

15.5 PETITION OF PROTEST : GK PRETORIA AGAINST THE DECISION TO APPLY FOR SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (SACC) MEMBERSHIP (Artt 19, 33A, 229)

- A. Petition of Protest is viewed as stated.
- B. **Decision:** The Petition of Protest is referred to Petition of Protest Commission 5.
- C. Rev GS Kruger reports on behalf of Petition of Protest Commission 5 the Majority report.
- D. Br JFK Muller reports on behalf of Petition of Protest Commission 5 the Minority report.

E. PETITION OF PROTEST

The decision against which the petition protests

3.2 Membership SACC

Die Deputies are of the opinion that the GKSA should apply for membership of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and makes such a recommendation to the Synod. At the same time the Deputy recommends that Synod Midlands be asked to also join the SACC together with Synod Potchefstroom.

Decision: 3.2 above is approved with the following recommendations:

- (a) *“The Synod states clearly that the GKSA maintains its independence and does not per association accept responsibility for every viewpoint of the SACC.*
- (b) *The Deputy receives the mandate to communicate serious and fundamental points of difference to our members.*
- (c) *The Deputy receives the mandate to advise the next Synod regarding the continuance of our membership”.*

8.0.0 The GKSA applies for membership of the South African Council of Churches.

9.0.0 The Synod budgets for the financial responsibilities with regard to membership of and participation in the activities of the SACC.

10.0.0 The Deputies prepare a short information leaflet available to church councils regarding the GKSA's membership of the SACC.

Decision: *Approved. (See also decision by Report Deputy Ecumenicity: Government (3.2).)*

(Decisions as found on the web at <http://www.gksa.org.za/sinode2006/Acta2006.pdf> on 18 June 2008)

Background

Shortly after Synod 2006 the Gereformeerde Kerk Pretoria raised the matter regarding the mentioned decisions and dealt with it.

This Petition of Protest is founded on the Report that has been accepted and which is added. The Report is in its entirety part of this Petition of Protest, and matters that are mentioned in the Report that are not directly referred to in this Petition of Protest, are still fully part of the Petition of Protest.

Grounds of Protest 1

There is no necessity for membership of the South African Council of Churches.

The grounds for the protest are explicated in the added Report, especially in paragraph 5.6.2 “Necessity for SACC membership”.

Grounds of Protest 2

There is no shared Confessional foundation with most of the other churches within the SACC.

The grounds for the protest are explicated in the added Report, especially in paragraph 5.6.3

Grounds of Protest 3

The SACC does not reject homosexuality and the expression thereof as contrary to the Word.

The grounds for the protest are explicated in the Report, especially in paragraph 5.6.4

Grounds for Protest 4

The SACC does not reject the “Interfaith” and “Multifaith” movements. To the contrary, the SACC takes part in such events.

The grounds for the protest are explicated in the Report, especially in paragraph 5.6.5

Concluding protest

There are sufficient grounds that clearly indicate that any connection with the SACC is irreconcilable with the demands of the King of the Church.

F. MAJORITY REPORT OF THE COMMISSION

1. Assignment

Petition of Protest: GK Pretoria (D) against the decision to apply for membership of the SACC.

Decision: Noted.

2. Issues that the Synod should take note of

(The numbering in the Supplementary report does not totally coincide with the numbering given in the Agenda, but we believed that we derived it correctly.)

- 2.1 The GK Pretoria did not appoint anybody from the church council to verbally put the issue to the Synod, but the petition of protest is well-written and was handed to the Synod with a supplementary report.
- 2.2 Various brothers made use of the opportunity to come and speak to the commission and to provide inputs.
- 2.3 Prof.JM Vorster and rev PW Kurpershoek, that are in liaison with the SACC, also gave information about this relationship.
- 2.4 The Synod should note the following:
 - 2.4.1 The three additions made to Synod 2006 in the decision to apply for Membership of the SACC (Acta 2006:175, 3.2)
 - a) ***“The synod makes it clear that the Reformed Churches in South Africa retain their independence and do not per association accept responsibility for each viewpoint and acta of the SACC.***
 - b) The Deputies are assigned to communicate serious and core points of difference to the members.
 - c) *The Deputies are assigned to advice the Synod on the continuation of membership”.*

Decision: Points 2.1 to 2.4.1 noted.

