

Allan Boesak in Juanani's  
2/3rd Q, 1980

## ANNEXURE R

Article by Dr Allan Boesak, chairman of both the Broederkring and Abrecca, published in Dialogue, an US religious magazine.

### *The heresy of apartheid*

Two years ago, I wrote an article on the relationships between the white Dutch Reformed Church and the three black, DR churches (the mainly "coloured" *Sendingskerk*, the African DRC in Africa and the "Indian" Reformed Church in Africa). The article concluded with four observations:

1. "If the White NGK continues its critical support of the white government, the situation will become very difficult, if not impossible. The continued relationships of the black churches with the most powerful of all apartheid churches are already undermining the integrity of the black churches in their own community."
2. "It is clear that on basic important matters, the gulf between the white NGK and the three black churches is widening. The white church, so the Dutch delegation which was here in January of this year (1978) was told, still maintains apartheid (and therefore white *baasskap*) as the will of God for South Africa. Blacks can never, will never, concede this and must flatly refuse any attempt to compromise their God-given human dignity. If the NGK remains adamant, however, the painful question arises for the black churches: how long?"
3. "How will the NGK accommodate the very definite desire on the part of many in the black churches to become one, united Reformed church? If no satisfactory response is forthcoming, the black churches will almost be forced to go it alone, opening the doors to all who wish to join."
4. "The next year or two that lie ahead will prove crucial for the whole DR Church family. If the white church persists on its road of isolation, if it continues to develop its theology within the framework of a racial ideology, if it continues to prove unable to make a practical contribution towards meaningful change in this country, the question remains: how long? This is not to say that a break will occur soon or even that it is inevitable. It does mean, however, that the tension between these churches will become unbearable."

That was two years ago. Much has happened since then and for a growing number of people in the black Reformed churches, the answer to the question "how long?" has become a painful but definite, "no longer."

The "big moments" in the deterioration of relationships can be pin-pointed fairly easily. First there was the *Sendingskerk* synod in 1978 which broke its long silence on apartheid by denouncing it as "irreconcilable with the Gospel." We said farewell to apartheid in the church and chose for total unification with the other NG Churches. The white church, on the other hand, affirmed its stand on apartheid and its biblical basis and rejected the call for union with the black churches on racial grounds.

Secondly, the two top-level meetings between the NGK and the black churches revealed a still widening rift on almost all major issues facing the church in South Africa today.

Thirdly, it was revealed last year that the white NGK has allowed the now defunct department of information to use its ecumenical contacts with overseas churches as a propaganda channel for the white government. This was bad enough, but the quite shameless cover-up of this indefensible action by the white church authorities has had a devastating effect on the image of the white church in our community — inasmuch as that image still meant anything at all.

Fourthly, there was the publication of two books which showed beyond doubt how important the white Afrikaans churches are to the *Afrikaner Broederbond* and vice versa. We also began to understand the consequences this relationship has always had for the black churches.

In JHP Serfontein, 285 Apartheid, Change &  
two NG Kerk, Jhb, Taurus, 1982

But all this has happened within a white context, so to speak. Even more has happened within the black community. The growing political consciousness and, indeed, radicalisation, has had a profound influence on the black churches. Not only is there growing understanding of our own situation, but also a much better understanding of the role of the white church and of whites within the church itself, *vis a vis* our situation. Black ministers now have an acute sense of awareness and of accountability and of responsibility to the black community, so that whether white people are "satisfied" with us is no longer important at all. Also, and most important, blacks know that to acquiesce in this situation of oppression would be an act of unfaithfulness and disobedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ they are called to proclaim.

And then, of course, there were the months of unrest in the Western Cape and there was Elsie's River, the name that now carries the same symbolic meaning that Soweto carried since 1976. During the unrest "the coloured community" matured with incredible intensity, and there was no way that the church could avoid being involved, and this meant, irrevocably, growing confrontation with the state and the supporters of the government, in *casu* the white NGK. And now, for the first time, people are openly talking about a split in the NGK family as being "inevitable."

During the unrest, an informal delegation of the *Sendingskerk* went to see representatives of the white church to discuss the current crisis and the church's response. They shared with the white church the following insights:

1. The conviction that the root cause of the unrest is the government's policy of apartheid;
2. As apartheid is a policy initially devised by the white NGK and, once taken over by the government, given moral justification by the NGK, the white church is as responsible as the government for the chaos, alienation, bitterness and suffering this policy causes. After all, it was an Afrikaner churchman who in May of this year confirmed this when he stated that "after 1948, it was not necessary for the (white) NGK to make political pronouncements, because the government was faithfully executing apartheid — the NGK's own creation . . .";
3. The price we are paying for apartheid — fear, distrust, hatred, suffering, escalating violence and especially the blood of innocent children — is too high. No one who believes in the Gospel of Jesus Christ could be party to this any more;
4. On the basis of this, the white church was asked publicly to denounce its support of the policy of apartheid and to exhort the government to seek the cooperation of all people to create a new dispensation for our country to secure peace.

Given the situation, I found the attitudes of the white representatives shocking and their response beyond belief. A subsequent leading article in the *Kerkbode* rejected the suggestions out of hand. In fact, during these months that Cape Town was seething and bleeding with protest, all the white church could say was to praise the police for their restraint. But through it all, their support for apartheid remained unchanged. And it is this fact, more than anything else which has brought us to the breaking point. For apartheid, being what it is, has not only to do with political peace and economic justice. It has to do with the integrity of the Gospel.

#### **Inevitable fruits**

People should be clear about this. The crux of the matter is not the NGK's stand on mixed marriages or mixed worship. These are merely the inevitable fruits of the system and the result of the NGK's uncritical support of the ideology underlying apartheid. People who think that twenty-three anonymous white Dutch Reformed ministers who plead for "mixed worship" in white churches are "showing signs of a new movement in the NGK" are amazingly out of touch with both the NGK and the black churches.

When one has formulated an ideology, plotted and planned and cajoled for decades to have provided theological and moral justification for that policy in spite of the injustices, the suffering and the violence about which you knew; when you have done to others (in the name of Christian love at that!) what you never would have accepted yourself; and when the nation's children are dying on the streets because of this policy, mercilessly shot down because they dared to protest for the sake of their future, then it is simply not enough to say, "Come, let us worship together. . ."