

## 20.2 REPORT PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES FOR DAYS OF HUMILIATION [CO, ART 66] (Artt 82, 191)

- A. The vice-chairman, rev SD Snyman, takes the chair.
- B. Dr CJ Smit delivers the Report.
- C. **Decision:** The Report is referred to the Commission for Church Matters : Historical and Polity.
- D. Dr WC Opperman reports on behalf of the Commission for Church Matters : Historical and Church Polity.

### E. REPORT

#### 1. Assignment

**Decision: Noted.**

#### 2. A framework of principle considerations

##### 2.1 *Scriptural grounds for determining a day of prayer*

##### 2.1.1 Point of departure: General Scriptural Grounds

##### 2.1.1.1 *Love and obedience*

Throughout Scripture the kingdom relationship that God upholds with his people is assumed. In the light of the meaning of the Decalogue in which the recognition of God's rule comes together, this relationship requires an attitude of love for and obedience to Him (Matt 22:37-40).

##### 2.1.1.2 *Solidarity in guilt*

Sin radically disturbs the command to love and obedience. Without exception every person sins, and therefore certain sins are not limited to the active individual sinner. Sin also has a communal character that leads to solidarity in guilt before God (Rom 3:9-20; DD I, 1).

##### 2.1.1.3 *Mutual suffering*

The family, the church, and the entire community can suffer under God's testing hand due to a sin that takes place in one of these areas (see Lev 4:3; 16:16, 22; 1 Cor 12:21-26).

##### 2.1.1.4 *Shared humiliation*

Believers who in one or another relation suffer with each other due to the consequences of sin and who are therefore driven by the testing hand of the Lord, has the responsibility to humiliate themselves together before the Lord (Lev 16).

##### 2.1.2 Overview of Old Testamental information with regard to days of prayer

##### 2.1.2.1 *Extraordinary days of fasting*

For communal humiliation there is an example of a frequent, fixed day of fasting: Levites 16:29-31. There are also examples of extraordinary days of fasting: Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 7:6; 1 Kings 21:9; Jeremiah 36:6, 9; Jonah 3:5-10; 2 Chronicles 20:3-30; Joel 1:14 en 2:12-17.

##### 2.1.2.2 *A time for fasting*

The Hebrew word *tsom* means a time for fasting, not so much a day of fasting (see Koehler-Baumgartner, Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros, 1953:798).

##### 2.1.2.3 *Meaning of days of fasting*

Days of fasting does not emphasise the Old Testamental rest idea on the Sabbath, but rather the idea of humiliation in prayer (Joel 1 and 2).

##### 2.1.2.4 *Fasting as outer sign of humiliation*

Fasting is the outer sign of humiliation before God, confession of guilt, bowing before Him and subjecting to his will (see Joel 2:15 in context; Theol Wörterbuch zum NT, IV:928; Calvin, IV,12, xv and xvii).

