

STATEMENT BY THE ACTING GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES,
MR JOHN REES, ON THE ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE TRANSKEIAN GOVERNMENT ON ITS INTENTION TO
BAN THE METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTH AFRICA, DATED JANUARY 13, 1978

We are shocked by the announcement yesterday that the Transkei intends to ban the Methodist Church of South Africa.

Our initial response must be limited until further details come to hand.

The Methodist Church is a member of the South African Council of Churches and as such we feel compelled to react to this move by the Transkei.

We totally reject the reasons given by the Transkei for this step, especially in the light of the fact that, at this stage, it appears that the Transkeian Government did not consult, in depth, with the National leadership of the Methodist Church of South Africa.

The move by the Transkei can only bring about a rupture of the fellowship within Methodism specifically, and the Church as a whole in South Africa.

As such, we call on the Transkeian Government to reconsider its decision and to resolve any problems it may have with the National leadership of the Methodist Church of South Africa.

SECTION V : DOCUMENTATION

THE EMERGENCY MEETING OF THE PRESIDENT AND THE SECRETARY OF CONFERENCE AND THE DISTRICT CHAIRMEN OF THE METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTH AFRICA, HELD ON JANUARY 16, 1978, IN JOHANNESBURG, RELEASED THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT:

The Prime Minister of Transkei has declared that his Cabinet intends to pass a law through the Transkei Parliament banning in Transkei the Methodist Church of South Africa. An Act is also envisaged which will establish a Methodist Church of Transkei with Circuits in Transkei and South Africa.

The reason given is that the Conference of 1977 did not send a message of greetings to the Transkei President. This has unfortunately been regarded as an affront to "the integrity and dignity of the Head of State, Government and the people of Transkei".

The growing complexity of the political situation in the nations served by this Church has made it more and more difficult for the Conference to send letters of greetings in their traditional form. The Conference, therefore, decided to discontinue the practice of sending these letters. In the debate on this issue, some of those who spoke said that they themselves did not recognise Transkei. This, however, was not the issue before the Conference and the independence of Transkei was not debated.

We strongly reject suggestions that the Methodist Church of South Africa takes instructions from the World Council of Churches or any other body. The Methodist Church of South Africa is completely autonomous, making its decisions in the light of its understanding of the Will of God as revealed through Holy Scripture.

The Methodist Church of South Africa has a long and very honourable history of loyal service in Transkei and other parts of Southern Africa. We believe that we can serve the people of Southern Africa best in the name of God by remaining undivided.

We have already been in conversation with the Prime Minister of Transkei, seeking an interview with him. He is arranging for us to meet his Cabinet Ministers and thereafter he will be willing to receive us. The President and the Secretary of the Conference, the Rev F H T Fikeni (Chairman of the Clarkebury District which incorporates most of Transkei) and the Rev S G Pitts (Chairman of the South-Western Transvaal District and past President of the Conference) will make up the deputation.

We commend this matter to the prayers of our people. Let us continue to serve our Lord Jesus Christ and to proclaim His Gospel, recognising Him as the Head of His people in every nation.

/STATEMENT BY THE ACTING GENERAL

SECTION V : DOCUMENTATION

STATEMENT BY THE REV ABEL HENDRICKS, PRESIDENT OF THE METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTH AFRICA, ON A MEETING BETWEEN A DELEGATION OF THE METHODIST CHURCH WITH THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE MINISTER OF POSTS, COMMUNICATIONS AND TRANSPORT, OF THE TRANSKEI, HELD ON FEBRUARY 16, 1978, IN UMTATA

DATE OF RELEASE OF STATEMENT : FEBRUARY 17, 1978.

Discussions took place yesterday on the question of the announced intention of the Transkeian Government to ban the Methodist Church of South Africa in that country. The discussions lasted for about two hours.

The Methodist delegation consisted of myself, the Rev Cyril Wilkins, secretary of the Conference, the Rev Stanley G Pitts, chairman of the South Western Transvaal district, and the Rev Ferrier Fikeni, Chairman of the Clarkebury district, which incorporates most of the Transkei.

There were full discussions held on the decision of the Methodist Conference in Benoni last year, not to send greetings to Heads of State any longer. It was alleged that this indicated that the Church had become political and that this accounted for its refusal to recognise the independence of the Transkei.

