

# UNDERSTANDING MORATORIUM

*An Interim Report by the  
South African Council of Churches Task Force*

1. To us moratorium means renewed commitment to mission and evangelism through *rejecting* structures that create or perpetuate dominance-dependency relations and *becoming* more self-reliant within the total fellowship of the Church Universal. Therefore our South African Churches, too, must stringently examine the hidden as well as overt nature of their internal structures and their relationships with one another and with Churches (mission boards, missionary societies) overseas and take appropriate action.
2. These structures and relationships have developed within the context of a divided society and a divided world. Consequently our churches bear wounds and scars of division — between rich and poor, black and white, donor and recipient, clergy and laity and between denominations — scars and unhealed wounds which often make mockery of our claim to be the sign and instrument of "God in Christ reconciling the world to himself".

MORATORIUM means withdrawing "overseas" missionary personnel and funds from churches in Africa, to enable them to establish their own identity and integrity, and accept responsibility for their mission.

- To discover an authentic African form of Christianity which can in turn enrich all the Christians of the world.
- To encourage African churches to leave the dependent attitudes many have adopted.
- To help African churches establish their own priorities in their work for Christ and to become fully missionary churches themselves.
- To enable the traditionally missionary — sending churches in other lands to re-examine the nature of their mission and their future partnership with other churches.

3. Each church has to make its own analysis of its dependence for money and/or personnel on resources outside its own membership or similar dependencies internally and, in the light of that analysis, develop its own programme for achieving greater self-reliance and authenticity.
4. However, the churches also need to share their probings and their findings, and to help one another to implement the — probably painful — "growing-up" process.

## Our responsibility

1. We covenant to bring before our own churches the challenge to move away from dominance-dependency relationships and structures whether internal or external and to move towards such forms of communion and community as will enable them to use and strengthen the particular gifts God has given them and to share these gifts with the worldwide fellowship of the People of God.
2. The questions we therefore put to our churches are as follows:
3. Does dependence on personnel and/or money from outside our own membership or from one part to another hinder us from full and effective participation in God's mission to reconcile all men and the whole creation to Himself in Christ?
4. If so, in what ways and to what extent?
5. What can we do, separately and in partnership with other churches, to outgrow dependence that hinders mission and to grow into self-reliance and inter-dependence (mutuality) that promote mission?
6. In raising these questions we must sound a note of urgency. The deepening conflict in Southern Africa demands a radical renewal and strengthening of the Church as the Body of Christ.
7. We must discard obsolete goals, especially the goal of institutional self-preservation; and we must give absolute priority to becoming communities that are actively engaged with God in the struggle for His righteousness in the whole of life, social as well as personal.

## A CONTRIBUTION TO THE MORATORIUM DEBATE BY SOME CHRISTIAN INSTITUTE MEMBERS

Most South African churches are supported by money and men on the spot. They are autonomous organisations with an inter-connected racial structure of the "mother-daughter" or "multi-racial" pattern, in which the conditions of the mission

societies to the north do not apply.

But there are many ways in which the principles prompting moratorium are particularly relevant, with additional pressures applied by the apartheid system.

White Christians, because of the power they wield as white people in South Africa, and because of their inherited racial and paternalistic attitudes, are often blind to the realities of the Southern African situation, and a barrier to the purposes of God. Because of their circumstances, and supported by some black people who are similarly indoctrinated, they are preventing most blacks from discovering and proclaiming the good news of Christ in ways relevant to Africa.

#### **How do the South African churches exhibit their dependency on false criteria?**

Most of the main churches depend on apartheid structures. They separate local congregations on racial grounds, see nothing wrong in it, desire no change from it, and make no moves to alter it. Everything is done on a racial basis including representation on church councils, the training and deployment of ministers, and the payment of stipends. Most churches are structured to keep ordinary church members apart.