- 2.1.2.5 *Circumstances that necessitate days of humiliation in prayer*  
 Times of fasting was proclaimed in the Old Testament in times of darkness and panic:  
*If calamity comes upon us, whether the sword of judgment, or bank or famine, we will stand in your presence before this temple ... and will cry out to you in our distress, and you will hear us and save us!* (2 Cron 20:9).  
 [The formulation of article 66 of the Dordt Church Order of 1618/19 to a great degree coincides with the quoted text: *In tijden van Oorloghe, Pestilensie, dieren tijt, sware Vervolginghe der Kercken ende andere alghemeyne swarigheden ...*].
- 2.1.2.6 *Grounds for humiliation*  
 The grounds for humiliation and confession of guilt by means of a time of fasting lies in the recognition that God is the disposer of the fate of all nations, and in so doing the testing hand of the Lord in disasters is acknowledged:  
*'O Lord, God of our fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you.'* (2 Cron 20:6-9).
- 2.1.2.7 *Nation and church overlaps*  
 It must be understood that nation (*am*) and church (*kahal*) overlaps to a great extent in the Old Testament. Sometimes the church is in meeting, that at the same time includes the whole nation (e.g. Joel 2:16). However, this given fact changes in the New Testament (see pt 2.1.3 below).
- 2.1.2.8 *Conclusions*
- (i) The aim of fasting is to subject the body and to subdue it while in prayer. Fasting was used as the outer sign to express humiliation and confession of guilt visibly. The emphasis should not fall on fasting as the method, but rather on the attitude of humiliation and confession of guilt as the essence of the matter.
  - (ii) Extraordinary days of humiliation do not include the frequent annual prayer and thank days. A day of humiliation makes a manner of mutual confession of guilt and humiliation due to the testing hand of the Lord possible. Therefore a day of humiliation does not necessarily have to be followed by a general day of thanks.
  - (iii) The changed relationship between church and nation has implications for determining a day of humiliation. The matter that 2.1.3 goes into is whether a day of humiliation is meant to be only for the church, or for all the nations of the country, and in 2.1.4 the relationship between church and state authority with regard to days of humiliation is investigated.
- 2.1.3 Overview of New Testamental information with regard to the relationship between church and nation
- 2.1.3.1 *New dispensation*  
 In the New Testamental dispensation the church and the nation clearly do not fall together as identical any longer.
- 2.1.3.2 *Church and nation*  
 The church (ecclesia) is now on the one hand *larger* and on the other hand *smaller* than the nation:
- (i) Larger than the nation therein that not only one nation (Israel) is God's. The blessing of Abraham has now, according to God's promise, gone out to all nations (Gen 22:18; Matt 28:19; Acts 3:25). Now the believers from all the nations are included as God's people (Acts 15:14).
  - (ii) Smaller than the nation therein that not everyone who belongs to the nation also belongs to God (Matt 3:9, 10; Rom 9:6).
- 2.1.3.3 *Church in the nation*  
 In the New Testament the church exists in the nation. Believers are not divorced from their nations to belong to God's people as church. In fact, they are called to

have a sanctifying effect on the nation. Keeping their nation and cultural bonds, the believers form part of God's people as well (see Acts 10:34, 35).

#### 2.1.3.4 *Living tree*

The believers of the nation is in God's view the living tree that remains, while the non-believers are the dead branches that should be cut off (Rom 11:16 ao).

#### 2.1.3.5 *Conclusions*

- (i) Days of humiliation due to the sins of the nations of the country as a result of which God's testing hand is felt everywhere, should be organised by the church.
- (ii) At the same time the church should work in the nations of the country like yeast – and the entire community of nations should thus be called to humiliation and confession of guilt before the one true God.

#### 2.1.4 Overview of New Testamental information with regard to the relationship between church and state authorities

##### 2.1.4.1 *The task of the church towards the state is to:*

- (i) Pray for state authorities (1 Tim 2:1, 2),
- (ii) Be submissive to the state authorities in what is right before God and to encourage all people to obedience to the authorities (Rom 13; Pet 2:13, 14),
- (iii) Pay taxes to the state authority as well as everything that should come to them (Matt 17:24-27; 22:21),
- (iv) Testify regarding the truth to all people, thus also towards the state authorities, and to call them to obedience to God (Acts 5:29; see 1 Kings 12:30; Dan 6:22), and
- (v) To call the state authorities to humiliation before the Lord (Joel 1:14; Jer 22; Mica 3; Jonah 3:5-10; etc).

##### 2.1.4.2 *The task of the state authorities towards the church is to:*

- (i) Be a "servant of God" for the good of all the citizens towards all people, therefore also the church (Rom 13: 4),
- (ii) Govern in such a manner that Christian subjects may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all honor (1 Tim 2 :2),
- (iii) Protect the virtuous (amongst which the believers), protect the Ministry of the Word so that the church may take up the sword of the Spirit against all idolatry and false religions (Deut 13; 17; BC, art 36), and
- (iv) Make days of humiliation possible for believers where it lies on the terrain of the state authorities to do so (1 Sam 7:5,6; Jonah 3:6-9; 2 Cron 20:3-30).

