

## OPEN LETTER - 8 JUNE 1982

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On 8 June (1982) 123 white ministers and theologians of the Ned Geref Kerk family made a statement in the form of an open letter. In this letter they criticised apartheid legislation such as that leading to forced removals, while acknowledging that they were part of white society that accepted the evils of apartheid. They pledged themselves to work and pray for a just society:

Statement on June 8, 1982 by 123 white ministers and theologians of the NG Church Family in which apartheid in politics and church was categorically rejected on Scriptural grounds.

### COVERING LETTER

This open letter is born out of the desire to share our understanding of the meaning of the Gospel in the South African situation. It grew over a period of some months. Our intention is not to imply that the NGK ignores these matters. A number of issues raised here enjoy the serious attention of the church and many of us had the opportunity to be involved in such activities.

Although we hereby wish to express our deep convictions we do not intend it to be considered as the final word but as a contribution to the discussion.

The discussion within the church concerning the meaning of the Bible for the situation in our country is of great importance, and we wish to participate in that debate by way of this letter. We ask the members of the church to read and consider our statement in this spirit.

In the middle of March we handed the letter to the Chairman of the Broad Moderature and the Chief Executive Officer of the General Synod with the request that they advise us how best to bring its contents to the attention of the church, and that it be tabled by the Moderature. After consultation with the members of the Broad Moderature they informed us that according to church policy the letter could not be received. We were further informed that they could not deal with the matter.

We were not in a position to offer all the ministers and ordinands of the NGK an opportunity to sign the letter, and we assume that a number would still wish to do so. These and any lay members of the NGK who wish to associate themselves with this letter are invited to advise any one of the signatories. We hope that this open letter will serve the debate within the family of Dutch Reformed Churches (NGK).

### AN OPEN LETTER TO THE NGK

We, ministers and ordinands of the NGK, state as our conviction that genuine reconciliation in Christ between individuals and groups is the greatest single need in the Church and so also in our country and society. We believe that the Church of Jesus Christ in South Africa has a particular contribution to make in this connection by (1) giving ever more explicit expression to reconciliation and the unity of the church, and (2) by exercising its prophetic calling in respect of society.

#### 1. Concerning reconciliation and the unity of the church

1.1 We are convinced that the primary task of the church in our country is the ministry of reconciliation in Christ.

1.1.1 In the first place this means that it is the inalienable privilege of the church to proclaim the message of reconciliation between God and man. Without this aspect of reconciliation the issue at point would lose its deepest meaning and significance.

1.1.2 It is likewise the inalienable privilege of the church to proclaim simultaneously the message of reconciliation between people - even between those who had formerly been enemies - and to bear witness that for believers Christ has put an end to human enmity and has united us by creating "in himself one new man" (Eph. 2:15, 16).

1.1.3 We confess that the unity of the church is both a gift and an injunction of God. Like reconciliation, it was brought into being by God and it is therefore a fortiori our responsibility to give it visible expression. The church will therefore oppose factors which threaten her unity. This includes factors like heterodoxy, lovelessness, selfrighteousness, exclusivism, prejudice and the giving of preference to personal or group interests.

1.1.4 There is space within the unity of the church for a diversity of languages and cultures. Specifically because of the reconciliation this diversity provides mutual enrichment and not division.

1.1.5 The unity, however, belongs to a different category than diversity. Unity is primary, diversity secondary. The unity is normative and is confessed (the Apostles' Creed and Nicene Creed), the diversity not so.

1.2 This has the following implications, among others, for the concrete existence of the Church in South Africa:

1.2.1 That no particular church (denomination) can afford to do without discussion and fellowship with other churches, or close its doors to others

1.2.2 that the church may lay down no condition for membership other than the confession of true faith in Jesus Christ (Belgic Confession, Art. 27)

1.2.3 that the various churches within the family of the Dutch Reformed Churches (NGK) who in any event adhere to the same Confession of Faith and historically emanated from the same church, ought to do everything within their powers to give visible expression to the unity which they confess.