Many churches perpetuate a dependency on white leadership as is seen in the preponderance of whites in senior positions, and the contrast of "missionaries" with "indigenous church leaders". Christianity is identified with white westernism, and an uncritical acceptance of the political power structure. Blacks are looked upon as objects that whites must convert, some of whom may even "come over" on to "the white side". White church members accept without question the manipulation of white economic structures to give them money that is earned by black labour. Most do not question the use of restrictive legislation, injustice or "legalised violence".

Many blacks exhibit a shameful dependency on whites, bowing and scraping to white church people, scrambling after "white" money, moaning and criticising with friends but refusing to stand up straight and confront error with whites — or "white blacks".

Most churches retain white control of monies; pay whites more than blacks; run expensive schools for whites only; and pattern themselves on a western capitalistic type of church in which wealth and social position take preference. It is all done paternalistically "for others good".

There is a "religious organisation syndrome" amongst blacks and whites which concentrates on maintaining organisation instead of spreading Christian truth. Indeed, it runs from any proclamation or action which might bring the organisation into disrepute with the secular power.

There is widespread rejection of "liberation theology", or "black theology", which is simply an attempt to rediscover the basic essentials of the gospels beneath the European culture and thought forms in which it has been handed on, a vital exercise if we are to win the *nations* of Africa for Christ (Matt. 28:19).

True Christian involvement is not of white against black, but of Christian for non-Christian, and includes a commitment to Christian liberation in the political and social spheres. Christian mission is not something which happens to individuals without any reference to their environment: it is a battle to liberate men from greed, injustice, oppression and ignorance in their relationships and their organisation, as well as their souls. Dependence on individualism robs churches of their true activity as the Body of Christ.

Finally, even churchmen who are concerned for Christian change have a dependency on "gradual development" and

"token activity" which is a denial of the radical act of repentance and the definite decision to follow a new way of life. We stumble on, paying lip-service to concepts we must acknowledge but have no courage to follow, talking of faith but living in fear, expending our energies on matters which do not make one jot of difference for the Kingdom, repeatedly turning our heads from the suffering of our fellow man, yet claiming to be light for the world in Christ.

Such an examination may seem brutal and disturbing, but it is necessary if the church is to recover its initiative and authenticity in a continent and a world which rejects it as irrelevant.

#### **How can Moratorium be used as a strategy to alert the church for better mission in South Africa today?**

1. *A Moratorium on black finances.* This would involve the withdrawal of black participation in the finances of white-controlled churches as far as stipends are concerned, to raise their own funds and pay their own men; to maintain an independent stand relative to "missionary funds"; for a period of three years. It is possible that white church members would be constrained to examine church funding also.
2. *A Moratorium on secondment to government agencies.* The withdrawal of manpower from employment in the "Defence" Force as chaplains paid by the State, replacing them with ministers paid by the church to minister to all involved in such struggles. The refusal to second men to work in apartheid institutions such as the Homeland Governments, other than in exceptional circumstances which clearly warrant ministry in a compromising situation. The refusal to accept restrictions on radio services. The support of conscientious objectors.
3. *A Moratorium on Marriage Officers.* The withdrawal of all church marriage officers from the compromising situation where they must make a racial classification of those wishing to marry; and their replacement by the Continental system of a civil marriage in Court, followed by a church marriage if desired.
4. *A Moratorium on White Church Schools* — by opening them to all races, in obedience to Christian convictions, or closing them as an elitist embarrassment to the Gospel.
5. *A Moratorium on uni-racial congregations* — by adopting a definite policy to enable the integration of specific congregations, and regular planned meetings in all congregations to enable the contribution of black Christians to be heard.
6. *A Moratorium on the erection of church buildings* which can only be used as places of worship once a week; and a moratorium on the erection of *all* church buildings unless consultations have been made with all churches within five miles.
7. *A Moratorium on Only Talking* by calling a National Assembly of Churches and Christians to work out ways and means to establish the principles and enact the practice of Christian liberation in the society of Southern Africa.

It is submitted that these are realistic issues on which to focus the emergence of a Church which is relevant to the dynamics of the situation now appearing in this part of God's world called South Africa.