

# THE COTTESLOE DECLARATION (1960)

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One of the major crises for the churches in South Africa came with the Cottesloe Consultation in 1960. On this occasion the church's role as regards racism was put under the spotlight by delegates of the World Council of Churches and representatives of South African member churches. After some far-reaching decisions were taken by this consultation there was a strong reaction from especially the Afrikaansspeaking churches. At synods held in 1960 the Ned Geref Churches and the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika decided to resign from the World Council of Churches:

## **PART 1**

We have met as delegates from the member churches in South Africa of the World Council of Churches, together with representatives of the World Council itself, to seek under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to understand the complex problems of human relationships in this country, and to consult with one another on our common task and responsibility in the light of the Word of God. Our worship, Bible study, discussion and personal contacts have led us to a heightened appreciation of one another's convictions and actions. Our next task will be to report to our several churches, realising that the ultimate significance of our meeting will consist in the witness and decisions of the churches themselves in consequence of these consultations.

The general theme of our seven days together has been the Christian attitude towards race relations. We are united in rejecting all unjust discrimination. Nevertheless, widely divergent convictions have been expressed on the basic issues of apartheid. They range on the one hand from the judgment that it is unacceptable in principle, contrary to the Christian calling and unworkable in practice, to the conviction on the other hand that a policy of differentiation can be defended from the Christian point of view, that it provides the only realistic solution to the problems of race relations and is therefore in the best interests of the various population groups.

Although proceeding from these divergent views, we are nevertheless able to make the following affirmations concerning human need and justice, as they affect relations among the races of this country. In the nature of the case the agreements here recorded do not - and we do not pretend that they do - represent in full the convictions of the member churches.

The Church of Jesus Christ, by its nature and calling, is deeply concerned with the welfare of all people, both as individuals and as members of social groups. It is called to minister to human need in whatever circumstances and forms it appears, and to insist that all be done with justice. In its social witness the Church must take cognisance of all attitudes, forces, policies and laws which affect the life of a people; but the Church must proclaim that the final criterion of all social and political action is the principles of Scripture regarding the realisation of all men of a life worthy of their God-given vocation.

We make bold therefore to address this appeal to our churches and to all Christians, calling on them to consider every point where they may unite their ministry on behalf of human being in the spirit of equity.

## **PART II**

1. We recognise that all racial groups who permanently inhabit our country are a part of our total population, and we regard them as indigenous. Members of all these groups have an equal right to make their contribution towards the enrichment of the life of their country and to share in the ensuing responsibilities, rewards and privileges.

2. The present tension in South Africa is the result of a long historical development and all groups bear responsibility for it. This must also be seen in relation to events in other parts of the world. The South African scene is radically affected by the decline of the power of the West and by the desire for self-determination among the peoples of the African continent.

3. The Church has a duty to bear witness to the hope which is in Christianity both to White South Africans in their uncertainty and to non-White South Africans in their frustration.

4. In a period of rapid social change the Church has a special responsibility for fearless witness within society.

5. The Church as the Body of Christ is a unity and within this unity the natural diversity among men is not annulled but sanctified.

6. Non-one who believes in Jesus Christ may be excluded from any church on the grounds of his colour or race. The spiritual unity among all men who are in Christ must find visible expression in acts of common worship and witness, and in fellowship and consultation on matters of common concern.

7. We regard with deep concern the revival in many areas of African society of heathen tribal customs incompatible with Christian beliefs and practice. We believe this reaction is partly the result of a deep sense of frustration and a loss of faith in Western civilisation.

8. The whole Church must participate in the tremendous missionary task which has to be done in South Africa, and which demands a common strategy.
9. Our discussions have revealed that there is not sufficient consultation and communication between the various racial groups which make up our population. There is a special need that a more effective consultation between the Government and leaders accepted by the non-White people of South Africa should be devised. The segregation of racial groups carried through without effective consultation and involving discrimination leads to hardship for members of the groups affected.
10. There are no Scriptural grounds for the prohibition of mixed marriages. The well-being of the community and pastoral responsibility require, however, that due consideration should be given to certain factors which may make such marriages inadvisable.
11. We call attention once again to the disintegrating effects of migrant labour on African life. No stable society is possible unless the cardinal importance of family life is recognised, and, from the Christian standpoint, it is imperative that the integrity of the family be safeguarded.
12. It is now widely recognised that the wages received by the vast majority of the non-White people oblige them to exist well below the generally accepted minimum standard for healthy living. Concerted action is required to remedy this grave situation.
13. The present system of job reservation must give way to a more equitable system of labour which safeguards the interest of all concerned.
14. Opportunities must be provided for the inhabitants of the Bantu areas to live in conformity with human dignity.
15. 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 man, and for this reason a policy which permanently denies to non-White people the right of collaboration in the government of the country of which they are citizens cannot be justified.
16. (a) It is our conviction that there can be no objection in principle to the direct representation of Coloured people in Parliament.  
(b) We express the hope that consideration will be given to the application of this principle in the foreseeable future.
17. In so far as nationalism grows out of a desire for selfrealisation, Christians should understand and respect it. The danger of nationalism is, however, that it may seek to fulfil its aim at the expense of the interests of others and that it can make the nation an absolute value which takes the place of God. The role of the Church must therefore be to help to direct national movements towards just and worthy ends.

