

15.7 PETITION OF PROTEST GK OOS-MOOT: SACC AND PARLIAMENTARY DESK, SYNOD 2006 (Artt 19, 34, 280, 281)

- A. Dr. G.J. Meijer states the Petition of Protest.
- B. **Decision:** The Point of Petition is referred to the Petition of Protest Commission 5.
- C. **Decision:** The Synod decides to appoint an ad hoc commission to advise the Synod whether the Petition succeeds or not.
- D. Prof. S.J. van der Merwe reports on behalf of the ad hoc commission the implication that the Petition of Regional Synod Bosveld about SARK succeeded.
- E. See decision taken by 15.6 – Petition Regional Synod Bosveld about SARK.

F. PETITION OF PROTEST

1. Decision that is protested

Article 14.1 I. Report and decisions (Acta 2006:171-175) are protested, which reads as follows:

“3. Matters for decision

- 3.1 That the GKSA liase with the SACC and the Government through means of “Parliamentary Chair” of the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa (dr Ben du Toit, Director of Communication, Cape Town. The Synod is requested to grant dr Ben du Toit a short turn to speak so that he can do a presentation on the activities of the “Parliamentary Chair”.

Decision: Approved that dr Ben du Toit receives a turn to speak.

3.1.1 Motivation

The church has the kingdom of God as fixed point in its testimony. The foundational thought of the kingdom is that Christ is King over the church and the entire creation. Nothing falls outside the domain of Christ’s rule. Therefore it is important that reformed churches in South Africa try to visibly subject the process of public policy formulation to the light of Scripture together with other believers in their own spheres of influence. The new political dispensation gives churches a unique opportunity to fulfill their calling towards the kingdom of God. Through a Reformed ecumenical body that monitors legislation, churches can make a difference to the policy making processes of the country from a reformed tradition in dialogue with other social groups. The success of the evangelical churches in the United States of America in the monitoring of legislation is a striking example of the influence that such a body can exercise.

Even if it is so that the power and weight of the church’s testimony should be carried by the content, the heads of those in power do not always work like this. It is therefore obvious that the larger the constituency is on behalf of whom the presentation is being made, the ‘heavier’ it will weigh. The greater the church’s membership, the stronger their testimony. The more thoroughly considered memoranda and faxes end up on the table, the more efficient. For this reason there is great wisdom in securing the cooperation and ‘partnership’ of churches and religious groups (in as far as is possible and responsible)

In order to play an influential role, the extent of the monitoring of the activities of the government – even if it is only with regard to certain functions that are of more interest to the church – is so great that it cannot be done efficiently in a lacklustre manner. To mention only a few examples: there should be contact with State Departments; all relevant policy documents should be studied; important papers, the Government Gazettes (in which announcements, invitations for commentary and concept legislation are published) should be studied.

It is clear that the successful handling of contact with the Government can not be fulfilled by one ‘anchor person’ (for example an emeritus minister). A databank of

experts must be established to monitor concept legislation in the light of Christian-ethical values on an ad-hoc bases. The establishment of such a databank is a matter that deserves serious attention from the side of the churches.

The Synod of 2000 gave the Deputy for Correspondence with the Government the mandate to “where necessary and possible, cooperate with other churches in contact with the government, amongst which the possible involvement in the ‘listening post’ at the Parliament.”

In the light of the fact that the civil community is involved with the legislative and policy formation processes in accordance with the principle of participating democracy, the proposal is that a Reformed ecumenical monitoring body be established to become involved in public policy formation. The Deputy is of the opinion that the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church’s “parliamentary desk” as part of a synodal minister’s post – Director of Communication (dr Ben du Toit, Cape Town) – provides an opportunity. Part of his duty is to monitor legislation, to initiate action, to call in experts and to communicate information. The Deputy GKSA has already negotiated with dr Ben du Toit in this regard. The Dutch Reformed Church welcomes it.

Decision: Noted.

3.2 *Membership SACC*

The Deputy is of opinion that the GKSA should apply for membership with 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 join Synod Potchefstroom in this endeavour.

(a) Motivation

In the light of the fact that shared ecclesiastical testimony is very important, the Deputy is of the opinion that the GKSA should join the SACC because it provides the GKSA with greater direct access to government. At the same time it will enable our churches to play a more influential role within the broader ecclesiastical environment. The theological climate within the SACC has changed considerably since 1994, while the structure of the SACC allows churches to keep their own identity. Member churches do not have to agree with all decisions of the SACC, and can give testimony or launch initiatives on their own when necessary. These factors make it easier for the GKSA to join the SACC. Unfortunately the constitution of the SACC does not provide for observer status any more, with the result that the GKSA has to either join the structure, or remain outside of it.

