

## 20.7 PETITION OF PROTEST: GEREFORMEERDE KERK PRETORIA (DISSENTING) AGAINST DECISION OF SYNOD 2006, ON “STRUCTURES” OF MAJORITY ASSEMBLIES (Artt 19, 37, 249, 266)

- A. The Petition of Protest is considered stated.
- B. **Decision:** The Petition of protest is referred to Petition of Protest commission 3.
- C. Rev PW Kurpershoek reports on behalf of Petition of Protest commission 3.
- D. 3.5.3 and 3.5.4 – Commission report – is referred to an ad hoc commission.
- E. Dr G Breed reports on behalf of the ad hoc commission.

### F. PETITION OF PROTEST

#### 1. Decisions that are protested

Acta 2006, art 19.2 –

“Classes and Sinodes

2.1 That Regional Classes and Regional Synods and a General Synod be instated.

2.2 That Classes be made up of more churches, so that there can be adequate spiritual gifts to effectively deal with the Agenda.

2.3 That as a general rule no less than 15 churches form a Classis. There are more or less 410 churches that have to be grouped into Classes. Attention should be paid to practical concerns such as distance and cost, as well as the availability of the necessary gifts.

2.4 That a Commission be appointed to provide a preliminary suggestion to the next General Synod regarding the grouping of new minority assemblies and on the manner in which Classes should delegate to the Regional Synods and Regional Synods to the General Synod. This Commission may consult existing Classes on the manner of grouping, and may co-opt members if necessary ...”

**Decision: Approved.”**

“4.2 *Language*

Recommendation

4.2.1 That each new Classis and new Synod has to take its own measures with regard to its language medium within the framework of the official languages of the region.

**Decision: Approved with the following addition: Each assembly should ensure that language differences do not lead to inadequate communication. Each delegate should be able to participate in discussion and decision making with regard to matters on the Agenda.** (Own underlining)

**Decision: Approved.”**

#### 2. Introduction

***Prof B Spoelstra in “Die Kerkpad”, May 2006:***

“Based on unity in doctrine and life, local churches can correspond across cultures and not “rule” each other.

The **central question** is what the **necessity** (CO, art 46) was for Synod 2006 **abolishing the “National Synod”**.

Without insight into the decision making process I guess that this necessity was never considered or indicated, while ***light years*** of difference **EXIST** between Western and African cultures on **liturgy, church organisation, morality, authority, concept of Church and office, etc.**

[For instance] The Zuma court case and how the (“general people”) [= changed word for the sake of softness] view it, is already an indication of this.

Do the **change in church form** not come from contemporary **SOCIO-POLITICAL** constructs?

*Will the GKSA CHURCH “STRUCTURE” SOON stagnate into a MONO-ENGLISH Synod until the the centrifugal forces of faith, cultural and formal **DIFFERENCES** within the*

“unity” blow up and lead to the “liberation” of homogenous local churches within a certain culture?”

**The Church Council of the Gereformeerde Kerk Pretoria (Dissenting) decided in its meeting of 19 June 2008 to protest the above-mentioned decision. The Synod decision has scant regard for the problems with regard to language and culture differences among the churches involved. These far-reaching decisions affect the current state of affairs in all the churches, and in our opinion this clashes in principle with other Synod decisions and Church Order stipulations.**

### **Grounds for protest 1**

**Synod 2006 took this decision without ammendment of CO, art 29 and of Synod decisions with regard to Ecumenicity as taken in 1967 and 1985, and as upheld in the first part of the decisions of 1997.**

#### **Motivation**

CO, art 29 **only** acknowledges the following assemblies: Church Council, Classis, Particular Synod, National Synod and General Synod.

If **joint** assemblies such as *Area Classes, Regional Synods, and a General Synod (with exclusion of National Synod)* are created to **REPLACE** the entire “old structure”, it implies unification of the churches among different nations, something that can only be carried into effect once CO, art 29 has been **legally ammended**.

This “unification” clashes with the principles as contained in decisions pertaining to nations and church relations, as taken at Synods 1967, 1985 and 1997.

In short the essence of the decisions of 1967, 1985 and 1997 is as follows: “From the unity of the Church it therefore follows that ecumenicity is not sought within the local church (mixed services, etc), but in church denomination.”

Since the church denomination in which different churches came together found its expression in the General Synod, the “church denomination” to which reference is made in the above quoted Synod decision *must mean the General Synod ... with exclusion of the National Synods?*

Why dissolve the General Synod? Was this done according to the Church Order? We could not find any Petition of Protest and decision on this matter. This entire matter of restructuring etc, belongs to the General Synod.