1.2.4 that with immediate effect, while negotiations for clearer structural unity are under way, all members of churches within the family of Dutch Reformed Churches (NGK) should be welcome at any meeting of any of these churches

1.2.5 that members of the one Body of Christ accept one another as brothers and sisters without questioning one another's Christianity, concern themselves with each other's welfare, esteem the other higher than oneself, bear one another's burdens, show mutual love in word and deed and intercede for one another in prayer.

## **2. Concerning the prophetic calling of the church**

2.1 We are convinced that the calling of the church extends beyond the ministry of reconciliation within the four walls of the church. We therefore reject the opinion that the church ought to concern itself only with so-called 'spiritual matters' and withdraw from other areas of society.

2.1.1 Reconciliation includes a prophetic witness in relation to the entire life of society and therefore the church dare not remain silent concerning such matters as moral decay, family disintegration and discrimination.

2.1.2 The church will always bear witness that an arrangement of society based on the fundamental irreconcilability of individuals and groups cannot be accepted as a basic point of departure for the ordering of society.

2.1.3 The church has a wonderful opportunity to be God's experimental garden in the world. This means that God wants to demonstrate something to the world, through the life of the church, concerning that unity, mutual love, peace, understanding, sharing and justice, which God intends to be present in the whole of society.

2.1.4 Naturally all this is also realised in the church only in a defective manner! This state of affairs must not, however, give rise to the prophetic talk of the church in relation to society being made into a responsibility of the distant future when the church's integrity has been fully established.

2.2 For the concrete situation in the South African society, the above comments mean, inter alia, the following:

2.2.1 that the church may exercise its prophetic witness with great boldness in the South African society; we in fact live in a state which explicitly calls itself Christian and therefore wishes to listen to the Word of God together with the church

2.2.2 that a social order which elevates irreconcilability to a principle of societal living and which alienates the different sections of the South African population from one another is unacceptable

2.2.3 that such a system makes it virtually impossible for the inhabitants of South Africa to really learn to know one another, to trust one another and to be loyal to one another

2.2.4 that the laws which have become symbols of this alienation, among these being those concerning mixed marriages, race classification and group-areas, cannot be defended scripturally

2.2.5 that justice, and not simply law and order, shall be the guideline and point of departure for the ordering of society. We believe that the incidence of the forced removal of people, the disintegration of marriage and family ties as a result of migrant labour, the inadequate expenditure on black education, insufficient and inadequate housing for black people and the low wages paid to such people cannot be reconciled with biblical demands for justice and human dignity

2.2.6 that all people who regard South Africa as their fatherland ought to be included in the process of negotiating a new order for society

2.2.7 that this system ought to be built on order and peace which is the fruit of justice. This means that all people ought to enjoy equal treatment and opportunities.

## **3. Our solidarity**

In the above statement we do not only want to place on record what is, in the light of Scripture, our deepest conviction concerning the concrete South African reality, but we also want to

3.1 confess to our deepest guilt before God that we ourselves have also failed to manifest adequately the unity of the church of Christ in our lives and that we too have contributed to many of the societal evils which we have identified

3.2 explicitly declare that we have neither spoken concerning the church nor the government from an attitude of self-righteousness. Our witness emerges out of a deep solidarity with the church and an awareness of co-responsibility with regard to the present order of society

3.3 confess that we believe in conversion, the forgiveness of sins, and a new life in obedience to God

3.4 pray that our letter will contribute to the church of Christ in South Africa having a clearer vision concerning its calling, and that the realization of a new societal order in South Africa may be expedited

3.5 bear witness that the Gospel of Jesus Christ - God's good news to the world - also gives hope to the people of South Africa in these specific circumstances

3.6 gives the assurance that we will earnestly continue in prayer for the Church, as well as for the government in its extremely difficult task.

