

*Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk 1982*  
A STATEMENT ON APARTHEID  
AND A CONFESSION OF FAITH

**Reconciliation and Apartheid**

*Proposition*

The political and ecclesiastical order of South Africa is an order within which irreconcilability has been elevated to a fundamental social principle within which, in spite of supposed good intentions, the greed and prejudice of the powerful and the privileged are entrenched at the cost of those who are powerless and without privileges.

*Responsibility*

Apartheid is a system within which people are separated from one another, and kept apart from one another.

The possibility that these groups can be brought together and that peaceful co-existence can replace tension and conflict is ruled out as a matter of principle. Therefore, ethnic groups, to the extent that this is possible, must be compelled, by law if necessary,

remain separate from one another, because the bringing of these groups of people together will necessarily result in conflict and the mutual threatening of one another.

The use of the phrase 'separate development' in an attempt to replace the hated word 'apartheid' in essence results in no change to the basic point of departure: the development of each group must still take place apart from that of other groups, because the development of one group is regarded as a threat to that of the other. Similarly, communal development is regarded as a threat to individual development.

In the light of this unchanged point of departure, it is not surprising that when we are requested to give more attention to the positive aspects of apartheid, this repeatedly breaks down in the face of reality, which is that the white section of the population always benefits most from such development.

The choice of the term 'irreconcilability' in the decision of the Synod of 1978 was intentional. The Synod translates its witness into its own language, that of the Church and theology. *Irreconcilability* always stands in contradiction to *reconciliation*, the main artery of the Christian Gospel is also the main artery of the existence and the proclamation of the Church.

The visible effect of reconciliation between God and man is the existence of the Church as a *reconciling community of people*, a unified community. The message of reconciliation is entrusted to this Church. The invitation is extended to the world and to all people who inhabit it to reconcile themselves to God and to one another. In Christ, the Church says, there is new hope, there are new possibilities for the world. Sinfulness and hatred, enmity and separation need not be the last word, but rather reconciliation and peace. Christ has made this possible.

The Church will always bear witness to the fact that no order of communal living which fundamentally affirms the irreconcilability of people and groups of people can be regarded as acceptable. Such a point of departure binds people to their past history of enmity and hate—it invalidates the Gospel.

We do not simply present one or more Bible texts. It is always easy to use biblical texts to one's own end, even to the extent that it was possible for many years for it to be said that apartheid is Scriptural, and, indeed, on the ground of only two texts: the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9 and Acts 17:26).

No! The touchstone for apartheid is the essential biblical message of reconciliation. If it fails here, a few disparate biblical texts

cannot save it. In fact, the traditional exposition of these texts then needs to be fundamentally questioned.

#### The Decision of the 1978 Synod with regard to Apartheid

In addition to the theological proposition regarding irreconcilability, the Synod went further to say that the system which necessarily results from such a policy must inevitably lead and has led to an *increasing polarization between people. It does more than merely keep them apart from one another. It moves them further apart from one another. It polarizes and creates conflict. In turn, this conflict is then used as an alibi to maintain this separation at all costs. So everyone is drawn into this vicious circle - which can only be broken by changing the point of departure.*

#### The Demand of Justice and Self-concern

The decision of the Synod goes further to demonstrate that, in practice, it can be shown undeniably that 'within the system one section of the population, the whites, is privileged, and that as a result of this the Gospel demand of justice for all has not been satisfied'. In a system within which concepts such as the 'own' (*ete*) and the 'separateness' (*afsonderlike*) receive so much attention, people are indeed going to concern themselves essentially with their 'own'. The result is that the powerful and privileged are not willing to share their power and privilege, but rather are tempted to acquire still more for themselves. In conclusion the Synod shows that through the system of apartheid 'it is not only the humanity of the underprivileged sections of the population that is affected but also the humanity of everybody involved within this system'.

#### Racism and Apartheid

Racism is an ideology of racial domination which includes a belief in the inherent, cultural and biological inferiority of certain races and racial groups. It is also a political and an economic system that determines the unequal treatment of these groups at the level of law, structures and institutions. Racism does not merely concern the attitude of people, it is also structural. It does not merely concern the *feeling* of inferiority in relation to another person or group, but the *system* of political, social and economic domination. In a racist situation certain groups of people are excluded because of their race from participation in the political decision-making process, from participation in the economic decision-making processes, and as a result, they are discriminated against both

economically and socially. This exclusion is, however, not merely on the basis of race and colour, it is exclusively aimed at the domination of the other. Where this racism is regimentally imposed in Church and communal structures it denies the community of believers the possibility of being human and it denies the reconciling and the humanizing work of Christ.

