

15.8 POINT OF DESCRIPTION OF SOUTHERN REGIONAL SYNOD REGARDING THE DECISION OF NATIONAL SYNOD 2006 TO JOIN THE SACC (Artt 56, 280, 281)

- A. Rev H Reinecke states the Point of Description.
- B. **Decision:** The Point of Description is referred to the Commission Ecumenicity.
- C. Prof SJ van der Merwe reports on behalf of the Ad hoc commission on the implication that the Petition of Protest of the Regional Synod Bushveld regarding the SACC has succeeded.
- D. **Decision:** The Synod decides that in the light of the implications of the fact that the Petition of Protest of Regional Synod Bushveld regarding the SACC has succeeded, this Point of Description will not be considered.
- E. See decision taken at 15.6 – Petition of Protest Regional Synod Bushveld on the SACC.

F. POINT OF DESCRIPTION

1. Point of description

That the General Synod is requested to reconsider the GKSA's membership of the SACC and to investigate additional ways in which the churches can fulfil their prophetic task, with consideration of the churches' and members' need that the churches should give more visible testimony.

2. Argumentation and motivation

2.1 *The South African Council of Churches (SACC)'s link with the World Council of Churches (WCC)*

During Synod 2006 no mention was made of the fact that the SACC is an affiliated member of the World Council of Churches (WCC). Synod 2006 states: *Negative perceptions of 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 to the churches in the world regarding this in a suitable fashion* (Acta 2006:174, vii). In the light of this statement it is also necessary that members should be aware that the SACC is an affiliate of the WCC (www.sacc.org.za, see under the heading *Partners*).

It is well-known that the WCC not only strives towards unity amongst Christian Churches, but that they tend towards a syncretist direction and wants inter-faith cooperation. There was recently a reference to an inter-faith seminar on the WCC website: *How can we affirm our identity as Muslims, Jews and Christians not in separation or against each other but in relation to one another?* They then tell how combined services were held in a synagogue, mosque and church (webpage, World Council of Churches). It is clear that the WCC supports such inter-faith gatherings.

An Australian Newspaper, *The Australian*, reported as follows on a remark made by the Director of the WCC's Inter-faith dialogue, Wesley Ariarajah:

"The World Council of Churches took ecumenism to the farthest limits at the weekend, suggesting Muslims, Hindus and others achieve salvation in the same way as Christians and warning the latter against narrow thinking." It is furthermore important to remember that members of the WCC do not have to adhere to faith in the Triune God.

The WCC also gives its support to other ecumenical bodies in the growing inter-faith movement. One of these is the Parliament of World Religions, which openly pleads for religious equality (Godsdienstige Dwalinge, p17, 18,

<http://www.bibleguidance.co.za/AfrartikelsNalseleringe.htm>).

The result of the GKSA's affiliation to the SACC is that the Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid Afrika is therefore also indirectly member of the WCC. The members of the GKSA contribute estimated offerings to the SACC, who in turn pays affiliation fees to the WCC.

2.2 *Inter-faith events by the SACC*

In Synod 2006's motivation to the decision to join the SACC it is said: *Member churches do not have to agree with the decisions of the SACC, they can testify on their own and launch initiatives when necessary. These factors make it easier for the GKSA to join the SACC* (Acta, 2006:173, (a) Motivation). Although the GKSA can remain independent, the question can be asked whether it is worth the price. There are many news bulletins on the SACC website where they cooperate with Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus and other faith groups. Some of the articles are: *"Interfaith Marches for Trade Justice", "Interfaith Relief Commission Established", "Interfaith Delegation to Explore Reconciliation in Rwanda"*. However, God tells us clearly in the Bible: *Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?"* (2 Cor. 6:14-16).

Here follows an extract from the article *Interfaith Service Marches for Trade Justice* on the SACC webpage:

"Singing 'Siyahamba – We are marching in the light of God', faith leaders from Christian, Muslim and Jewish traditions led 500 worshippers on a procession from St George's Anglican Cathedral in Cape Town to St Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral, opposite the Houses of Parliament. During the service, organized as part of the Global Week of Action on Trade " en "During the intercessory prayers, members of the South African Textile Workers' Union came forward to tell the assembly how they had been affected by the announced closure, ... ". (www.sacc.org.za)

In the light of which god did they march and to which god did they pray? Could it be to the Triune God in which we believe, but who is rejected by the Muslims and the Jews?