## **Signatories**

S W Albertyn, Port Elizabeth; C A Anthonissen, Johannesburg, J A S Anthonissen, Tygerberg; F D J Basson, Parow; J H Basson, Bellville; D P Bekker, Durban; H H Biermann, Voortrekkerhoogte; J Bohnen, Stellenbosch; G M Booy, Pretoria; D J Bosch, Pretoria; H L Bosman, Pretoria; O S Bosman, Stellenbosch; C J Botha, Bellville; D P Botha, Stellenbosch; J G Botha, Stellenbosch; J J Botha, Stellenbosch; J S F Botha, Viljoensdrif; J Bouwer, Stellenbosch; H Brand, Kaapstad; J D Bredekamp, Sasolburg; G A Breytenbach, Zimbabwe; E C D Bruwer, Pretoria; J J Burden, Pretoria; J A Burger, Verwoerdburg; J C Buys, Randpoort; W J C Cilliers, Germiston; W S Conradie, Windhoek; F S de Jager, Voortrekkerhoogte; P G R de Villiers, Stellenbosch; J T de Jongh van Arkel, Verwoerdburg; D C de Wet, Potchefstroom; A W Doyer, Randfontein; G J S Doyer, Vanderbijlpark; P J Dumas, Kuilsrivier; J J F Durand, Stellenbosch; C P du Toit, Pretoria; S I du Toit, Pretoria; J J Els, Grahamstad; P J J Els, Bellville; C Erasmus, Riebeek-Wes; P J A Fourie, Stellenbosch; D Ganzevoort, Zimbabwe; F E O'B Geldenhuys, Pretoria; J H G Gous, Vanderbijlpark; R C Herholdt, Bellville; S J Herholdt, Youngsfield; M H Heyns, Parow; S Heyns, Bloemfontein; W J M Janson, Pretoria; A C F Koch, Port Elizabeth; A König, Pretoria; B J Kotze, Kaapstad; W A Krige, Westville; J J Kritzinger, Pretoria; P R Kruger, Springs; P J Kühne, Vanderbijlpark; G L Langeveld, Bellville; D G Laurie, Franschhoek; W P F Lawrenz, Potchefstroom; H I Lederle, Pretoria; G P V le Roux (J A sn), Pretoria; S J le Roux, Florida; A F Louw, Pretoria; A F Louw, Harare (Salisbury); L K Louw, Vereeniging; A H Lückhoff, Pretoria; P J Maartens, Pinetown; J C Malan,

Bellville; B J Marais, Pretoria; D J Marais, Montagu; J C Marais, Nkhensani; S Marais, Askham; S J Marais, Sanddrif; P G J Meiring, Pretoria; J A Nieder-Heitmann, Maandagshoek; J N Odendaal, Grahamstad; W M J Odendaal, Port Elizabeth; C C Olivier, Zithulele; O J Olivier, Potgietersrus; L v Z Peters, Boshoff; W A Pieters, Stellenbosch; H J C Pieterse, Pretoria; E A C Pretorius, Pretoria; H L Pretorius, Umtata; P A C Pretorius, Zimbabwe; G J Retief, Bellville; J H Roberts, Pretoria; W A Saayman, Pretoria; C L van W. Scheepers, Cullinan; E H Scheffler, Cullinan; F E A Scheffler, Franschhoek; D A Scholtz, Vanderbijlpark; B Schreuder, Richmond, Kaap; D J R Schutte, Voortrekkerhoogte; S O Skeen, Welkom; D J Smit, Stellenbosch; H J Smit, Stellenbosch; C J Smuts, Ghanzi; J H Spies, Ysterplaat; J D Steyn, Caledon; C J Swart, Riebeek-Kasteel; J Symington, Pretoria; J P Theron, Youngsfield; G P van der Merwe, Ventersdorp; P J van der Walt, Vereeniging; A S van Dyk, Zimbabwe; J F van Heerden, Verwoerdburg; A S van Niekerk, Pretoria; G W S van Rooyen, Bloemfontein; H L van Schalkwyk, Voortrekkerhoogte; J van Schalkwyk, Pretoria; P J F van Vuuren, Zimbabwe; A J van Wijk, Grahamstad; D C van Zyl, Pretoria; W F Vermaak, Brackenfell; J C Vermeulen, Pretoria; J N Vorster, Verwoerdburg; G F Wessels, Zomba.