike liefde weë te soek waarlangs ons as Christene en lidmate met dieselfde belydenis mekaar beter kan leer ken, beter kan leer saamwerk en beter kan leer saam bid in belang van Gods Koninkryk.”

Hoewel die Sinode dus hom nie wou vereenselwig met die besluite van Cottesloe nie, het hy tog hierdie mooi en bemoedigende besluit geneem waaruit dit duidelik is dat die moederkerk die behoefte aan geestelike gemeenskap met sy lidmate uit die dogterkerke voel. Mag hierdie besluit tog net in konkrete dade gestalte kry. In beginsel is die moederkerk dus ten gunste van geestelike gemeenskap, maar in die praktyk kom daar ongelukkig nog nie veel van tereg nie. Ons pleit met u, ons moederkerk, voeg die daad spoedig by die woord. Want talle besluite soos o.a. hierbo aangehaal, sê vir ons duidelik hoe u voel; maar besluite alleen is nie genoeg nie. Ons verwag van u konkrete dade!

Vervolgens wil ek pleit vir geestelike gemeenskap tussen lidmate van die moeder- en sendingkerk.

3.) Op grond van die praktiese uitvoerbaarheid daarvan

Daar is in werklikheid geen wesenlike verskil tussen die Moederkerk en die N.G. Sendingkerk nie. Ons voertaal is Afrikaans; ons lees dieselfde Bybel; ons gebruik dieselfde liturgiese formuliere; ons staan op dieselfde belydenisgrondslag; ons eredienste is in hooftrekke op dieselfde manier ingerig. Ons het dieselfde kultuur; baie van ons lidmate het sosiaal en ekonomies reeds ver ontwikkel; daar vloei baie bloed in ons are; geografies grens ons gemeentes saam.

Ook geestelik het baie van ons lidmate ver gevorder; daar is talle toegewyde Christene wat opreg die Here dien en aktief is in sy diens deur middel van die kerkraad, die Sondagsskool, die C.S.B., die Kinderbond, die C.J.V. en die brigade.

Kleurling-Christene toon diepe insig in geestelike sake, getuig spontaan vir die Here en het liefde vir die Woord van God en glo in die gebed. Daar is absoluut geen hindernis in die weg van geestelike gemeenskap van die kant van die Kleurling-Christene nie. Die probleem lê by die blanke Christene met sy kleurvooroordeel. Die Sendingkerk se deure staan vir die blanke oop. U kan u in sy kerk kom verryk, maar die deure van die Moederkerk staan nog nie oop vir die Kleurling-Christene nie. Die verantwoordelikheid is derhalwe op die Moederkerk om alles in haar vermoë te doen om die struikelblokke in die weg van geestelike gemeenskap tussen moeder en dogter uit die weg te ruim.

Ek pleit ook vir geestelike gemeenskap tussen blanke en nie-blanke Christene.

4.) Op grond van die Heilige Skrif

Dit is duidelik dat die beleid van die Kaap vanaf die begin op Skrifuurlike gronde gerus het. Die Sinode van 1857 het skeiding toegelaat op praktiese gronde. Die besluite en uitsprake van die laaste jare impliseer ook almal die Skrifuurlikheid van geestelike gemeenskap tussen Christene en verskillende rasse.

Elkeen wat die Skrif onbevooroordeeld lees, kan dan ook nie tot 'n ander gevolgtrekking kom nie. Die Christendom is die nuwe volk van God (I Petrus 2:9) en alle Christene behoort tot die familie van Jesus Christus.

• To be continued.

• Vervolg op bladsy 4

Dietrich Bonhoeffer and young Christians

• Cont. from page 1.

- b. War is the work of the evil powers of this world and is, therefore, the work of the enemies of God and similar to diseases, catastrophes, etc.;
- c. War reveals the true nature of a world which has fallen under the law of death.
2. Those who attempt to justify war usually do so in three ways which are related to the threefold nature of war delineated above:
 - a. Those who consciously decide to wage war maintain that it is a means of maintaining the security of the state and of bringing about future peace. This is a "moral" justification of war.
 - b. Those who regard themselves as realists maintain that war is an irresistible event over which no man has any power. This is a fatalistic justification of war.
 - c. Those who regard themselves as being more positive realists maintain that war reveals an heroic world of sacrifice. This is an idealistic justification of war.
3. Secular pacifism replies as follows to this 3-fold attempt to justify war:
 - a. The peace and welfare for which humanity seeks cannot be brought about by means of war. There is no moral justification for waging war.
 - b. An organisation must be created which will approach problems arising between the nations in a reasonable and rational way, thus holding back the irrational powers making for war.

c. War must be suppressed so that the world will be revealed as a good world.

4. The Christian Church replies as follows both to those who attempt to justify war and to the secular pacifist:

a. The human will must be confronted with the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill". God does not exempt any of us from obedience to His Commandments. If we are disobedient to God we will be guilty before God, the God of the Sermon on the Mount who is not only our Saviour but our Judge.

To those who object: "The state must be maintained", the Church replies: "Thou shalt not kill".

To those who object: "War creates peace" — the Church replies: "It is a lie! War creates destruction!"

To those who object: "The nation must defend itself!" — the Church replies: "Have you put your faith in God for protection, remembering that to have faith in God means to obey His commandments?"

To those who object: "My love for my neighbour compels me to defend him!" — the Church replies: "He who loves God must keep all His commandments!"

To those who ask: "What shall I do?" — the Church replies: "Believe in God and be obedient to Him!"

But to the secular pacifists the Church replies: "The motive behind our actions is not primarily the welfare of humanity, but obedience to the

commandments of God. Ever if war was to the good of mankind the commandments of God would still have to be obeyed by us."

b. We will not brake the power of evil by means of an organization, but only by prayer and fasting; (Marc. 9:29). Any other attitude underestimates these powers and regards them as natural or materialistic ones. The spirits of hell will only be banished by Christ himself. This does not imply fatalism nor organization, but prayer! Although they too are subject to the power of evil those men who feel their responsibility for bringing about peace will be made aware of the fact that the solution to this problem will only come about through God's help. Prayer is stronger than any organization. It is easy to hide the burden of evil and the struggle involved behind an organisation. (See Eph. 6:12).

c. Because war reveals the true nature of the world as being under the domination of the law of death, it also reveals that the abolition of war would only be the suppression of a horrible symptom — it would not destroy the rest of the evil.

It is not pacifism that is victory which overcomes the world, but faith which expects everything from God and trusts in the coming of Christ and his Kingdom. (1 John 5:6). Only then will the cause of the evil, the devil and his demons, be overcome.