However, I and my delegation made it clear that this decision in no way dealt with the question of recognition or non-recognition of any State. Any comment which may have been made about this State was incidental to the debate during Conference. The question of recognition or non-recognition was not debated by the Conference.

We also firmly denied allegations by the Transkei that the Methodist Church of South was the instrument of the World Council of Churches.

No funds are paid by the Methodist Church to the WCC or are received from it. In addition, we strongly oppose the WCC support of terrorist organisations and we firmly reject the use of violence as a means for political change.

In our discussions with the Prime Minister, we pointed out that while the church must indeed remain aloof from party politics, it must nevertheless, speak a Prophetic Word on its understanding of Biblical teaching - especially insofar as this affects any matter concerning the welfare of human beings.

We explained that in developing nations autonomy had in the past been granted to local churches. Such an example has occurred for instance, when the Methodist Church in Rhodesia was given autonomy from the Methodist Conference in Britain. However, the initiative in this case was from the church and not from the State.

Any church created by the initiative of any government can rightly only be regarded as political.

I must point out further that the allegations that the Methodist Church has become a political organisation is totally without foundation. Coercion which created a separate church as a result of that contention would, therefore, be based on a false premise.

/After all, scripture

After all, Scripture and tradition show that a church comes into being as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit, and that its only foundation can be in the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

The Transkeian Prime Minister undertook to refer the delegations' representations to his Cabinet.

At this point, it must honestly be stated that things did not go as well as one had hoped.

The situation is most unhappy and disturbing.

It must be emphasised that our representations and our concern are made in the light of our pastoral responsibility to the Methodist people in the Transkei.

Furthermore, we cannot, at this point in time, know what the next step will be. For the time being, we have to await the outcome of a meeting on Tuesday February 21, of all Transkeian Methodist ministers to be held in Umtata.

In this regard, one must unhappily report a development not of our making. On February 10, the Chairman of the Clarkebury District, the Rev Ferrier Fikeni, received the following telegram from the Transkei Minister of Justice, Mr G M Matanzima:

"Prime Minister has directed that all church meetings of Methodist Ministers in Transkei be for Transkeians only. Foreigners attending will be dealt with".

This issue was also discussed with the Prime Minister. We were told that this ban had been imposed because it was believed that the church had become political.

We informed the Minister that this step was deeply regretted and we pointed out that it was a matter of most grievous and serious concern when the President of the Conference was prevented from sharing in a church consultation with his brethren and people, thus depriving him of caring for them pastorally.

We were referred by the Prime Minister to the Minister of Justice whom we met for between 10 - 15 minutes.

He told us that he had reason to fear that there might be violence at the meeting to be held on Tuesday February 21.

We informed him that we saw no reason to fear or expect violence in a church consultation.

The Minister said he had to take the matter seriously and said he was especially concerned about any possible danger to the President of the Conference.

The ban would stay.

Needless to say, we view this as a terrible situation.

/SACBC's RESOLUTION ON MILITARY CHAPLAINS.....

SECTION IV : DOCUMENTATION

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE METHODIST CHURCH, THE REV. ABEL HENDRICKS, ISSUED ON FEBRUARY 22, 1978

A non-violent and orderly meeting was held yesterday in Umata by 110 clergy and leading lay people of the Methodist Church of South Africa in the Transkei.

The result of that meeting clearly showed that the majority of Methodist leadership in the Transkei wished to remain part of the Methodist Church of South Africa.

I was prevented from attending this meeting in terms of a ban placed on any foreigners attending a meeting of clergy anywhere in the Transkei. The ban was imposed by the Minister of Lands, Mr George Matabane to the Chairman of the Clarkebury District, Rev. Fannie Pixani, dated on February 10.

Two resolutions came before yesterday's meeting.

One motion called for the meeting to support the Prime Minister's intention to ban the Methodist Church of South Africa in Transkei. This was defeated by 30 votes.

The other resolution read: "That in the light of the eagerness of the Prime Minister of Lesotho for the re-acceptance of the Church to his decision to ban the Methodist Church of Transkei, this meeting decides that it is still part of the Methodist Church of South Africa and cannot make a formal decision and therefore reflects its wishes to the existing Conference of its Synod".

This motion was passed by 70 votes to 30. 40 were abstained. It is interesting to note that the voting was completely open by means of secret ballot. It was completely open.

Members at the meeting were asked to stand to indicate which way they voted.