### **Grounds for protest 2**

**Decisions with regard to the language issue is contrary to the principles as contained in the Holy Scripture, amongst others Acts 2:8 and Romans 10:17, as well as BC, art 32.**

#### **Motivation**

Since the church meetings also form part of members’ God experience, in addition to the services, sacraments, etc, the mother tongue should be maintained in the church meetings just like in the services.

The Word of God also points to the importance of language. Romans 10:17 states it as follows: “...*faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.*”

Acts 2:8 states it as follows: “*Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?*”

It is therefore not a crudely assembled, lacking English. **It is mother tongue.** This is precisely in line with Synod Acta 1967 (p188 c. (1) (2): “As members of the body of Christ the believers are not detached from their natural relations. To the contrary, its about their redemption in all their generations and about nations that are saved in their believers and baptised. In the finished kingdom we see the saved from all nations and ethnic groups and languages (Rev 5:9; Acts 17:26). A variety of nations is presupposed and maintained by the establishment of the Church at Pentecost, where the Gospel is heard by each in his own language.”

The National Synod 1985 (p434, 3.3.2.2-3.3.2.8) also took note of this matter in its decision. On p436 under 5.1.1(ii) and (iii) it is stated: "Therefore, in a community where there are language and cultural differences between believers, an external or artificial form of unity may not be forced. In such cases it is justified that separate congregations are instituted, each with their own type of preaching and worship." It was decided that the "formulation contained in 3.3.2.9 of the Deputy report be accepted explicitly as Synod decision".

In Acta Synod 1997:870 "recommendations 4.1 to 4.2.4 are approved in that discussions will be held with other Synods regarding ways in which the different churches can adequately **assist** each other within language and cultural regard, as well as outside of language and cultural regard in church governance." (Own emphasis.)

At the Synod of Emden in 1571 it was decided to establish Dutch and Flamish congregations on both sides of the river, just because of language differences.

(Also compare the current debate on mother tongue education. Language is not an issue to be taken lightly.)

These decisions of 1967, 1985 and 1997 stand, since no protest founded on the church order or Scripture were brought against them so that they had to be revoked.

### **Grounds for protest 3**

**The decisions around the language matter creates insurmountable practical problems and disturbs the already strained unity and peace in churches, and in the process it negates the admonishment of BC, art 32.**

#### **Motivation**

It is neither fair nor attainable to expect that delegates should formulate their deepest persuasions and church and doctrinal contributions in another language than their mother tongue. The enormous cultural differences, and on top of that the strange language, will make it even more difficult for the hearer as well.

We also refer to the fact that there are countless Coloured and Black people who understand and speak Afrikaans well, especially in rural areas. On the other hand we believe that there are many ministers who will find it difficult to express themselves in church terms in English.

The decision is forced, just like with the creation of the combined majority assemblies. When seen in relation to the decision to stretch backwards to speak to the government by means of the SACC and the Dutch Reformed Church's parliamentary desk, these decisions can seem to be more political than ecclesiastical.

**BC, art 32** states it so clearly and simply: "We further believe that the governors of the Church should, although it is useful and good to keep a certain order in the body of the Church, take care to not deviate from what Christ, our only Master, has instated for us ...

... So we only accept that which can serve to promote and conserve **unity**, and we uphold all in obedience to God."

In our view Synod creates a climate prone to disagreement with this decision.

### **Grounds for protest 4**

**Also CO, artt 30, 48, 49 and 51 are transgressed with this decision, together with art 29. It was also not changed based on Petitions of Protest.**

#### **Motivation**

The current decision ignores the fact that art 48 speaks of **correspondence** (especially in the sense of mutual assistance), and not of **forced** unification. In art 48 difference are acknowledged, including countries, languages and cultures.

In transgression of art 49: The decision includes that "**a Commission**" be appointed. According to this article the work is referred to **Deputies**. While the Synod dissolves the National Synods, there can in any case not be such "National" Synods where the "Commission" can report.

2.4 also transgresses art 30 – Why should the "Commission" report on matters that minority assemblies should conclude themselves?

Art 51's "General Synod" was also not changed based on a Petition of Protest. The existence of National Synods can not be circumvented in this manner.

## Recommendations

1. That the Synod 2006 sets this artificial unity aside in the light of the above-mentioned and consider the matter from the start, together with Synods Midlands and Soutpansberg.
2. Since the majority of delegates to the majority assemblies are Afrikaans speaking, or at least understand Afrikaans, those who do not understand it should carry the costs involved with translation themselves, into whichever language.