- 3.1 **Ground of protest 1 “There is no need for membership of the South African Council of Churches”** *(The grounds for protest can be found in the appendix p 4 point 2 that probably is 5.6.2.)*

3.1.1 Reasoning

- 3.1.1.1 The GK Pretoria quotes as motivation a part of the minority report, that was handled by Synod 2006 and was not accepted. In this it is reasoned that the church is called to profess according to our confession. There is also a reference to the fact the “pure voice of the GKSA is engulfed by a more tempered point of view, and that it will not be clearly heard in future.”
- 3.1.1.2 The GK Pretoria adds two proofs of Scripture to the minority report from which was quoted (3.1.1.1) that there are also other ways in which to testify before the authority, namely Jonah (Jon 3:36) and Baruch (Jer 36). By indicating these ways

from the Scripture, the idea of the decision of Synod 2006 is actually strengthened because there are more ways in which to testify.

3.1.2 Finding

This motivation does not convince that the membership of the SACC should be cancelled.

Decision: Points 3.1.1 to 3.1.2 noted.

3.1.3 Recommendation

Ground of protest 1 fails.

Decision: Approved.

3.2 **Ground of protest 2 “There is no mutual ground of confession with most of the other churches in the SACC.”** (*The ground for protest can be found in appendix p 4 point 3 that is probably 5.6.3.*)

3.2.1 Reasoning

3.2.1.1 The GK Pretoria contradicts its own ground of protest in its motivation:

In the first place they claim that there is no mutual ground of confession, while they make it clear in their motivation that most of the churches that are members of the SACC are unknown to them. (*In the appendix petition of protest p. 5 point 3*)

In the second place they claim that there is no mutual ground of confession, while they make it clear in their motivation that with the churches that are members and known, there are very little mutual ground of confession, except for the basic. (*In the appendix petition of protest p. 5 point 3*) “No” that is used in the protest do actually exist in the basic similarities of the churches with known confessions. The level of ecumenical contact in the current South African community does not require confessional unity in this matter.

3.2.2 Finding

From their own acknowledgement there are basic grounds of confession, with some of the churches that are members of the SACC that are not unknown. A basic mutual ground of confession serves as a point of departure for the discussion and the argument of the GK Pretoria, and cannot serve as motivation for cancelling the membership.

Decision: Points 3.2.1 to 3.2.2 noted.

3.2.3 Recommendation

Ground of protest 2 fails.

Decision: Approved.

3.3 **Ground of protest 3 “The SACC does not reject homosexuality and the lifestyle as contradictory to the Word”.** (*We find the grounds for protest on p. 5 of the appendix at point 4 that should probably be 5.6.4.*)

3.3.1 Reasoning

3.3.1.1 The protesters clearly show that the SACC do not reject homosexuality, as is the case with other issues. But the protesters do not convince to withdraw, measured against the calling of the church to testify everywhere.

3.3.1.2 Point 5 of their ground of proof claiming that to be a member of the SACC, the GKSA must also confirm the official attitude of the SACC and bind them to cooperate with a group that openly endorses and praises homosexuality. This motivation is not valid since the decision of Synod 2006 was taken knowing that the GKSA keep their independence and do not per association accept responsibility for each viewpoint and act of the SACC. The membership of the GKSA does not require that the GKSA abandon its confession or equate it to any other church that forms part of the SACC.

3.3.2 Finding

The GKSA already clearly distanced themselves from certain viewpoints of the SACC and will continue to do so because of our bond with the Scripture and confession.

Decision: Points 3.3.1 to 3.3.2 noted.

3.3.3 Recommendation

Ground of protest 3 fails.

Decision: Approved.

3.4 **Ground of protest 4 “The SACC do not reject the “Interfaith” and “Multi-faith” movements, instead the SACC participate in such actions.”** (*We find the grounds for the protest on p. 6 of the appendix at point 5 that should probably be 5.6.5).*

3.4.1 Reasoning

3.4.1.1 The protesters show that there were instances in which these practices occurred.

3.4.1.2 The GKSA already expressed himself concerning certain actions of the SACC.

3.4.1.3 The finding that it is unthinkable that the Reformed Churches outright on its own or not outright through the SACC or other organisations can bind themselves to “Interfaith” performance, are not reasoned further and gives no reason why the GKSA should not be a member of the SACC.