The meeting also decided to send a deputation to see the Prime Minister in the light of this resolution.

This deputation will be led by the Rev. Fannie Pixani. Other members are the Rev. Tom Mshane, Secretary, East Presbytery of Methodist Conference, Jathan Mushi, Rev. Wellington Caba, Dr. Elliott Ngqo, Mr. Kholiso Caba, Mr. J. Ban and a Mr. Larkat.

The delegation was due to approach the Prime Minister's office this morning to seek an interview.

The meeting is a clear indication from the Methodists in Transkei that Methodism does not want to see its relationship fractured by political action.

I trust that Chief Matanzima and his cabinet will respect the decision of the Methodist leadership in Transkei and not give such a big nod to his announcement to ban the Church.

/A TRIBUTE TO MR ROBERT

SECTION V : DOCUMENTATIONSTATEMENT BY THE REV ABEL HENDRICKS, PRESIDENT OF THE METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTH AFRICA, TUESDAY, APRIL 11, 1978

A meeting was held in Durban on April 7, between myself, the secretary of Conference, the Rev S G Pitts, and the interim committee of the Clarkebury district, charged with making representations to Transkei's Prime Minister regarding that country's announced intention of banning our church in that land. A full and frank discussion was held, involving all aspects of the threat, and the implications which such a ban would hold for the Methodist church in Transkei itself.

In addition, the Clarkebury district interim committee gave a full report on their meeting with Chief K. D. Matanzima.

In the light of these discussions it must be reported that there have been no meaningful new developments. It remains clear that Transkei's Prime Minister intends proceeding with enabling legislation to create the Independent Transkei Methodist Church, thereby banning the Methodist Church of South Africa.

The Clarkebury district sub-committee will continue to negotiate with Chief Matanzima on this matter.

The Prime Minister indicated however, that his proposed Bill dealing with the Methodist Church will not be gazetted nor could legislation be enforced until the courts of our Church have been able to consider the situation and have come to some decision.

The Clarkebury district synod of the Church will undoubtedly deal with this matter, as will our Conference which meets in East London in October.

There is, however, one further development - not of our making - which needs to be reported.

The Methodist Church of South Africa owns considerable property including schools and hostels being used by the Transkei Government in Transkei. However, the Transkei Government owes rentals for some considerable time on these and has also paid nothing since January, when Chief Matanzima first made his announcement that he intended to ban our Church.

If this is intended as an attempt to provoke the Methodist Church of South Africa, then Chief Matanzima and his Government are making an error of judgement.

We in the Methodist Fellowship do not desire confrontation. We desire nothing other than reconciliation and the opportunity to be of service to people wherever they are or may be.

/These schools and hostels

These schools and hostels, as Chief Matanzima well knows through personal experience, have been of inestimable value to Transkei for many decades.

I find it strange in the extreme therefore, that a Government should refuse to pay rentals which it owes or to offer any reasonable explanation for its refusal to do so.

We in the Methodist Church have always done our best to meet our financial commitments. We believe it to be the duty of any Government which claims allegiance to the Christian faith, to do the same.

It is a disaster for the countless ordinary Methodists in Transkei who will be confused at the mind-boggling non-theological action of some of their ministers and some of their lay leaders who have cut their ties with Methodism in Southern Africa.

It is a disaster for those Methodists belonging to the churches whose ministers have remained loyal to the Methodist Church of South Africa for they will now be prevented from worshipping God in their churches.

Disaster it may be - churches and many have been ruptured by this political action. But the Church of Christ continues in spite of man-made disasters.

I would call on the Government of Transkei to reconsider its position immediately in the interests of Christian unity and of theological and Biblical truth; in the interest of obeying God rather than man.

Nevertheless, in spite of their unilateral action divorcing themselves from the Methodist Church of South Africa I would say to them and emphasise that the door of negotiation and reconciliation is still open, that we still uphold them in our prayers.

Insofar as the ministers are concerned who remained loyal to the Methodist Church of South Africa at today's debate meeting, and any others who too remained loyal, I want to give the firm assurance that the Methodist Church of South Africa will stand by them in all respects.

Finally, at this hour of address and crisis for this branch of the Church of Christ, I call on all Methodists and their ministers to observe this Sunday as a special day of prayer for the church in Transkei. I also call on my fellow ministers in other churches to pray with us about this matter which, although it affects only one denomination at this stage, in fact affects the entire Church of Christ.

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