## G. REPORT OF THE COMMISSION

### 1. Assignment

Petition of Protest Pta (Dolerend) Art 48 CO.

**Decision: Noted.**

### 2. Matters to take note of

2.1 Input and advice has been received from prof. CFC Coetzee as advisor.

**3 Decision: Noted.**

### 3. Evaluation of grounds of protest

3.1 *Ground for protest 1*

#### 3.1.1 Claim by petition of protest

3.1.1.1 The petition of protest claims that the relevant decision of Synod Potchefstroom could only have been taken after article 29 CO and several Synod-decisions had been altered.

#### 3.1.2 Argumentation by petition of protest

3.1.2.1 The petition of protest states that the replacement of the “old structure” presupposes an unification of churches from the different people.

3.1.2.2 This unification - according to the petition of protest – is in conflict with the decisions of Synods Potchefstroom 1967, 1985, 1997 because – according to the petition of protest – the decisions of Synods 1967, 1985, 1997 can be summarised as *ecumenicity should not be looked for in the local church (mixed race worship services), but in church community.*

3.1.2.3 The word *church community* refers - according to the petition of protest - **only** to the General Synod – with exclusion of the National Synods – with the result that ecumenicity should – according to the petition of protest – be looked for in the General Synod only.

3.1.2.4 The petition of protest argues also that Article 29 CO should have been changed first, as with the “new structure” unification of the churches from the different people has been carried out.

#### 3.1.3 Evaluation of ground of protest

3.1.3.1 The summary and interpretation of the decisions of Synod Potchefstroom by the petition of protest (refer to §3.1.2.2) is selective and unilateral.

3.1.3.2 Synod 1964 (Acts, 1964:269) has already stated:

*Because of the extraordinary situation the common Synod is not enough. This has to be supplemented by way of a ecumenical relationship from the local churches up to the (national) Synods.*

3.1.3.3 Synod 1967 (Acts, 1967:188, §2.c.7) has also decided:

*And because the church is one and catholic, church community can't stop before national or colour boundaries.*

3.1.3.4 Synod 1970 (Acts 1970:65) again stated:

*Each race should have the right to choose a degree of separate development, but never at the expense of a specific race in the same country.*

3.1.3.5 Synod 1985 (Acts, 1985:435-437, §3.2.2.9 en 6) also emphasises:

*The unity of the church as the body of Christ should be acknowledged. It could be desirable to form different congregations because of language or cultural differences. Combined worship services, including the Lord's Supper, between*

*Christians, without reference to their race, is an expression of the unity of the body of Christ.*

- 3.1.3.6 The point of departure of the petition of protest (*The replacement of the “old structure” is unification, §3.1.2.1*) is not correct, as the “old structure” already has the unity of the churches in the nations as point of departure and is only a practical method by which this unity can be lived.
- 3.1.3.7 The extra statement by the petition of protest (*ecumenicity should be looked for only in the General Synod, §3.1.2.3 above*) is also not correct, as the decision of Synod 1964 to form a General Synod already stated the necessity that the ecumenical relationship should be looked for from the *local churches up to the (national) synods*.
- 3.1.3.8 Article 29 KO states the principle of church community and church assemblies. The specific referral to which church assemblies should meet, is not part of the essence of article 29 CO. When a new decision is taken about which church assemblies should meet, the changing of article 29 CO will follow this decision.
- 3.1.4 *Finding about point of petition*
- 3.1.4.1 From the evaluation of the petition of protest follows that it is not correct to claim that article 29 KO should have been changed first or that the decisions of the Synod should have been changed.

**Decision: Points 3.1.1 to 3.1.4.1 noted.**

#### 3.1.5 Recommendation

- 3.1.5.1 The protest fails according to ground of protest 1.

**Decision: Approved.**

### 3.2 *Ground for protest 2*

#### 3.2.1 Claim by petition of protest

- 3.2.1.1 The petition of protest claims that the decisions of Synod Potchefstroom regarding the languages to be used is in conflict with Scripture and Confession, as the mother tongue should be upheld in church community.

#### 3.2.2 Argumentation by petition of protest

- 3.2.2.1 The petition of protest takes as point of departure the statement that mother tongue should be upheld in church assemblies – just as in worship services.
- 3.2.2.2 The petition of protest grounds the importance of mother tongue by referring to Romans 10:17 (*Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ*) and Acts 2:8 (*Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?*).
- 3.2.2.3 The petition of protest gives no Confessional grounds, but refers to the decisions of Synods 1967, 1985 en 1997, as well as to the situation at the Synod of Emden (1571) to stress the importance of mother tongue.