3.4.1.4 A few grounds from Scripture are quoted in point 4 but is not further discussed or dealt with.

3.4.1.5 Although the SACC participate in interfaith actions, the decision of Synod 2006 determines that the GKSA keep their independence and do not per association accept responsibility for each viewpoint and act of the SACC.

3.4.2 Finding

The commission is of the opinion that the membership of the SACC does not enforce participation in “Interfaith” actions.

Decision: Points 3.4.1 to 3.4.2 noted.

3.4.3 Recommendation

Ground of protest 4 fails.

Decision: Approved.

The Petition of protest fails as a whole.

Decision: Approved.

G. MINORITY REPORT OF THE COMMISSION

1. Assignment

Petition of Protest: GK Pretoria (D) against the decision to apply for SACC membership

Decision: Noted.

2. Matters to be noted by the Synod

2.1.1 Same as in the First Report.

2.1.2 The commission did receive information telephonically from Rev de Villiers.

2.2 Same as in the First Report.

2.3 Matthew 28 verse 19 says the following: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (NIV).

2.4 The responsibility that rested then on the disciples of Jesus Christ to proclaim the Gospel to non-believers also rests on Christians today. The fact that we are together in this Synod 2009 as people who do not only have one language but many mother tongues, is proof of the fact that the GKSA also wants to be involved with this prophetic calling placed upon us by the King of the church.

2.5 Thus it is also our order arrangement as church meeting to “bear testimony to the government in cases where the need to do so occurs”, Church Order Article 28.

2.6 Further, we also profess in Article 36 of the Belgic Confession the following, regarding the current South African government that God appointed to rule over us:

“And the government's task is not limited to caring for and watching over the public domain but extends also to upholding the sacred ministry, with a view to removing and destroying all idolatry and false worship of the Antichrist; to promoting the kingdom of Jesus Christ; and to furthering the preaching of the gospel everywhere; to the end that God may be honoured and served by everyone, as he requires in his Word.”

That our government is currently not what we profess from the Word of God it should be, places our prophetic calling as an obvious given. God must indeed also in government receive the honour that is His.

- 2.7 The formulary for the ordination of elders states under point four that the elder's task is as follows:
"You must call the apostates and non-believers to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ because Christ gathers his church in this manner."
On the content of our message and that we must proclaim it to the government there is unity in the GKSA. For this we can thank God because it is the bond of unity in the Gospel and calling that can only be forged between us by his Spirit.
- 2.8 Synod 1967 decision: *Hierby mag die bestaande ekumeniese bewegings nie uit die oog verloor word nie. Dit lê nie op die weg van die kerk om by sulke organisasies aan te sluit nie* (Acta 1967:367). [In addition the existing ecumenical movements may not be lost out of sight. It does not lie on the path of the church to join such organisations (Acta 1967:367)]
- 2.9 Synod 1997 decision: *In die uitlewing van die ekumeniese roeping gaan dit nie net oor 'n gesprek oor hoe kerk gemeenskappe sigbaar een kan word nie maar ook oor profetiese getuienis vir die waarheid en teen die leuen, asook oor samewerking in soverre daar 'n gemeenskaplike taak is wat behartig moet word* (Acta 1997:176). [In the execution of the ecumenical calling it is not about a discussion on how church communities can visibly become one but also on prophetic testimony for the truth and against the lie, as well as on cooperation in as far as there is a common task that must be performed (Acta 1997:176).]
- 2.10 It is important to remember that the question does not deal with testimony directed at the SACC and its members *per se*, but rather with the GKSA's prophetic calling directed at the government. This is then also the manner in which the matter came to the table of Synod 2006.
The original mandate to the Deputies was to: *Namens die Gereformeerde kerke in Suid-Afrika die nodige skakeling met die regering van die republiek van Suid-Afrika en ander instansies waarmee ons as gereformeerde kerke moet skakel onderhou.*(Acta 2003:230) [on behalf of the Reformed Churches in South Africa, maintain the necessary liaison with the government of the Republic of South Africa and other institutions with whom we must liaise (Acta 2003:230).]
- 2.11 1 Corinthians 5 verse 11 reads: "But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat." (NIV)
- 2.12 Association with a person who calls himself a Christian but whose lifestyle and confession contradicts it, is prohibited by the Word of the Lord. For this reason the GKSA withdrew not so long ago from the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC).
- 2.13 The most important point of difference between brothers of the GKSA thus does not relate to the content of our message directed at government or that we have a calling to do so. The difference between us is how we must convey the Gospel to the government. Must we do so through mediators of questionable origin and conviction, or will the Lord open the ways to the government for ourselves? We can also ask: Does the Gospel only dictate to us the content of our message directed at government? Or does it also dictate to us how we must bring it to the government?

