

THE NEED FOR TRUE COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

Possibly the greatest tragedy of the division between nations is that for one group God is the god of liberation, while for another He is the god of the status quo. The author argues that for a viable future South Africa needs true reformation. This implies reconciliation between man and man, and between man and God. To bring this about, and heal the divisions in the church, expert help, and better communication should be sought, entailing respectively information about future possibilities, and the ability to listen to others. This will enable the church to be God's people of the New Covenant, comprising men of all races and languages, and truly become Christ's presence among men.

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INTRODUCTION

When I was asked to prepare a paper for this symposium, I accepted the invitation neither because I am an expert in church history, nor because I have carefully systematized thoughts on the subject, but simply because I have a deep concern with the current situation of the churches in general and those in my country, South Africa, in particular.

I have to admit that the topic has occupied my mind on and off during the past months. However, it would be presumptuous to say that what I am about to present is a thoroughly thought-out position; I consider it only as a preliminary reflection.

I am not standing here to represent the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa of which I am a member. Therefore, what I present in this paper should not in any way be viewed as representing the official view of my church, but it should be regarded only as a personal opinion of a member of that church, speaking of course from his particular background.

In my limited capacity I dare to stand here however, only because of my sincere hope that I will be able to contribute whatever little thought I have managed to put together, for the success of this symposium, for the building of the future of South Africa, and for the glory of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

Anyone who enters into discussion with people who, in our times, are exposed to rapid social change, very soon realizes how immense are the tasks that have to be carried out in their parts of the world. We, on the planet earth, have hardly yet mastered some of the problems we are faced with, for example, the Industrial Revolution and now we are already launched into the age of nuclear fission and of space travel, and these bring new problems of their own; especially when one thinks of the problems of our country, South Africa. But perhaps there is a value in attempting to find a theological sense of direction in these perplexing times.

Any discussion of practical models for church life must take as its starting point the cosmic purpose of God in which the churches find their task.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

The church is sometimes designated in Scripture by the Greek term **ecclesia**. **Ecclesia** was current in the Hellenistic world for the regular assemblies of a particular social group or even of the whole population, but **ecclesia** was never used by the Greeks in a religious context. For religious meetings

they employed other terms, none of which are retained in the New Testament, to signify the church. The word, church, therefore has its origins elsewhere, namely in Jewish tradition. There the word has the same general sense of "being called together" as in Greek usage, but it acquires a religious connotation in view of the fact that the person who convokes, is God.

In short, the church is God's people of the new covenant, comprising men of all races and languages, who respond to the preaching of the Gospel by faith in Jesus Christ. As a people whom God calls together in Christ, the church shares in the unity of her Lord: there is one God, one Lord, one church (Eph 4:1-6) which is the church of God.

The church is not of the world, but she lives in the world. She confesses her faith in her Lord who came, who reigns, and who will come again. She is the means by which God draws the work of redemption to its appointed end, a redemption which had been declared in the old covenant and is realized in Christ. She is Christ's presence among men until the end of the world.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH?

Now, having now an idea of what the church is, let us look into the situation of our country and thereafter see what role the church can play.

When we are witnesses of great changes, we may begin to understand what is meant by the word **history**. History appears to be a process of larger or smaller changes in the destiny of peoples. For centuries many races have lived undisturbed. Others have hardly ever known such periods of peace. The more decisive the changes and the more rapidly they occur, the more urgently we are driven to ask: What is it that we are experiencing here? What or who is behind all this?

In such a terribly troubled world one way of raising the fundamental questions which need to be asked, is to address the issue of human rights: What about the right to life? The right to gainful employment? The right to peaceful family

life? The right to decent housing? The right to a healthy environment? The right to equal treatment under the law? The right to participate in the political process? The right to voluntary association? The right to a fair share of the goods of God's creation?, and many others.

How shall we respond to these pressing issues? What shall we, as a Christian community, say?

