
Response to the papers of Prof T F J Dreyer and Prof J H Koekemoer, read at the symposium:

Die roeping van die kerk in die nuwe Suid-Afrika

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Ga-Rankuwa

Paper 1: 'Praktiese kerkwees in die nuwe Suid-Afrika', by Professor T F J Dreyer
Professor Dreyer has made a comprehensive and informative presentation about the practical implications of being a church in the New South Africa. His paper deals primarily with the 'internal' ordering of the lives and attitudes of church members.

Unfortunately it reflects a parochial view (that of the NHKA) and does not attempt to arrive at a holistic perspective, given the multifaceted face of the church in South Africa. Professor Dreyer's concept of 'being a church' (i.e., 'kerkwees'), gives rise to a few questions.

Professor Dreyer argues: 'Die kerk kan homself maklik van sy lidmate vervreem en predikante kan hulle geloofwaardigheid inboet deur, met verbygaan van mense se vrese en pyn, gewoon na die nuwe situasie as 'n uitdaging te verwys'.

What is the church? By 'church' does Professor Dreyer, like Abraham Kuyper, mean 'the church as *institution* and the church as *organism*; or otherwise, like Hendrikus Berkhof, does he mean the church as *institution* and the church as *fellowship*? Does this imply, to put his statement in perspective, that there is a distinction in the communion of saints — that is, that there are those who make policies and decisions (the institutions) on the one hand, and those who are the recipients (organisms/fellowships) on the other? Therefore does the 'church' mean majority meetings (*meerdere vergaderings*) especially the General Church Assembly and their commissions, especially the Executive Board of the General Church Assembly? Further still, does the insinuation, '... en predikante kan hulle geloofwaardigheid inboet', not mean that even in the decision-making structures of the church there is also a grading of office-bearers so that the ministers of religion are the determining factor in policy- and decision-making and, in fact, they have the capacity to sway the thinking and foster hope among members?

I put this question as a serious matter for discussion. Professor A D Pont, previously professor in Church History and Church Polity at the University of Pretoria, has already had to respond in *Die Hervormer* to a suggestion that, with its proposals for a new Church Order, the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika is now using double standards in changing its historical trend of decision-making by placing the right to

decide on controversial articles — especially the resolution on church membership in Article III of the present Church Order — at the doorstep of the Council of Elders of the local congregation, while that has been always the prerogative of the General Church Assembly. The Hervormde Kerk in Suidelike Afrika, in an interview with the chairperson, Dr D J C van Wyk, which was published in *Montshafatsi*, has long said that the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika should give the local congregation the right to decide on the question of open membership. The local congregation is *ecclesia completa* in as far as it is also vested with the kingship, priestly and prophetic offices of believers within the context of its *Sitz im Leben*. While I concede that issues of Confession and the Holy Scriptures cannot be left to arbitrary decisions of the individual congregations, the practical implications of the church's existence ('kerkwees') should be deferred to the local congregation. We need to recognise the diversified contexts of individual congregations and not tie them to a general decision which does not take cognizance of the realities of each congregation. We need to be reminded that the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika is a progeny of 'a decision of a congregation', the *Witfontein* congregation (c.1885). We further need to listen to and recognise contributions of individual members who may be biblically and spiritually inspired to lead the church in new directions, no matter how few. Otherwise we may be closing our eyes to the reality that the HKSA is the brainchild of such small initiatives. This is the vision of a few members. We need to be reminded that when the 'church', the 'institutional church', namely the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika, failed to recognise the Lord's missionary command, 'the church' — whether 'organic, fellowship or invisible' (Louis Berkhof in his *Systematic Theology*), namely the Nederduitsch Hervormde Sendinggenootskap — acted, and today its work is the property of the former, namely the 'institution'.

Hope and suffering

I want to appreciate Professor Dreyer's choice of theological perspective, while I suppose the materialistic and philosophic options would still remain with *many* white Christians. He continues to tie theological perspective to two important elements during a time of uncertainty and anxiety — namely hope and suffering. To me, this sounds like a message from a 'Liberation Theology' text, a reverse of the message heard in oppressed communities, especially during the apartheid era. It may sound as if the betterment of life in the communities which for so long have been deprived should be met with resistance. I think Professor Dreyer should have qualified his statements more clearly to avoid misunderstanding, if that was not his meaning. With the many associated uncertainties, questions and scepticism, within even the black communities, I

think to start sounding the alarm as to 'suffering' would be premature. It would sensitise the issues of the new South Africa too much, and 'kerkwees' will not become a challenge to impact life with the message of peace and reconciliation, but of anxiety, withdrawal and aversion. If, of course, we have to talk about being a church in the context of 'hope and suffering', there is a valid concern with regard to the growing secularisation, the increase in international drug trafficking, the increase in evils of the society already mentioned since yesterday in this symposium, that will demand ever increasing Christian action and endurance of the pain that goes with it.