Decision: Points 2.1.1 to 2.13 noted.

3. Ground of Protest 1

3.1 Argumentation

- 3.1.1 In Scripture there are clear examples indicating *that it is not necessary ... to belong to any organisation to be heard by the government.*
- 3.1.2 Similarly the example of Baruch, die prophet Jeremiah's scribe, is quoted. Baruch reads the Word of God to the people, where after king Jehoiakim's officials called him

to also listen to the Word. When the officials read it to the king, he rejected it and had it burnt in the fire.

- 3.1.3 In both cases the Word of God was ministered by speaking in public. One king believed it, the other rejected it.

3.2 Finding

- 3.2.1 Synod 2006 judged that it is necessary to join the SACC to gain “greater and more direct” access to government (Acta 2006:172 point 3.2 a).

- 3.2.2 From the motivation given by the protestors it is clear that the access to the government (kings) is provided by God by simply proclaiming the word of God in public. The Lord will bring the testimony to the government. There is no need to bring it to the government by way of human plans through the SACC.

Decision: Points 3.1 to 3.2.2 noted.

3.3 Recommendation

The petition of protest is given consequence to.

Decision: Rejected.

4. Ground of protest 2

4.1 Argumentation

- 4.1.1 The essence of the SACC is multiplicity in confession as long as it sounds “Christian”, and thus lack of confession. The SACC’s “Preamble” can be described as a précis or rather short summary of our Creed of Athanasius. Byt why then not the whole of the Creed of Athanasius? And what then became of the Nicean Creed, and the Apostle’s Creed, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordt?

- 4.1.2 Membership of the SACC, with the purpose of testifying as against the government, will quell the GKSA’s Reformational confession.

4.2 Finding

The abovementioned motivation has grounds.

Decision: Points 4.1 to 4.1.2 noted.

4.3 Recommendation

The petition of protest is given consequence to.

Decision: Rejected.

5. Ground of protest 3

5.1 Argumentation

- 5.1.1 The GK Pretoria indicates clearly that the SACC does not consider homosexuality to be sin. The SACC’ secretary-general described the so-called “same sex marriages” as “a joyful affirmation of their humanity and dignity”.

- 5.1.2 Other clear utterances and examples from the ranks of the SACC are mentioned to prove the ground of protest.

5.2 Finding

The abovementioned motivation has grounds.

5.2 Recommendation

The petition of protest is given consequence to.

Decision: Points 5.1 to 5.2 noted.

4.3 Recommendation

The petition of protest is given consequence to.

Decision: Rejected.

6. Ground of protest 4

6.1 Argumentation

- 6.1.1 The SACC can without doubt be described as “interfaith”, that assumes cooperation with non-Christian religions.

- 6.1.2 The protestors clearly indicate Scriptural grounds why the “Interfaith” movement must be rejected without qualification.

6.1.3 The protestors' finding reads as follows: It is unthinkable that 'n Reformed Church can bind itself directly in own right or indirectly through the SACC or other organisations to Interfaith conduct.

6.2 Finding

The motivations put forward by the protestors in their averment that the SACC does not reject the "Interfaith" of "Multifaith" movements, and even participate in such events, succeed.

Decision: Points 6.1 to 6.2 noted.

6.3 Recommendation

The petition of protest is given consequence to.

Decision: Rejected.

7. Conclusion

Ground of protest 1 succeeds.

Ground of protest 2 succeeds.

Ground of protest 3 succeeds.

Ground of protest 4 succeeds.

Decision: Rejected.

The petition of protest succeeds.

Decision: Rejected.

Decision: The Minority report is not approved. The Majority report is approved.