#### 3.2.3 Evaluation of ground of protest

- 3.2.3.1 The petition of protest correctly states that language is an important factor when referring to the proclamation of the Gospel.
- 3.2.3.2 The petition of protest however states incorrectly that mother tongue **should** also be upheld in church assemblies.
- 3.2.3.3 The referral to Scripture as stated (§3.2.2.2 above) concerns the proclamation of the gospel and the comprehensibility thereof and is not about the use of mother tongue during church assemblies.
- 3.2.3.4 No argumentation deriving from the Confessions has been given. The claim in the ground for protest that the decisions of Synod 2006 are contrary to article 32 of the Belgic Confession, is not argued at all.
- 3.2.3.5 Even the decisions from Synods which are referred to, give no grounds for the statement that mother tongue should be upheld in church assemblies. Instead, the decision of Synod 1985 which is referred to, is not the decision which has been taken (compare Acts, 1985:437, §6 with Acts, 1985:435, §3.3.2.9). Also, the decisions of Synod 1967 referred to are part of a set of decisions which in the first place focus on the question if “mixed worship services” is a principle or not (Acts,

1967:188, §c1-c5). Thereafter, it is stated specifically about church community that *church community can't stop before national or colour boundaries* (Acts, 1967:188, §c7-c8). Synod 1997 (Acts, 1997:8.5.2, §2.1.2.5) states that *distinctive aspects like language, situation of the country, and customs (KO, art.85) influence the specific way which churches follow to help each other*, but show in no way that that mother tongue should be upheld in church assemblies.

3.2.3.6 The reference to the decision of the Synod of Emden gives no proof that the mother tongue should be upheld in church assemblies.

3.2.3.7 It is necessary to remember that the decisions of Synod 2006 emphasise that each deputy to the Synod has to be able to take part in discussions and decision making and that every meeting should ensure that differences in languages don't lead to bad communication (Acts, 2006:389, §4.2.1).

### 3.2.4 Finding about point of petition

3.2.4.1 It follows from the argumentation that the petition of protest is not correctly claiming that the decisions of Synod about languages are in conflict with Scripture and our Confessions.

**Decision: Points 3.2.1 to 3.2.4.1 noted.**

### 3.2.5 Recommendation

3.2.5.1 The protest fails according to ground of protest 2.

**Decision: Approved.**

## 3.3 *Ground for protest 3*

### 3.3.1 Claim by petition of protest

3.3.1.1 The petition of protest claims that the decisions of Synod Potchefstroom regarding the languages negate the exhortation of article 32, Belgic Confession, as unbridgeable practical problems are formed which disturb the harmony and unity of the churches which are already full of tension.

### 3.3.2 Argumentation by petition of protest

3.3.2.1 The petition of protest states as point of departure that deputies to church assemblies have to act (speak and listen) in a language other than their mother tongue.

3.3.2.2 The petition of protest states that these actions in a non-mother tongue are unfair and unattainable.

3.3.2.3 The petition of protest argues that the decisions regarding language have resulted in a situation where disunity can be rife and that in this way the exhortation of article 32, Belgic Confession, to accept only what is proper to maintain harmony and unity and to keep all in obedience to God, is negated.

### 3.3.3 Evaluation of ground of protest

3.3.3.1 The petition of protest gives no proof that the decision by Synod 2006 implies that deputies to church assemblies are compelled to use another language than their mother tongue.

3.3.3.2 In stead, Synod 2006 decided about language (Acts, 2006:389, §4.2):

*4.2.1 That every new Classis and the new Synod should take its own steps with regard to its language medium, within the framework of the official languages of the country.*

***Decision: Approved with the following addendum: Each church assembly has to look to it that differences in language do not lead to bad communication. Each deputy should be able to take part in discussions and decision making about all the matters in the Agenda.***

3.3.3.3 With the decision the point of departure is that everybody should be able to partake in his mother tongue. The possibility of discord as a result of languages has been taken into consideration. With its decision Synod 2006 thus tried to promote the harmony and unity.

### 3.3.4 Finding about point of petition

3.3.4.1 It follows from the argumentation that the petition of protest is not correct when it says that the decisions of Synod regarding languages negate the exhortation of article 32, Belgic Confession.

**Decision: Points 3.3.1 to 3.3.4.1 noted.**

### 3.3.5 Recommendation

3.3.5.1 The protest fails according to ground of protest 3.

**Decision: Approved.**

## 3.4 *Ground for protest 4*

### 3.4.1 Claim by petition of protest

3.4.1.1 The petition of protest claims that articles 30, 48, 49 and 51 CO are violated as they have not been changed as a result of petition of protests.