In South Africa apartheid in the Church and in society leans to a significant extent on the theological and moral justification of the system. Apartheid is therefore a pseudo-religious ideology as well as a political policy. It allows itself to be validated within the realms of both Church and state, and in so doing it influences and structurally controls the entire South African society.

#### Article 9 of the Apostles' Creed

The specific character of the pseudo-religious ideology of apartheid makes it practically impossible for the confession 'I believe in one, holy, catholic Church, the community of the saints' to determine the structures of the Church. In reality, the secular Gospel of apartheid structures the way in which the Church is realized and the way in which Church unity is manifest within the Dutch Reformed Churches in South Africa.

#### Resolutions

Because the secular Gospel of apartheid threatens in the deepest possible way the witness of reconciliation in Jesus Christ and the unity of the Church of Jesus Christ in its very essence, the NG Mission Church in South Africa declares that this constitutes a *status confessionis* for the Church of Jesus Christ (A *status confessionis* means that we regard this matter as a concern about which it is impossible to differ without it affecting the integrity of our communal confession as Reformed Churches.)

We declare that apartheid (separate development) is a sin, that the moral and theological justification of it makes a mockery of the Gospel, and that its consistent disobedience to the Word of God is a theological heresy.

The decision of Ottawa and the decisions with regard to racism and therefore apartheid (separate development) cannot be regarded as an alternative to the decision of the Synod of 1976, but rather as a consequence.

According to the conviction of the Synod the NGK believes in the ideology of apartheid, which is in direct conflict with the evangelical message of reconciliation and the visible unity of the Church.

reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God;

-that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of the Church.

Therefore we reject any doctrine

-which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the Church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate Church.

-which professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace whilst believers of the same confession are in effect alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in despair of reconciliation.

-which denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a precious gift is a sin;

-which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the Church.

3. We believe,

that God has entrusted to his Church the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ, that the Church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the Church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker; that the Church is witness both by word and deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells.

that God by his life-giving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of unreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity, that God, by his life-giving Word and Spirit will enable his people to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world.

-that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity;

-that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the Gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the Gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.

Therefore, we reject any doctrine which, in such a situation, sanctions in the name of the Gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and colour and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ.

4. We believe:

-that God has revealed himself as the One who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among men, that in a world full of injustice and enmity he is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged and that he calls his Church to follow him in this, that he brings justice to the oppressed

and gives bread to the hungry; that he frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind; that he supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly; that for him pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and widows in their suffering; that he wishes to teach his people to do what is good and to seek the right; that the Church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which means, among other things, that the Church shall witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that 'justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream'.

—that the Church as God's possession must stand where he stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged, that in following Christ the Church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

Therefore we reject any ideology which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the Gospel.

5. We believe that, in obedience to Jesus Christ, its only Head, the Church is called to confess and to do all this, even though authorities and laws forbid them, and even though punishment and suffering be the consequence.

*Jesus is Lord*

To the one and only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be the honour and the glory for ever and ever

#### **The Relationship between the NG Mission Church and the NGK in terms of the Status Confessionis**

1. The Synod resolves that its decision regarding the *status confessionis* be officially handed to the NGK at its General Synod sitting in Pretoria and that it also be sent to the different regional synods.

2. The NG Mission Church regrets that its relationship with the NGK is seriously threatened. The Synod is of the opinion that the road of reconciliation can only be walked if the NGK confesses its guilt regarding the moral and theological grounding of apartheid, and concretely demonstrates her repentance by working out what the consequences of this confession of guilt mean in both Church and state. In so doing the NG Mission Church does not deny its own guilt in the situation and declares itself ready to walk in love and forgiveness with the NGK in seeking to develop and not to break the relationship with that Church. We ask the NGK to work urgently together with us to make this possible. The NG Mission Church's most sincere prayer is that the NGK will walk this way of conversion and will not allow the bond between us to be broken.

3. The Synod resolves that the NG Mission Church will with

pastoral compassion fulfil her role as prophet and priest toward the NGK in South Africa. With all the weight and the channels at her disposal she will zealously endeavour to lead the NGK to the point where this Church will acknowledge her share and guilt in the realization and establishment of the pseudo-religious ideology of apartheid and a political policy which has deprived and continues to deprive people of their humanity, and has resulted and continues to result in numerous acts of sorrow and suffering for countless people in this country.