The SACC is also busy with attempts to promote ancestor worship and heathen rituals in their Christian Churches. In its publication, *Rite of Reconciliation*, different examples of reconciliatory rituals are described that can be followed by churches. This was amongst others done in an attempt to meet the ideals of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In these rituals water, fire, gall, blood, beer and oil are used. One of the suggestions are as follows:

Beer, blood or water mixed with mealie meal in a calabash will be used. Spears or knob kieries , wooden shrines, guns or any appropriate symbol is put on a blanket, quilt, etc. on the floor. As the minister says the following prayer, his or her helpers pour the libation slowly on the symbols representing the ancestors and the spirits of those who died unjustly whether as victims or defenders of the apartheid government' The prayer is as follows "As we pour out the libation, we call upon you, our ancestors, to be present at this ceremony of reconciliation. We invite the Spirits of all who have died before their time as innocent victims of human blindness ... We invoke the Spirits of our ancestors to intercede on behalf of our new nation ... We ask for courage and honesty through Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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The GKSA will have to answer to the requirement of Scripture not to >>> met die ongelowiges in dieselfde juk te trek nie. The decision to participate in the SACC without real principle argumentation brings confusion amongst members. In 1 Cor. 10:27-33 Paul says that the believer should not eat the meat that is sacrificed for the idol for the sake of the conscience of others. Is this situation not similar? If we know that the SACC has close ties with other faith groups, we should for the sake of the consciences of others not walk this road with them.

2.3 *Lacking influence of the SACC with the Government*

During Synod 2006 the following motivation was provided for joining the SACC: *In light of the fact that mutual church testimony within the new constitutional regime is ver important, the Deputies feel that the GKSA should joining the SACC because this gives the GKSA greater direct access to the government. At the same time it would enable our churches to play a more influential role within the broader church environment* (Acta 2006:172, (a) Motivation).

The question should be asked after two years what difference the GKSA's joining of the SACC really made. Did our churches really fulfil a more influential role within the broader ecclesiastical environment? The GKSA will probably not have a pure voice towards the government, because the SACC only goes to the government with the majority voice. The minority voice, which we would often identify with, in any case then has very limited access to the government.

If it would repeatedly come down to us stating our own views in the media, why don't we just state it directly to the media without the participation in the SACC? The aim of the church's decision was to have influence on the government and to play a more influential role within the church environment. If we did not succeed in this aim, the attempt has failed. Then there would no longer be any sense in continuing with the link with the SACC.

It also seems that members are not aware of any advantages that we may get from membership of the SACC. Cooperation with organisations such as Christian Action would probably have more success. The organisation has in the past few years received more publicity aside from the SACC than the GKSA did as member church of the SACC.

The danger is that we sacrifice our actual calling, namely the pure proclamation of the gospel due to the route we are taking to make a contribution. The purpose and the route are both important. The route to a certain destination may look good, but it may later emerge that this route leads to another (disappointing) destination. We should make sure of the route we are going to follow. In our opinion we are losing the opportunity to proclaim the Word in freedom and without inhibition. Of course the GKSA has the calling to give prophetic testimony to the world on a reformed foundation (see Col 2:8 and John 9:5; 1 Pet 3:15), (Acta 2006:173, 3.2,b,(ii)) but is an alternative and possibly better route not possibly greater and more urgent prayer regarding our calling and the expectation that the Lord would open doors in a more acceptable (and more reformed foundation) manner? In Rev 3:8 we hear the promise of the Christ, the Head of his Church, to his church in Philadelphia: *see, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut*. Jesus Christ himself is the One that opens doors for his church. Are we certain that the road with the SACC is the door that Christ opens for his church, or are we trying to force open a door that has not been given to us by Him?

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 both, 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.