(b) Argumentation

- (i) Involvement with the SACC is not a new matter (see Acta 1976:366; Acta 1997:177, 3.2.3). However, observer status at the SACC is no longer possible, with the result that the GKSA now has to decide to become a member of the SACC or to break ties with the organisation. Good reasons will have to be offered for the last option.
- (ii) The GKSA has a calling to give prophetic testimony in the world and to the government based on a reformed foundation (see Col 2:8 and John 9:5; 1 Pet 3:15).
- (iii) The Deputy has given testimony of discussions with the Management with the SACC who will welcome the presence of the GKSA and who are positive and friendly regarding the matter.
- (iv) The available Constitution of the SACC includes clear policy statements regarding their Christian confession:

Decision: Noted.

“PREAMBLE

- 1 *The South African Council of Churches is a fellowship of Churches and organisations which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour, according to the Scriptures,*

and therefore seek to fulfill their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

- 2 *The Council affirms, on the basis of the Scriptures, that the Church is the Body of Christ and therefore is one. Though obscured and marred by sinful division, this unity of all Christians is the gift of God and does not need to be created.*
- 3 *Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the Council is an instrument and servant of the Churches, committed to stimulating and effecting fellowship, co-operation and unity among its member Churches and all other Christians in their common mission in the world. The work of the Council is based on the recognition of Jesus Christ as the divine Head of the Body and is to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*
- 4 *The theological basis of the Council is a common confession of the Christian faith of its members and is not a credal test of Churches or individuals. The Council is not committed to anyone theological understanding of the Church, and membership of the Council does not imply acceptance of any specific doctrine of the Church.”*

- (v) The SACC states no precondition to the GKSA regarding amendment or possible amendment of its Confession in order to become a member. On the contrary, with other churches of reformed confession (such as the Dutch Reformed Church and the NHK) the reformed doctrine can acquire a meaningful vote.
- (vi) There are other ways of giving testimony. Especially the involvement of churches on third level government through “fraternals” can be very efficient. At the highest level of contact with the government the SACC is by far the most effective way of contact with the government. Bodies such as the TKK and the Convent of Reformed Churches have very limited influence for purposes of contact with the government.
- (vii) Negative perceptions about the SACC in the GKSA should not be underplayed, but should be managed by embracing the truth about the SACC in every situation and to testify about it in a fitting manner to the churches and in the world.
- (viii) A Minority Report will also be presented.

Decision: Noted.

Decision 3.2 above is approved with the following addition:

- (a) “The Synod makes it clear that the GKSA keeps their independence and do not per association take responsibility for every view and action of the SACC.
- (b) The Deputy receives the assignment to communicate serious and fundamental points of difference to our members.
- (c) The Deputy receives the mandate to advise the next Synod regarding the continuation of our membership”.

2. Grounds for Protest and motivations

2.1 Ground for Protest 1

The decision is contrary to Scripture, as Matthew 10:19-20 and 2 Timothy 3:10-4:5, where the Lord calls on his church to spread the doctrine unfalsified and boldly.

Motivation

- 2.1.1 Association with a community where homosexuality¹, interfaith² and immorality³ are justified, is intolerable in terms of Scripture.

¹ www.sacc.org.za/docs/anrept05.pdf

² www.sacc.org.za/news05/ifrelief.html

³ Compare amongst others point (k) in the Minority report that served before the Synod 2006 and which was dismissed without any noted refutation by the Synod. Point (k) states: ‘With the court ruling on same-sex marriages (gay and lesbian marriages), the SACC rejoiced about the decision. The GKSA has just with the start of this Synod made press releases which said that we have clarity regarding the matter. It is therefore not on our table’.

- 2.1.2 To 'association' has the consequence that the GKSA has to dilute its Reformed confession and has to compromise in order to be heard by the Government as a unified voice. This 'association' also has as consequence that internal strain within the GKSA will increase.
- 2.1.3 The churches have the task to proclaim the Christian doctrine unfalsified and boldly and not to question the *sola scriptura*⁴. The ministering of God's Word should always take place under the supervision of a Church Council. Under which Church Council does the GKSA's representative at the SACC and the Parliamentary Desk fall? None! Therefore no discipline can be exercised. As a result one of the characteristics of the true church of Christ is lacking (NGB, art 29).
- 2.1.4 The principle behind majority meetings that are ultimately embodied in a church denomination, is the unity of congregations in Christ and a unity of faith and doctrine. Therefore there is no organisational unity that can exist separate from this unity in doctrine. How can we then form a unit or be in association with members of an organisation with which the GKSA neither can nor may go into correspondence with?

2.2 *Ground of Protest 2*

The decision is contrary to Belgic Confession, 36.

Motivation

In the Belgic Confessions, art 36 the church confesses that we amongst others despise all re-baptisers⁵, because they have a certain view regarding the government that does not agree with Scripture and Confession at all. In the SACC there are participating church groups that are outspoken re-baptisers. In fact, the viewpoint that the SACC and the WCC hold, includes in itself a great deal of liberation theology⁶, which provides a foundation for re-baptism.