4. The synod resolves that the NG Mission Church should call on the NGK to hear the words of II Chronicles 7:13 and 14. The Lord says: "Whenever I hold back the rain or send locusts to eat up the crops or send an epidemic on my people, if they pray to me and repent and turn away from the evil they have been doing, then I will hear them in heaven, forgive their sins, and make their land prosperous again."

Therefore in deep compassion and humility we bow before the Lord with our own guilt and complicity in the unreconciled relationship between believers in our family and we confess that we have withheld this truth from you in many different ways. We do not condemn you, so that we ourselves may not be condemned.

We owe you nothing other than love because therein alone is the fulfilment of the law. See Romans 14:8, "Be under obligation to no one—the only obligation you have is to love one another. Whoever does this has obeyed the law." Also I John 4:7, "Dear friends, let us love one another, because love comes from God. Whoever loves is a child of God and knows God."

We address you as our sister in this language, because the Gospel of love which you preach to us continues to be our guide and source of comfort.

*Sola Scriptura!*

*Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk, 1982*

STATEMENT ON THE WARC DECISION

At a meeting held on 17 September 1982, a commission of the General Assembly of the Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk received a report from its representatives on the meeting of the WARC which was held in Ottawa from 16-27 August 1982. The report dealt both with the proceedings and with the specific decisions of this meeting of the World Alliance. In the light of this report the commission has responded to the implications of the decisions of the World Alliance with regard both to the future position of the Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk as a member of the World Alliance and to the motives and tendencies which led to this decision.

From the report which we have received and from the documents of the meeting at our disposal it is clear to us that the World Alliance has, by and large, departed from its Reformed basis in favour of a theology which

1. Has not dealt earnestly with the objective reality and existence of the Triune God independent of this world and above time.
2. Politicizes and socializes the person and work of Jesus Christ in a biased manner
3. Assails the authority of Holy Scripture as the only source from which one can come to know God and as the only norm for faith and life, and superficially manipulates it by means of association and speculation in order to provide grounds for a theology which has little to do with the God who reveals himself in the Holy Scriptures.
4. Denies the totality and the radicality of sin by a naive exemption of 'those who are sinned against' as being less defiled, and as limited to categories which are made to synchronize easily with the political views out of which the theology arises.
5. Neglects the call to faith in Jesus Christ as the only Saviour in favour of a summons to solidarity with a so-called liberation struggle.

This shift in the theological point of departure of the World Alliance, which has come about not suddenly but indeed gradually, and was already clear in the pronouncements of the Nairobi meeting in 1970, has now taken on further concrete form in the decision by which the Alliance has degraded the Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk to second-class membership. By this decision the World Alliance of Reformed Churches wants to prescribe to us how to arrange the life and practice of our Church and what our attitude ought to be towards socio-political problems in our land while, at the same time, it holds before us by implication a political policy which is said to be good and right.

We reject this claim by the Alliance:

1. To deprive us of our obligation and privilege to organize our Church life in a manner which is constantly tested against the demands of Holy Scripture, and to strive for the best practical way in which to fulfil our apostolic calling to be the Church of Jesus Christ giving due consideration to our experience within the unique South African ethnic situation [*volkere-situasie*].
2. To prescribe for us a political choice whereby we become a partner of those forces which, with disregard to the truth, with misuse of theology, and with reckless promotion of revolution, promote the objectives of godless communist imperialism. We claim the privilege as a Church of Jesus Christ to make our own choice

concerning what we regard to be responsible politics within our situation with full responsibility towards God and with a good conscience in relation to him.

3. To make a dogmatic pronouncement, with arrogant hypocrisy, concerning the political policy and circumstances in South Africa in response to misrepresentations, malicious exaggeration, and the calculated suppression of specific information.

The Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk continues to maintain that its regulations concerning membership do not constitute a doctrine, but must be seen as a practical regulation concerning the peaceful furtherance of the Gospel. We are further convinced that a political policy of separate development and equal opportunities is not in conflict with Holy Scripture. The irrefutable fact is that this policy has greatly improved the quality of life and brought more freedom to our peoples than in many countries of the Third World, not to mention Marxist countries. Our question to the world still stands: where is a land with a similar ethnic composition which can serve as a model for our situation? As long as the World Alliance sings in the same choir as international politics with its questionable motives, we cannot treat its judgment seriously. We do not feel challenged at the level of conscience by such a condemnation.

The Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk cannot comply with the requirements set by the World Alliance and it, therefore, has no choice but to withdraw. This Church will continue to determine its course in response to an **earnest investigation of Holy Scripture** and in consideration of its **experience gained through the ages**, both with regard to its **own internal policies** and also with regard to South African politics. We cannot take an apologetic attitude toward an ecumenical body that allows itself to be misused in this way. Over against such a position, and before Almighty God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we stand continually in deep repentance for our sins and we endeavour day by day to improve and change. The Gospel itself continues to bring about change and we wish to offer no resistance to this, but we must offer resistance to a false Gospel which offers people little more than political power as an ultimate destination, and in so doing has already brought nameless misery to millions of people in the world.

We thus hereby inform the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and everyone who may be concerned with this decision that we have terminated our membership of the Alliance.

In making this decision we do not wish to indicate that we intend to live without any ecumenical relationships. We have, however, repeatedly found that the World Alliance of Reformed Churches is not a useful instrument for genuine ecumenical contact. Concerning the future, we are still prepared to engage in dialogue concerning our communal task and calling with Christians and fellow believers both in our own country and throughout the world.

*Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk, 1982*

RESOLUTION ON THE WARC DECISION

*Die Kerkbode* (27 October 1982) summed up the debate concerning the WARC membership of the NGK by indicating that the Synod considered three basic responses: 'To maintain membership for ecumenical reasons, to immediately terminate membership, not to terminate membership at this time, because this would be to play into the hands of those seeking to isolate the NGK. The last-mentioned option has become the official position of the Church after a two-thirds majority could not be obtained in support of the summary termination of relations which was being asked for.' The resolution which was ultimately adopted reads as follows:

The Synod notes with regret the course of events and the decisions of the WARC which mean that

- a one-sided picture of the NGK has been presented to the member churches in Ottawa,

- a shocking judgment by the WARC concerning the NGK has been executed in a manner and on grounds which were not made allowance for in the constitution of the WARC (at the time when the NGK became a member), and in that way the membership of the NGK has been terminated,

- certain conditions are imposed on the NGK, which must be complied with before it can again be accepted as a full member;

- these decisions of the WARC are undoubtedly taken from a standpoint of liberation theology, which according to the NGK is undoubtedly in certain essential respects in conflict with the Bible and Reformed theology.

The NGK is placed in an extremely difficult position, and is left with no alternative but to resolve as follows:

- that the NGK does not willingly accept the termination of its membership, and

- that the NGK, under these circumstances, for practical purposes regards itself as no longer being a full member of the WARC.

It was also decided that this Church would no longer accept its financial responsibilities to the WARC, and the moderation will communicate these decisions officially to the WARC.

*Die Kerkbode* seems to have captured the mood of the Synod in quoting the moderator, Ds Kobus Potgieter, as saying immediately prior to the vote that the question amounted to whether they 'resign now, or a little later'

The Synod also issued the following statement

*Racism is a sin*

Because the New Testament affirms the principle of equality (Report 31.1) and the actual differentiation (Report 13.4, 13.7 and 23) of all people and nations, each with its own right of existence (Report 9), as well as the unity of the entire human family (Report 8 and 31.2), and because the commandment to love one's neighbour, which also manifests itself in justice (Report 13.9), is the ethical norm for ordering human relations (Report 13.8), the general Synod rejects all racism as unscriptural and as sin (cf. The Heidelberg Catechism, Sunday 40), because it regards and treats some nations as superior and others as inferior. The Synod gives further expression to its conviction that race-consciousness and the love of one's own nation is not sinful, but when race and/or nation become absolutized, we are dealing with racism and that is sinful. [Report is the NGK publication *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*.]

*United Congregational Church of Southern Africa, 1982*

RESOLUTION ON APARTHEID

Assembly endorses the resolution of ABRECSA taken at the Conference at Hammanskraal from 26-30 October 1981, namely, 'We are not against dialogue with the white Dutch Reformed Churches. However, we cannot engage in dialogue with the white Dutch Reformed Churches as long as

(a) they continue not only to talk from within the frame-work of their acceptance of "apartheid", but also to give it a moral and theological justification,

(b) they continue to use the instruments of power at their disposal to manipulate such discussions to suit their own ends,

(c) they continue to refuse to declare "apartheid" as sinful and to confess their complicity in the suffering and oppression of our people.'