The Bible teaches us: God is the Lord of **history**. He leads his people. He accompanies them through the storms of time. God helps his people. This basic melody of the Bible is most relevant to our subject. The constantly renewed sense of the near presence of God in changing circumstances made it possible for the people of Israel to master the problems of transition from the half-nomadic existence of the desert to the settled life of agriculture.

God is in control of history. The prophets talked to Him, they understood his plans. But again and again they asked God to change his plans, and God was willing to do so. That is what gives character to the history of this world - that God is always striving to win our faith, our trust and our obedience. We constantly rebel against Him, and give history a direction which leads us away from Him.

In every life-relationship we are called to be hearers and doers of God's word. The church should and must be the agent to righteousness and reconciliation in a broken world.

History itself is, of course, never normative. God's Word is our only ultimate and abiding norm. World history is the area of obedient or disobedient responses to the Word of God on the part of successive human communities. As an ongoing series of responses however, this historical record remains an important teacher. It can make its instructive impact upon the present. We ignore its fundamental lessons to our own hurt. For, as has been said, "those who forget history are doomed to repeat its mistakes."

We cannot undo the past. But we can repent of our corporate guilt for what has happened and is still going on. And we can resolve, by God's grace, in obedience to his Word, to faithfully honour, safeguard, restore and promote, wherever possible, human rights within our fellowship of Christian

churches and in the world around us. In a biblically-directed way we must lend our support to the cause of God-given human rights.

Man is created and called to be a free being, responsible to God and his neighbour. Any tendencies in state and society depriving man of the possibility of acting responsibly are a denial of God's intention for man and His work of salvation. A responsible society is one where freedom is the freedom of men who acknowledge responsibility for justice and public order, and where those who hold political authority or economic power are responsible for the exercise thereof to God and the people, whose welfare is affected.

Man must never be made a mere means for political or economic ends. Man is not made for the state but the state for man. Man is not made for production, but production for man. For a society to be responsible under modern conditions, it is required that the people have freedom to control, to criticize and to change their governments, that power be made responsible by law and tradition and be distributed as widely as possible through the whole community. It is required that economic justice and provision of equality of opportunity be established for all members of society.

The problem of human rights is universal. No nation, region, church or community can wash its hands in innocence. Violations of certain God-given rights of human beings, both personally and communally, in varied forms and degrees, accompany every conflict situation. Our guilt is global. In certain concentrated cases it is very local. From time to time, here and there, we gratefully record some alleviation of repressive measures. Again and again, however, our hopes are dashed by renewed outbursts of man's inhumanity to fellow-men, harsh reminders of the awful weight of sin which still encumbers our redeemed world.

THE SITUATION IN OUR COUNTRY

The situation in our country, South Africa, needs the attention of the churches. The question of population dynamics is very much in discussion. This reminds me of the national conference which was held in Grahamstown this year (4,5,6 Feb 1985).

Dr I Mackenzie (President of the 1820 Foundation) spoke of the importance of educating the people of South Africa. South Africa can only be regenerated by the goodwill, commitment and co-operation at the grass-roots level. No man is an island of himself.

Somebody once said: "South Africa is abundantly endowed with natural resources and could become an economic powerhouse in which all could prosper. This potential will only be unlocked if we develop the people of this country. South Africa's resources alone are not enough: Wealth is created by applying human skills, technology and initiative to these resources."

Total development, which would help to eliminate the present widespread poverty and inequality, can only be achieved if:

- * all people have equal access to relevant education and meaningful training;
- * the integrity of the individual and the viability of the family is maintained;
- * the people of this country work together in a commitment to a common cause.

Surviving in tomorrow's world will ask for new and better skills. We will have to work harder to achieve the essential growth in the economy. But we also have to cut waste and make better use of our resources, some of which will be stretched to the limits as the population increases. Education and training must be made relevant to the real problems and challenges around us. We need to recognize the potential in each individual and give it an opportunity to be realized.

Sensible family planning must become part of the process of development. Involving the people themselves in providing for their basic needs is the key to success. Economic development will not succeed without curbing the population by sensible family planning, and family planning will fail without development of the total population.

