

25. Work method Synod

25.1 PETITION OF PROTEST: REGIONAL SYNOD BUSHVELD REGARDING THE DECREASE IN DEPUTY GROUPS (Artt 19, 45, 176)

- A. Rev SP Venter states the Petition of Protest.
- B. **Decision:** The Petition of Protest is referred to the Petition of Protest Commission 3.
- C. Rev FM Dreyer reports on behalf of the Petition of Protest Commission 3.

D. PETITION OF PROTEST

1. The decision that is protested

National Synod Acta 2000:537, art 2.2.3: Decision: Point 3.2: The work method as formulated in 2.2 (under which also 2.2.3) is approved. Decreases in Deputy Groups... The smaller groups co-opt as much help and expertise as is necessary to see that the assignments are completed. The work of those co-opted is acknowledged in the Report".

2. Grounds for the protest

A seemingly innocent and certainly well intended change has far-reaching church governance implications

- 2.1 The very important church governance principle that majority meetings can not establish permanent structures is left out of consideration. Deputies should only do that which has been already decided. That is why the meeting calls them. They should never handle matters, but should only complete tasks that had been referred to them with a well described assignment from the majority meeting.
- 2.2 Deputy Groups are now instated next to the only acknowledge temporary meetings of churches as found in CO, art 29 in a direct or gradual manner in or between the church majority assemblies. They receive certain assignments and church management is implied with words such as co-opt, calling in help, seeing to "work" being completed and evaluating it. In the explanations of the CO of Dordrecht, which the GKSA basically still holds to, any resemblance of church governance by Deputies are rejected and cases where it has occurred that this led to "interreges" next to the meetings of Church Councils and majority meetings are strongly criticised (see Bouwman: Geref Kerkrecht II p214 ao, on the danger of management colleges as the reason why the Synod of Dordt added CO, art 49. Before 1816 no Deputy Group of the "Generale Sinode" was ever called. These days Deputy Groups take on the character of permanent Commissions of Synods if one looks at the Minutes of the consecutive Synod and the above-mentioned decision. They apparently do more than just the "execution" of decisions or advice in and to church assemblies. Bouwman rejects the name "Commission" ("Deputy Group") with assignments to the Deputies because (1934:215) "omdat de aldus benoemde personen in zich zelf een eenheid vormen en op hun terrein een zelfstandigheid en vrijheid van handelen bezitten" while CO, art 49 only mentions persons who execute what the majority meetings have decided.
- 2.3 The above-mentioned authorisation to a Deputy Group to expand itself by adding "experts" (with regard to Scripture and Confession, or with regard to scientific matters?) to do work and to acknowledge the work indicates a shift of authority from church assemblies who should decide in the light of Scripture, Confession and CO to the expertise of individuals selected by certain Commissions (possibly from a prejudices angle?) who in this manner gets a say in church matters as individual person.
- 2.4 The shift of authority to expertise as mentioned above sets the position and authority of the Report of a Deputy group against the judgement of the delegates in a church assembly when uninformed persons have to vote regarding the Report of experts. The

stipulation in the decision brings doubt about the church assembly that should evaluate matters according to the credence letters of the delegates (CO, art 33). Can less knowledgeable persons evaluate the work of experts – or does this decision change the Deputy Groups into the figurative tail that waves the dog so that church assemblies become the formal rubber stamp on what experts recommended? The decision thus does not include a stipulation that follows a church way of dealing with matters in church assemblies.

- 2.5 The Regional Synod is of the opinion that as a result of this stipulation of Synod 2000 Deputy Groups have already caused manipulations in decision making at the previous Synod and this caused uncertainty and unrest in the GKSA. The Regional Synod here refers to a disturbance in church unity regarding liturgy (Psalm versifications, alternative songs and versifications, couplets at Holy Communion), church ministry (women in so-called offices). See Acta 2006:172, 3.2 where Deputies brought their own persuasion to the churches by saying that they “are of of the persuasion that the GKSA should apply for membership at the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and recommends this to Synod”. The Deputies now seem to be the instructors to churches, because the Deputies makes recommendations regarding matters that harm CO, art 49 because where and when did churches give the Deputies the assignment to investigate our membership of the SACC, not even speaking about making recommendations or trying to conclude it? If the request did not come from the churches the Deputies should not cultivate it. In this manner the collegialistic church concept will start to affect us if the emphasis is more on the organisation GKSA’s interests at another organisation, the SACC. In the end the actual local church at grassroots level receives the cuts and bruises of Deputies that want to address unasked matters and want to actually make decisions.
- 2.6 The Regional Synod is of the opinion that when lesser meetings lie matters before the Synod, Synod should decide in the light that it has if the matter did not come to it clearly. The duty can not be transferred to the Deputy Groups, the matter should rather be referred back to the churches who laid it before the Synod. It then lies with the churches to call in advice, to let persons study and to come with a more refined and founded request before the Synod. The current procedure according to Synod 2000 with its decreased Deputy Groups that may expand themselves, leads to endless Reports that are pushed through in insufficient time at Synods.
- 2.7 Above-mentioned grounds can all be traced back to one simple statement: that CO, art 49 does not recognise Deputy Groups as Commissions, but that a church assembly should consider each matter on the Agenda and decide, if possible immediately, and Deputy Groups are appointed to execute the decision. This does not imply an open mandate to study or collect expertise. The stipulation that Deputy Groups may call in experts as they see fit outside of the church assembly, in essence hurts the reformed rejection of hierarchy that is stated in CO, art 84 (art 1 van Emden 1571) as condition for majority assemblies. The Church Council therefore requests that CO, art 49 remains unchanged and is maintained without the decision of Synod 2000. Each majority assembly calls Deputies to execute what has been decided according to a well described assignment. As many as possible separate Deputy Groups should be named for the separate matters. These Deputies keep minutes of all their acts in order to report back to the majority meeting. Only the majority assembly concerned may release them from their assignment. The calling and release of Deputies therefore do not lie with the Deputies themselves as Synod 2000 stipulates, but with the majority assembly in question”. Synod 2000 brought about unnecessary and irresponsible regulation with regard to CO, art 49.