2.3 *Ground for Protest 3*

The decision is contrary to CO, art 28.

Motivation

This article binds *church assemblies* to maintaining correspondence with the government, to get the necessary cooperation from the government and to testify before the government in precautionary cases. Neither the Parliamentary Desk, nor the SACC is a *church assembly* in terms of CO, art 28. The effect of the Synod decision is therefore that CO, art 28 is disregarded.

2.4 *Ground for Protest 4*

The decision endangers our ecclesiastical ties with Reformed Churches worldwide.

Motivation

Churches that come together in the ICRC, and with whom we have tight ties of faith, forbid membership of the WCC and per implication of the SACC⁷.

2.5 *Ground for Protest 5*

The decision does not take into account that there is room to testify before the government without having to make use of a vehicle such as the Parliamentary Desk or the SACC.

Motivation

⁴ www.sacc.org.za/news06/marriage.html and www.cft.org.za/news/1999/30-11-1999.html

⁵ It reads as follows: 'We hereby despise the Rebaptisers and other rowdy people and in general everyone who want to reject the government and who wants to overthrow the legal order, while they import communal ownership of property and disrupt the order that God has instated among people'.

⁶ www.sacc.org.za/about/celebrate14.html

⁷ www.icrconline.com/minutes.html Rev Dr Knight pointed out that Rev Smit had reassured the meeting that the GKSA would act according to Scripture and confession but had not said what he hoped the result would be. He also expressed his view that the ICRC's Constitution's condition for membership that churches should not be members of the World Council of Churches or any other similar organization (Minutes 2001, page 264) communicates a perspective: we should not have relations with churches going in a direction contrary to our own, because of the impact that may have on us.

- 2.5.1 The testimonies regarding HIV/Aids and Land Reform by the Deputy Ecumenicity are crystal clear examples of this fact (see www.gksa.org.za).
- 2.5.2 The government, in the current political dispensation, determines the agendas of the SACC and Parliamentary Desk. The government also creates the channels. The church also has a testimonial task with regard to the nature and content of the agenda as well as the channels. This the church can only fulfill if it stands outside of this organisational structure. In this way the church will also keep its credibility.

3. Request

Synod 2009 is requested to revoke the decision as taken by Synod 2006 (Acta:171-175) and consequently to cancel membership of the SACC as well as suspend any form of participation to the Parliamentary Desk (see in particular Acta 2006:175 point (c)⁸).

4. Concluding remark

The Church Council feels so seriously opposed to these matters that we have decided that we want to distantiate ourselves from participation in the SACC and the Parliamentary Desk, and we will therefore not pay any contributions for this purpose to the Administrative Buro (Church Council decision of 16 June 2007 and 22 May 2008).

G. REPORT AD HOC-COMMISSION – IMPLICATIONS OF THE FACT THAT THE PETITION OF PROTEST OF REGIONAL SYNOD BUSHVELD [15.6] REGARDING THE SACC HAS SUCCEEDED.

1. Assignment

To advise Synod regarding the consequences of the decision that Regional Synod Bushveld's Petition of Protest succeeds.

Decision: Note taken.

2. Argumentation

- 2.1 Petition of Protest GK Oos-Moot – This petition of protest is against two decisions, namely membership of the SACC and the Parliamentary desk. Since the protestors view this as one matter and state the same grounds for bothe, this has implications for dealing with the Petition of Protest in its entirety.
- 2.2 Point of description of Southern Regional Synod regarding the SACC – the Petition of Protest of Regional Synod Bushveld only deals with the matter described in this Point of description. The Report of the Commission Ecumenicity regarding this Point of Description deals with the matter touched upon in the Point of description.
- 2.3 The decision of Synod also has implications for the recommendations of the Deputies Ecumenicity, 2.4.8.3 to 2.4.8.8, and these are dealt with in the recommendations.

Decision: Note taken of 2.1 to 2.3.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 Synod does not take the Petition of Protest of GK Oos-Moot regarding the SACC into discussion. Motivation: The decision that is protested has already been revoked.
- 3.2 The Point of Description of Southern Regional Synod does not succeed.
- 3.3 The Commission Report dealing with 2.4.8.3 to 2.4.8.8 of the Report Ecumenicity: Domestic is approved.
- 3.4 The Petition of Protest of Bushveld that succeeded against the decision of Synod 2006 (Acta 2006:172-175) regarding membership of the SACC has the consequence that the decision regarding membership of the SACC is revoked.

Decision: Approved – changes already made – Deputies Acta.

⁸ Point (c) reads as follows: 'The Deputies receive the assignment to advise the next Synod regarding the continuation of our membership'