## **PART 111**

### **1. Judicial Commission on the Langa and Sharpeville Incidents.**

The Consultation expresses its appreciation for the prompt institution of enquiries into the recent disturbances and requests the Government to publish the findings as soon as possible.

### **2. Justice in Trial.**

It has been noted that during the recent disturbances a great number of people were arrested and detained for several months without being brought to trial. While we agree that abnormal circumstances may arise in any country necessitating a departure from the usual procedure, we would stress the fact that it belongs to the Christian conception of law, justice and freedom that in normal circumstances men should not be punished except after fair trial before open courts for previously defined offences. Any departure from this fundamental principle should be confined to the narrowest limits and only resorted to in the most exceptional circumstances.

### **3. Position of Asians in South Africa.**

We assure the Indian and other Asian elements in the population that they have not been forgotten in our thoughts, discussions and prayers. As Christians we assure them that we are convinced that the same measures of justice claimed here for other population groups also apply to them.

### **4. Freedom of Worship.**

Bearing in mind the urgent need for the pastoral care of non-White people living on their employer's premises, or otherwise unable without great difficulty to reach churches in the recognised townships or locations, the Consultation urges that the State should allow the provision of adequate and convenient facilities for non-White people to worship in urban areas.

The Consultation also urges European congregations to cooperate by making their own buildings available for this purpose whenever practicable.

### **5. Freedom to Preach the Gospel.**

The Church has the duty and right to proclaim the Gospel to whomever it will, in whatever the circumstances, and wherever possible consistent with the general principles governing the right of public meetings in democratic countries. We therefore regard as unacceptable any special legislation which would limit the fulfilment of this task.

#### **6. Relationship of Churches**

The Consultation urges that it be laid upon the conscience of us all that whenever an occasion arises that a church feels bound to criticise another church or church leader it should take the initiative in seeking prior consultation before making any public statement. We believe that in this way reconciliation will be more readily effected and that Christianity will not be brought into disrepute before the world.

#### **7. Mutual Information.**

The Consultation requests that means be found for the regular exchange of all official publications between the member churches for the increase of mutual understanding and information. Furthermore, churches are requested to provide full information to other churches of their procedures in approaching the Government. It is suggested that in approaches to the Government, delegations, combined if possible, multi-racial where appropriate, should act on behalf of the churches.

#### **8. Co-operation in Future.**

Any body which may be formed for co-operation in the future is requested to give its attention to the following:

- (a) A constructive Christian approach to separatist movements;
- (b) The education of the Bantu;
- (c) The training of non-White leaders for positions of responsibility in all spheres of life;
- (d) African literacy and the provision of Christian literature;
- (e) The concept of responsible Christian society in all areas in South Africa, including the Reserves;
- (f) The impact of Islam on Southern Africa.

#### **9. Residential Areas.**

The Consultation urges, with due appreciation of what has already been done in the provision of homes for non-White people, that there should be a greater security of tenure, and that residential areas be planned with an eye to the economic and cultural level of the inhabitants.

10. The Consultation urges the appointment by the Government of a representative commission to examine the migrant labour system, for the Church is painfully aware of the harmful effects of this system on the family life of the Bantu. The Church sees it as special responsibility to advocate a normal family life for the Bantu who spend considerable periods of time, or live permanently, in White areas.

We give thanks to Almighty God for bringing us together for fellowship and prayer and consultation. We resolve to continue in this fellowship, and we have therefore made specific plans to enable us to join in common witness in our country.

We acknowledge before God the feebleness of our often divided witness to our Lord Jesus Christ and our lack of compassion for one another.

We therefore dedicate ourselves afresh to the ministry of reconciliation in Christ.