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Our transportation systems need to be attended to. The scale of our urbanization requires efficient mass transit systems. Mexico City, which has grown to 18 million people, could not manage the moving of millions without cheap, efficient and fully automated underground transport.

Transport from and to work absorbs a considerable portion of Black earnings, and its inefficiency leads to great sacrifices in comfort and time wastage additional to the working hours. Motorized White South Africa has, possibly, a limited awareness of the stresses arising out of transport problems in the Black community.

The increase in numbers of motorcars in the Black communities will make a serious impact on the pollution levels in our cities. The development of electrical vehicles for taxi purposes needs to be promoted, in addition to the public systems. Protection and overregulation needs to be reviewed. Somebody told me the other day that in China, the universal means of urban transport is the bicycle.

Health services. The cost of health care is rising far in excess of the inflation rate, leading to an intolerable burden to the state, without improving the health of the nation. It has been found that the total expenditure on health services in 1982 was in the region of R2 000 million and is expected to rise to R10 000 million by the year 2000.

At the same time the affluent urban sector is overserved, whilst the rural areas are underserved. Following urbanization, the number of people under medical cover will rise from the present five million to forty million by the year 2020, an eightfold increase.

Health services, particularly to the poor, affect population growth directly since infant and child mortality rates dictate the number of children parents want to have.

At present not more than 4% of total spending in health care is directed towards preventive medicine. This percentage will only increase if the monetary incentive in health care is made to shift from curative to preventive. As long as money in the system is made from diseases and not from health, prevention will remain the stepchild in health care.

For health care to support the goals of a population development programme, the emphasis needs to shift to prevention, primary health care, and health promotion programmes. The delivery of services should happen in a team-approach in which the medical practitioner and the hospital are the final and not the first stations. It is unthinkable that our society can afford the cost of health care, presently enjoyed by a minority, for a doubling population.

Family planning programmes are usually channelled through the health care system. The quality of the health care infrastructure and its staff, particularly in the rural areas and the poorer sections of the cities, will determine the effectiveness of these programmes.

Since family planning is an intimate and sensitive aspect of people's lives, it is arguable whether the state is the best channel for these services. Once we can achieve clarity as to our population policies, the private sector and other organizations should shed its reluctance to get involved and start participating and contributing actively. If these programmes become an integral part of the development process, a more active role by the private sector and the business community becomes essential.

Housing. It is noteworthy that the present housing backlog is in the region of 500 000 for all population groups. Rapid urbanization will add one million people per year to the cities or similar high density groupings. Given ten people to a house, this would constitute an additional demand for one million units per year.

Including replacement of entire dwellings, the cumulative housing needs between today and the year 2020 could be as much as eight million dwellings. Even a simple house, not counting the cost of infrastructure, will not cost less than R15 000 in today's prices. This would make for a construction bill of +- R120 000 million. For this reason such a massive format building programme will not take place. It did not happen when the economic situation was far more favourable and the demand and rate of urbanization was much lower.

The provision of adequate shelter for the growing population should be a source of work, promote a variety of essential skills and above all - should create wealth within the communities, where the building programmes take place.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE FOR THE FUTURE?

The past has failed us and viability of the **future** depends on our ability and willingness to make the transformation process happen. The church of Christ has to **pray hard for the situation**. We, as the church, should **learn to be hearers and doers of the Word**.

Allow me to mention some of the points which I feel can contribute to the church and the future of South Africa! To think through our situation with the help of the Word of God: This means that our intelligence is to be active, and also that it is to be guided by the Word of God in a particular direction. It is God Himself who has given us intelligence, in order that we may make the right use of it. Many wrong decisions, taken in our day both by individuals and by human societies, were taken because they were not intelligently thought out, but rested simply on emotion.

What help does the Bible give us in this situation? From all that has been said, it is clear that we shall not find ready-made prescriptions which are immediately applicable to our present situation in the Bible. Nevertheless, we shall find in it many examples of the behaviour of believing men in situations that called for decisions, and in a number of cases their situations were not so very different from our own.