##### 2.1.4.3 *Conclusions*

- (i) The church should seek the cooperation of the state authority to make general days of humiliation possible and to enforce it practically, especially where such days are organized on weekdays.
- (ii) The state authority has the Scripture founded responsibility to be of assistance to the church in this without entering onto the terrain of the church and wanting to do the job of the church.

#### **Decision: Points 2.1.1 to 2.1.4.3 noted.**

### 2.2 *Church governance grounds for the determination of a day of humiliation*

#### 2.2.1 Church grounds

##### 2.2.1.1 *Universal and local church*

The church as body of Christ is universal (see Eph 1:22, 23). The universal church comes to expression in certain places. The church in a specific place (local church or congregation) is the believers who, based on the same confession and in obedience to the Word of the Lord, gather together and therefore forms an organic unity (BC, art 27).

##### 2.2.1.2 *Denomination*

The local church (congregation) can due to the unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the universal body of Jesus Christ not function adequately in isolation. Due to the mentioned characteristics of the church the local churches

(congregations) enter into church denomination with each other. The denomination is expressed in mutual church governance with regard to church matters that can not be dealt with by the local church (congregation).

#### 2.2.1.3 *Authority of lesser assemblies*

As Head of his church Christ makes his will clear enough in his Word (Eph 1:22, 23; BC, art 7). Church meetings therefore do not function as governors in the order of the hierarchy in the place of the Jesus over the church, but serve as instruments through which the authority of Jesus Christ is orderly served in his church by the called servant (BC, artt 27, 31). This includes that congregations that gather in lesser assemblies have the church political authority to conclude matters that only affect them, without first lying the matter before a majority meeting for jurisprudence.

#### 2.2.1.4 *Conclusions*

- (i) The Scriptural point of departure is that believers in times of great suffering of which the pressure can be felt in all church communities, gather to humiliate themselves before (2 Cron 20:9) the Lord, and this normally takes place in a meeting of the local church (congregation) where their part-taking in the body of Christ is expressed in an organic manner, as seen in 2.2.1.1. However, this conclusion does not exclude that different church communities could gather together in certain justified circumstances.
- (ii) Lesser assemblies do not have to wait for all the congregations in the Synod to agree to a day of humiliation, since the necessity for humiliation and prayer are felt largely by die churches of a certain region.

### 2.2.2 The relationship between different church communities

#### 2.2.2.1 *Unity of the body of Christ*

The unity of the body of Christ, which is amongst other things expressed in uniting in prayer (Acts 2:42), serves as a principle point of departure with regard to days of prayer.

#### 2.2.2.2 *Unified humiliation*

True and unified humiliation that is pleasing to God, is a second principle point of departure that should be stated here (Isa 1:10-19; Mal 1:6-14; Matt 3:7,8).

#### 2.2.2.3 *Agreement in humiliation*

With regard to countrywide need that drives believers to humiliation, the divisions between different church communities may not be over-emphasised at the cost of the highly possibly cooperation and unity in the humiliation and prayer before the Lord.

#### 2.2.2.4 *Combined days of humiliation*

The unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the universal body of Jesus Christ makes a joined day of humiliation in obedience to the Word and through prayers possible, regardless of the boundaries of church communities (Acts 2:42; Isa 1:10-19; Mal 1:6-14; Matt 3:7, 8).

#### 2.2.2.5 *Conclusions*

- (i) This communion in obedience to the Word and in prayer makes it crucial that different church communities will consult each other as widely as possible in the determination of a day of humiliation.
- (ii) At the same time the communion of the different church communities with each other around a day of humiliation does not end the organic involvement of believers to their local church (congregation) as expression of the body of Jesus Christ where believers usually humiliate themselves together in the relevant faith community, due to shared and individual guilt (see 2.2.1.1).

### **Decision: Points 2.2.1 to 2.2.2.5 noted.**

### 2.2.3 The state authority and multiplicity of church communities

#### 2.2.3.1 *Recognition of each church community*

The state authority should acknowledge and respect the universal church in every local church (congregation), which groups themselves in denominations.