### 3.4.2 Argumentation by petition of protest

3.4.2.1 The petition of protest states that article 30 CO has been violated, as the Commission from National Synod had to report to the next National Synods about matters that should have been dealt with by minor assemblies.

3.4.2.2 The petition of protest states that article 48 CO has been violated, as article 48 CO is about correspondence and not about forced unification.

3.4.2.3 The petition of protest states that article 49 CO has been violated, as a Commission in stead of Deputies haven been appointed and as this commission can't report any more because the national Synod is not meeting again.

3.4.2.4 The petition of protest states that article 51 KO has been violated, as the General Synod has not been changed because of a petition of protest.

### 3.4.3 Evaluation of ground of protest

3.4.3.1 In connection with the claimed violation of article 30 CO, the petition of protest argues in no way as to way it is said that the commission had to report about matters that should haven been dealt with by minor assemblies. The statement that article 30 has been violated has not been proved.

3.4.3.2 Article 48 CO states that churches and church assemblies exercise community because of their unity in Christ. The manner in which this unity is practised, is not prescribed, but is a practical arrangement. As all the churches which formed part of the "old" General Synod were one already (compare the argumentation in §3.1.3), the decision of Synod 2006 is just another practical way by which the principle of article 48 CO is arranged. The statement that article 30 has been violated has not been proved.

3.4.3.3 In the petition of protest's argumentation concerning article 49, the decision of Synod 2006 has been read wrongly:

3.4.3.3.1 Paragraph 3 of the Acts van Synod 2006 (Acts, 2006:387-391) contains a summary of decisions taken by the Article 48 CO-deputies which have been summarised from their minutes.

3.4.3.3.2 The commission which is referred to in §2.4 (Acts, 2006:387) is a commission formed by the meeting of the different article 48 CO-deputies en not deputies appointed by National Synod 2006.

3.4.3.3.3 This commission had to report back to the different National Synods which met after June 2005 – which happened by way of the reports by the article 48 CO-deputies to the different National Synods (in the case of Synod Potchefstroom during Synod 2006 – Acts, 2006:392-398).

3.4.3.3.4 Synod 2006 didn't appoint a Commission in stead of Deputies.

3.4.3.4 Articles 47, 50 en 51 CO arranges the practice of article 29 CO, i.e. how church community should be reel in church assemblies. These arrangements take place because of the meetings between the different National Synods' deputies Article 48 CO, instructed by the different National Synods. In this way Synod Potchefstroom in 1991 instructed - because of two points of description - that the participation of another National Synod should be sought to call an extraordinary General Synod to reflect about the composition of the General Synod. This lead to General Synod

1992's decision that the respective National Synods should confer with each other in accordance with article 48 CO until agreement was reached about the composition of the General Synod. Only then the General Synod could be called again to meet. This agreement has been reached in 2005, conferred to by the respective National Synods in 2006 and 2008 and because of this agreement article 51 CO can now be changed by the General Synod.

3.4.4 Finding about point of petition

3.4.4.1 From the argumentation it follows that the petition of protest is not correct when it claims that articles 30, 48, 49 and 51 CO have been violated.

**Decision: Points 3.4.1 to 3.4.4.1 noted.**

3.4.5 Recommendation

3.4.5.1 The protest fails according to ground of protest 4.

**Decision: Approved.**

3.5 *Summarily Recommendations*

3.5.1 The protest fails.

3.5.2 The recommendations which are part of the petition of protest are not given consequence to.

**Decision: Approved.**

**Decision: Points 3.5.3 and 3.5.4 is struck out and referred to a commission for prepare a reformulation and put it to the meeting. The following commission is appointed by the meeting: Drr G Breed (s) JV Fatuse, rev P Sithole, proff D Mashau and JM Vorster.**

**H. REPORT OF THE AD HOC COMMISSION RE POINTS 3.5.3 AND 3.5.4**

1. The General Synod of the GKSA considers the introduction to the Petition of Protest as well as the second recommendation at the Petition of Protest as containing statement that can be experienced as racist and insulting by delegates to the Synod.
2. The National Synod of the GKSA decided in 1970, art 40 p60-67 that racism in all its forms is a sin, and in the light of this decision the General Synod distantiates herself from the comments in this Petition of Protest.
3. The General Synod of the GKSA 2009 once more refers members to the decision of 1970 and call on all believers to oppose all forms of racism and hatespeech between people of different races and to strive towards reconciliation and peace and the embodiment of the community of believers.
4. The General Synod of the GKSA informs the protestors of this call by way of ecclesiastical correspondence.

**Decision: Approved.**