The need for expert help. The right use of the intelligence means firstly that we must obtain **information** as to the possibilities that actually lie before us. For this, naturally, we are dependent on others. Let us take an example. A young man is offered a job in a factory in some town other than his home. He must find out not merely how much he will be paid, but also how much it will cost him to live there. If he only ascertains the amount of his pay, he is likely to experience grave disappointments, since the real value of money may be much less in the place to which he is going than in that in which he has so far lived.

It is, generally, one of the signs of our age that we are all much more dependent than we were on information and indications supplied to us by others. So, more decisions are required of us today than in earlier times; they have more decisive consequences than in earlier times, both for us and for the communities in which we live. And they are harder to arrive at than before.

This is due, in the last place, to the fact that in our industrialized world we are all more dependent on one another than we were. To look at the matter from another point of view, this is a consequence of the ever-increasing division of labour, and the rationalization of man's toil. Without this, human civilization could never have come into existence at all, but in our day it plays a more important part in human life than ever before. That is why we call our age the age of technology. And the church in South African is not exempted from all these happenings.

In this connection the important thing for us to realize is that this mutual dependence includes the fact that we depend on correct information and detailed knowledge from many experts. As Christians, we are in exactly the same situation as all the rest of the world. Most of us cannot be thoroughly

informed within more than one single area; but we have to make decisions on questions in relation to which we are dependent on the knowledge and judgment of others. When the Israelites entered the land of Canaan, they took knowledge from others, besides their fellow-believers. It is important is that the experts should understand their own business, in order that the vast structure of industrial society may function in all its parts, and in order that we may not be guided by ideas which are unrelated to the reality of this society.

The knowledge of the experts should help us to identify exactly the real needs of our fellow-men, and to tackle them. The love of God, which has been revealed in Jesus Christ and made available to us, should kindle our imagination and our knowledge in such a way that we see what really needs to be done, and that we do not, under the compulsion of a supposed science, simply replace one need by another.

The place of timeless truth, which has no power to help us, is to be taken by the indication of "directions". This is a dynamic picture, which can remind us that we can never stand still, if we follow the living Lord of the church, who accompanies us through the ages.

The church is always bound to call men to Jesus Christ, to invite them to sit at His table.

The church should look into the future of South Africa with **hope** and courage. As I said in the beginning, the church is God's people, we have to put our trust in the Lord of history.

If one looks at the situation of our country today, it is as if there is no hope. In the church itself there are walls of division. The church needs some reformation. There is no communication among the children of God. Reconciliation is needed between man and man; between man and God.

True reformation is needed for the future of South Africa. John Calvin once said: "A reformed church should be in a process of reformation always - otherwise it ceases to be a reformed church and all too quickly becomes a deformed

church." A mere patching here and there will not suffice as reformation. Reformation is encompassing. It is also radical, it reaches to the roots.

In order to reform, we must **first start with ourselves as a church**. We are a divided church. We, as church people, are anti-this and anti-that in our thoughts and in our actions. Remember, the life of the child of God is positive. True reformation should be fearless - no matter what the consequences will be. God is the one who guides us in this reformation. Again remember, reformation without God is not true reformation.

Communication is needed. The people of South Africa need to communicate among themselves. A real communication is needed for a better South Africa. When I speak of communication, I do not mean the coming together around a cup of tea and thereafter saying, "We have communicated."

We, as children of this country, do not know one another. We are suspicious of one another. We are too isolated in the same country. Real reformation cannot take place if communication is not there. In our communication we **must learn to listen**. One of the mistakes of the modern people is that we do not want to **listen**. Yes, to **listen** when others speak. If we can learn to listen to others, I think our communication can bring better results for the future of South Africa.

Somebody once said, "the process of language is 50% speaking, 50% listening. Language is not speech, it is a full circle from word to sound, to perception, to understanding, to feeling, to memorizing, to acting and back to word about the act thus achieved. And before the listener can become a listener, something has to happen to him: He must expect. To the silence that precedes the speech, we may compare the expectation that should precede the fact of listening."