2.2.3.2 *Equal treatment of church communities*

The church communities should therefore be treated equally by the state authority. One church community should not be singled out and be favoured as if that particular church acts on behalf of all other church communities.

2.2.3.3 *Church way of doing*

The state authorities should allow church communities to take the lead along the lines of their own processes to call and organise days of prayer.

**Decision: Points 2.2.3.1 to 2.2.3.3 noted.**

### **3. Principles and guidelines for the determination of a day of humiliation**

3.1 *Principles with regard to calling such a day*

3.1.1 Justification

It is Scripturally justified to organise a general day of humiliation due to need and the punishing hand of the Lord as a result of solidarity in guilt.

3.1.2 Acute need

A general day of humiliation should only be called *in cases of a widespread, specific and acute need of which the pressure can be felt in all the churches*. Circumstances that can lead to a day of humiliation must be of such a testing nature that in necessitates such a day.

3.1.3 Deep need for forgiveness

A day of humiliation is meant to be a day where churches flee to the Lord and call all the nations of the country/region to do so due to a deeply felt need to plead for God's forgiveness and for his mercy as a result of the specific need that the region/country is feeling: *should You bring calamity over us, or the punishment of the sword, or pests of famine ... (2 Cron 20:9)*.

3.1.4 Guard against underestimation

Churches should guard against too many days of humiliation, so that the use of special combined days of humiliation should not be underestimation or be overestimated in relation to Sunday's gatherings that last-mentioned are later neglected.

3.1.5 Extra-ordinary circumstances

A day of humiliation is not meant to bring chronic miseries that churches and nations of the country/region are continually confronted with before the Lord. It is therefore meant to bring churches to the Lord for confession of guilt and humiliation and to call the entire community to do so as a result of extra-ordinary trying circumstances in which the punishing hand of the Lord can also be seen.

3.2 *Guidelines for evaluation of the necessity for a day of humiliation*

3.2.1 The reasons for a day of humiliation should be found to be weighty enough in the fact that the testing hand of the Lord should be clearly visible in it.

3.2.2 The pressure must be felt in all the churches.

3.2.3 There should be a general feeling amongst all the churches for the necessity of such a day.

3.2.4 The punishing hand of the Lord should lead to a general, noticeable feeling of regret and confession. In fact, the representatives in the structures of the church community who takes the initiative to proclaim such a day should be convinced that the pressure that is felt everywhere, drives churches to seek the face of the Lord in *regret, conversion and pleading*.

3.3 *Principles with regard to the state authorities and the communion*

3.3.1 The church's responsibility

It is the church's responsibility, and not that of the state authorities, to determine a joined day of humiliation through the structures that the church has made available.

3.3.2 The responsibility of state authorities

It is the task of the church to approach the state authorities to be of assistance when the pressure and suffering can be felt throughout the church by enabling the citizens of the country to attend services of humiliations.