Mission and evangelisation

My last critique is of the definitions of 'mission' and 'evangelisation'. Professor Dreyer's understanding of these terms is typical of the traditional definition within the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika, explained by Dr D J C van Wyk in his article 'Sendingteorie and sendingpraktyk in die Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk: Verlede, hede en toekoms', published in *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*. Dr Van Wyk says, 'In die Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk in elk geval, word sending beskou as die verkondiging van die evangelie aan die mense van alle ander rasse en evangelisasie as die werk en verkondiging van die kerk aan ons eie volksgenote en ander blanke Europeërs'. This concept of mission ended with the 1910 Edinburgh conference on mission. For us it should make sense if we re-visit the 1947 Whitby Conference, which coined the phrase 'partners in obedience', where it was considered that 'not only co-operation between church and mission was necessary but that their intergration had become imperative' as Professor Saayman from the University of South Africa formulates it. Presently, within the white community, as in African communities, we have not only 'kerkvervreemdes' but also 'heathens', atheists, Satanists, et cetera. Now there is even a need to do missionary work in Europe, from the Third World countries.

Paper 2: 'Uitdaging aan die teologiese opleiding in die nuwe Suid-Afrika', by Professor J H Koekemoer

Wat teologiese opleiding in die nuwe Suid-Afrika betref, het ek baie min verskil met wat prof Koekemoer in sy referaat sê.

Die naamkwessie

Kurrikulering aan die Universiteit van Pretoria, veral in die Fakulteit Teologie (Afd A) sedert 1981, is onderworpe aan 'n hersieningsproses soos in die geval van baie ander universiteite in Suid-Afrika. Die groot kwessie is, watter effek sal die vereistes van die

nuwe Suid-Afrika op hierdie proses hê. Ek verstaan dat hoofstuk 15 van die *Interim Konstitusie* van ons land aandag gee aan hoe 'n universiteit in Suid-Afrika ten opsigte van die Herkonstruksie en Ontwikkelingsprogram (HOP) ingerig moet wees. So gesien word fundamentele strukture, inhoud en uitvoering van die opleidingsoefening ernstig geraak. Na aanleiding van hierdie nuwe situasie het baie teologiese inrigtings sekere benamings verander en aangepas. Die naam 'teologie' word nou gekoppel aan 'godsdienst', ensomeer. Ek hoop hierdie veranderinge is nie net oppervlakkig nie, maar tas ook die inhoud van die vakke om 'n teologie wat van toepassing is op die vereistes van die kerk in die nuwe Suid-Afrika, soos die Here in die Woord bepaal. Dit is net jammer dat prof Koekemoer nie aanduidings gee oor die moontlike denkrigtings, sodat die proses van gedagtewisseling kan wyer kring nie.

Die inhoudskwessie

Oor die kwessie van leerinhoude kan ons verder sê dat by baie teologiese inrigtings die inhoud van leerplanne vreemd is aan die lewensomstandighede van die mense wat teorie in praktyk moet omskep. John S Pobee, byvoorbeeld, oordeel dat ook wanneer daar gesê word dat teologiese opleiding in Suid-Afrika is onder beheer en bedryf van die Afrika-teoloë, is die 'Euro-social cultural content' van die leerplanne egter steeds aan die orde van die dag. Die *Pan African*-konferensie van die Derde-Wêreld teoloë het egter in 1977 betoog dat 'theology in Africa must be local in order to be real'.

Teologie moet gemeenskapgerig word

Die rektor van die Universiteit van Pretoria, professor P Smit, het in 1993, tydens 'n bekendstellingsfunksie van die Fakulteit Teologie gesê dat dit nou dit deel van die misie van die universiteit is om aan die omliggende gemeenskappe, veral swart, dienstig te wees. Dit is my mening dat hy daarmee by daardie funksie dié uitdaging ook by die deur van die teologiese fakulteit, en ook by die deur van Afdeling A, geplaas het. Teologie kan nie inheems word sonder om die gemeenskap te betrek nie. Vanweë die pluriformiteit van die gemeenskap moet swart dosente as sodanig ook aan die teologiese fakulteit aangestel word. Dit sal jammer wees as die Hervormde afdeling sy produk, die predikante van die Hervormde Kerk in Suidelike Afrika, nie in gedagte hou nie en hulle nie help om te vorder tot dosentskap van die universiteit, soos dit wel gebeur by ander inrigtings nie. Verder behoort die teologiese opleiding so ingerig te word dat dit bereikbaar vir die gewone mense in die kerk is, soos dit die geval met die Sentrum vir Teologiese Navorsing en Toerusting aan die Universiteit van Pretoria, en die C B Powell Bybelsentrum aan die Universiteit van Suid-Afrika is.