Language is the complete social relation between speakers and listeners. Let us build better communication among ourselves. Problems cannot be solved unless real communication exists between people. As Christians, we need to communicate and speak together about the problems which are facing

our beloved South Africa. We have to pray together for a better future for our country.

We must demolish the walls between us. If you read the story of the Samaritan woman in the New Testament, you learn a lot about the walls between nations. Many obstacles had to be removed by Christ before she could drink of the real living water.

I spoke of a radical reformation. Yes, a radical reformation can reopen all the rusty taps in our lives so that the life-giving water can start flowing again.

Allow me, to mention a few of the walls in the life of the Samaritan woman which Christ had to demolish and which, I think, exist today in the South African society.

If I read my Bible correctly, there were some such obstacles that He had to demolish: A wrong concept of God, a wrong tradition and a wrong relationship with the Jews.

The wall of religion. Do not be surprised if even the most holy of things, one's service to God, can be a divisive wall. This is the most impenetrable obstacle which Jesus had to break down in the Samaritan woman. "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship" (Jh 4:20).

Here we have perhaps the greatest tragedy of the division between nations who cannot find each other. How many sacred places do the various nations in South Africa not have. You know them better than I. This sort of thing is sometimes not limited to places of worship. God Himself, and the very act of worship become, in time, to be annexed for one's own nation. For one group God is the god of **liberation**, for another He is the god of the **status quo**. The place where one worships does not determine whether one's prayer is heard or accepted. God is not bound by place. He is omnipresent, and always ready to **listen**. Prayer also has nothing to do with ritual prescriptions and outward show. So, please let us break this wall of binding God with our ritual prescriptions.

The wall of traditionalism. "Art thou greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank thereof himself?" (Jh 4:12).

By referring to Jacob as her ancestor, she wanted to make the Jew understand clearly that Jacob had not been only the ancestor of the Jews, but also of the Samaritans.

Do we not also have our Jacobs in South Africa? Our saints from the past, to whom we ascribe superhuman powers and insight? In our country we have so many saints for practically each nation. You can think of a whole string of them without much trouble - from the ranks of political and church leaders from both sides of the fence of race.

In the Kingdom of God there is neither Jew nor Greek, Black nor White man, Coloured nor Asian, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither female nor male; for ye are all one in Jesus Christ.

The wall between nations. For the Jews, the Samaritans were dogs, and vice versa. From the time of Serubbabel onwards there had been bitter enmity between the Jews and Samaritans. There was a division between them and the Jews. So there was a wall of hate. The spiritual dividing walls, as you well know, are of greater breadth and impenetrability than physical walls of fortified cement with barbed wire on the top.

Christ paid no attention to man-made dividing walls between the nations. He simply travelled northwards to Bethel and from there through Samaria.

This was his first step in ignoring the isolation and the polarization between the two nations. He not only did that, but also decided to engage a Samaritan woman in conversation; to make matters worse, this was an immoral woman.

Do we not, today, have precisely the same situation here in South Africa? Mistrust, suspicion, and hatred among the va-

rious races in the country have caused sky-high walls to come into existence, dividing even the Christians among us.

May we draw courage in faith from the example of Christ to send in our bulldozers fearlessly to demolish these walls of racism and other ideologies.

Building a fence around oneself has a problem and that is, it always excludes more than it includes. You cut yourself off from other people by this isolation.

May God help his church to be one body of Christ and build a better South Africa of tomorrow.

Let us pray for our country. Let there be reconciliation between us. A vertical as well as a horizontal reconciliation.

For a better future for South Africa there should be reconciliation. Reconciliation is a basic concept of our faith. Reconciliation can only occur when God has cleansed us of hatred and fear. We must submit ourselves to the will of God.

In conclusion, I want to say that the future of South Africa and the church lies in the hands of our Almighty. He is the only One who knows the future of his people. We can only pray and ask for guidance as his people. Let us have hope, and trust in Him.