- 3.3.3 Equal treatment  
In negotiations of church communities with the state authorities regarding the possibility of a joined day of humiliation, the state authorities should not single out one church community and favour it as if that church community speaks on behalf of all other church communities.
- 3.3.4 Call also to state authorities  
It is the calling of the church to, where it is deemed necessary, also call the state authorities to humiliation before the Lord.
- 3.3.5 Call to the entire community  
The church does not stand separate from the nation, and therefore churches should in their majority assemblies – in cases of disasters of suffering – direct their call to the entire community so that everyone may hear the call to convert under God's testing hand and to humiliate themselves before the Lord.
- 3.4 *Guidelines for liaison with the government authorities and the community*  
The structure of the church community that takes the initiative for a call to a day of humiliation, should contact and come to agreement with as many other church communities as possible regarding
- (i) In which way state authorities will be contacted together, and
  - (ii) In which way the entire community will be called to humiliation and prayer.
- 3.5 *Principles with regard to other church communities*
- 3.5.1 Highly possible cooperation  
The highest possible level of cooperation and unity in humiliation should be gained from all Christians for such a day. For this purpose the cooperation of all the other Christian churches in the country should be sought to establish unity in the humiliation before the Lord.
- 3.5.2 No demonstration of unity  
The unity with regard to humiliation should not lead to an exaggerated, even untruthful demonstration of church unity, but should rather come to the fore in simultaneous services in the local churches (congregations) in every church community. This does not mean that combined services of humiliation in certain places where circumstances allow for it, are excluded.
- 3.5.3 No judgement  
There should be a clear understanding with the representatives of other church communities that on church community will not judge another when agreement regarding the proclamation of a day of humiliation can not be reached.
- 3.5.4 Simultaneous action  
When the representatives of a church community plans a general day of humiliation, they should not publish the intention before consultation with representatives of other church communities have taken place.
- 3.6 *Guidelines for liaison between the representatives of different church communities*
- 3.6.1 Due to the urgency when determining a day of humiliation when the need arises, the representatives of as many as possible church communities should be contacted directly.
- 3.6.2 If possible, a meeting of such representatives should be called to take decisions for the organization of a day of humiliation.
- 3.7 *Principles with regard to the shape of a day of humiliation*
- 3.7.1 Organic unity  
In Scripture such days are characterized by fasting and prayer through which genuine humiliation before the Lord was expressed. Due to the organic unity that is expressed in the congregation, it is preferable that believers gather for combined humiliation in their congregation.
- 3.7.2 Fasting  
Although fasting has not been used in the reformed churches since the previous century in the light of New Testament Scripture statements such as 1 Corinthians

10:31; 8:8; Romans 14:17 en Matthew 15:11, Scripture does not forbid it and this can therefore be applied to days of humiliation.

3.7.3 No prescription

The specific nature of a day of humiliation is not prescribed in Scripture.

3.8 *Guidelines for the nature of a day of humiliation*

3.8.1 Every congregation organizes the day of humiliation according to the liturgy of that church community.

3.8.2 At 3.8.1 it should be taken into consideration that humiliation is characterized by communal prayer and humiliation. This can take place in the form of a service where the Ministry of the Word and prayers are aimed at confession of guilt due to the circumstances.

3.8.3 The prayer of humiliation is central in the service. If more than one prayer (for example after the ministry of the Word) is used, those who lead in prayer can consult beforehand so that duplication is avoided.

3.8.4 The tradition to fast on a day of humiliation, could be investigated by churches, but in consideration of the fact that it is better not to fast at all than having it lead to superstition (Calvin, IV, 23, xix).

3.9 *Principles with regard to a certain region*

3.9.1 A certain region

The testing hand of the Lord can in certain circumstances be felt in a certain region to such an extent that only believers in that specific region feel the necessity of a day of humiliation.

3.9.2 Authority

Church assemblies in the specific region have the authority to decide on a day of humiliation independently.

3.10 *Guidelines for a day of humiliation for a certain region*

The principles according to which a region decides on a day of humiliation remain the same as for a general day of humiliation.

3.11 *Attitude*

It is not in the first instance about the formal determination of a determined day (e.g. length of the day, and whether it should be on a Sunday or weekday), but on the disposition of the heart that has to continue with obedience in humiliation after the formal communal event of humiliation.

3.11 *Guidelines for the determination of a specific day*

3.12.1 The church community that takes the initiative to call other church communities for a day of humiliation, should take in consideration

(i) That as many as possible representatives of the different church communities should decide on a date for a day of humiliation together, and

(ii) That there should be enough time to properly organize such a day.

**Decision: Points 3.1 to 3.12.1 noted.**

**4. Recommendation**

That the entire Report be approved as the principle foundation according to which days of humiliation are organized in future.

**Decision: The Report is approved as amended. The Report is sent to the authorised bodies of all the national church communities with whom ecumenical ties and contact is maintained for notice with reference to the fact that the Convent of Reformed Churches in Southern Africa has also already accepted this Report.**