E. REPORT OF THE COMMISSION

1. Assignment

Petition of protest: Regional Synod Bosveld on the decrease of deputy groups

Decision: Noted.

2. Issues for notification

2.1 Method

The commission thoroughly discussed the issue. Inputs and advice from other members of the synod on the petition of protest had been listened to. The elucidator of the petition of protest was also asked for oral elucidation. In the light of all the information the issue was reasoned, findings were made and recommendations are made to the General Synod 2009 for decision-making.

2.2 Reasoning

- 2.2.1 The decision of Synod 2000 (Acta 2000:538, 3.2) against which the protest is directed, is quoted in point 1. Protest is made against the method that the deputies followed in point 2.2.3 (Acta 2000:537) that was endorsed by the decision.
- 2.2.2 One ground of protest is given in point 2. In this the claim is made that the decision of synod 2000 made an apparently innocent and surely well meant amendment with far reaching church governance implications. The amendment to which the ground of protest refers, indicate the decrease of deputies by combining groups. The numbered paragraphs 2.1 to 2.7 are accepted as motivations for the ground of protest. The testimony that is presented here was measured in the reasoning.
- 2.2.3 In 2.1 it is claimed that the decision of synod 2000 loses sight of the governance of the church principle that major assemblies cannot establish permanent structures. It is accepted that there is a referral to deputy groups as permanent structures. The claim is not proved. The decision of synod 2000 confirms that the term of deputies is 3 (three) years (Acta 2000:537, 2.2.1). The decision of synod 2000 therefore does not make – as is claimed by the protest –deputies permanent commissions of the synod. The statement that deputies must execute the well-described assignment of the major assembly (art 49 CO) is true. No indication is given in what way the statement supports the protest against the decision of synod 2000.
- 2.2.4 The sentence (paragraph) with which 2.2 starts is not well rounded therefore it is difficult to understand. What is meant by the reference to the difference between the naming of deputies and Deputy Groups is not indicated in the protest. In the decision of synod 2000 (Acta 2000:537.2) the word is used as a synonym for deputies. The claim that the decision of synod 2000 set deputy groups as permanent bodies next to existing church assemblies (art 29 CO) is discussed and rejected in 2.2.3 above.
- 2.2.5 The sentence constituting 2.3 avers that the decision of synod 2000 causes that the authority of church assemblies shifts to individuals. In this claim an authority concept is found that is strange to Presbyterian Church Governance. Church assemblies in the GKSA do not have authority that can be shifted to individuals. Collegialism gives authority to assemblies. In the Presbyterian Church Governance (GKSA) the authority of Christ is served in obedience to his Word. His authority is served in assemblies by persons that He calls to service and equip them through his Spirit.
- 2.2.5.1 The deviations and claims in the petition of protest that is made on the grounds of the wrong concept of authority, cannot serve as valid motivation for the ground of protest.
- 2.2.6 The motivation in 2.3 claims in conjunction with 2.2 that the method of deputies in co-opting give them unrightfully authority and control to expand. In the decision of synod 2000 (Acta 2000:537, 2.2.3), against which the protest are made, an assignment is given to the deputies to co-opt help and expertise where necessary. The motivation for the assignment is that the deputies **can** use the method to complete the assignments that the synod gave to them. Where deputies use this method they do not act with so-called ‘*own authority*’ but in assignment from the synod. In this article 49 CO is not breached. This is an execution of article 49 CO. The argument in the motivation on co-opting delivers no proof in support of the protest against the decision of synod 2000.
- 2.2.6.1 The claim in 2.3 that deputies can be selective in co-opting to enhance a certain view is not proved. The claim delivers no proof on why the protest against the decision of synod 2000 should be upheld.

- 2.2.7 A distinction is made in 2.4 between experts and ignoramus. The distinction is applied on church assemblies and their decisions without proof. In this distinction the unacceptable contrast between cleric and laymen is brought back into the church. Delegates are not minors. They are called by God and equipped to perform his authority in and via decisions that are grounded in Scripture. The distinction cannot be accepted as valid proof for the ground of protest.
- 2.2.8 The petition of protest says in 2.5 that Deputy groups already caused manipulations in decision-making at previous Synods – and in this way caused unrest and uncertainty in the GKSA. As proof of the statement there is a reference to the whole issue surrounding membership of the SACC. The petition of protest claims that it seems as if the Deputies were the mandators of the church “... because where and when did churches give Deputies the assignment to examine our membership to the SACC, not speaking about making recommendations or making an effort to complete this.”
- 2.2.8.1 The petition of protest emphasises that the assignment to examine membership of the SACC had to start in a local church. However, articles 30 and 52 specifically organise that the general synod should handle an issue like membership of the SACC.
 Art 32 CO “On major assemblies only issues must be handled ... that belongs to the major assembly”
 Art 52 CO “Church correspondence and cooperation of contact (with churches and church institutions) outside the relation of the general synod, is organised during a general synod.”
 Therefore Synod 1997 (Acta, 1997:177, 3.2.3) made the statement that it is important that the GKSA (amongst others through the Deputies) should deliver inputs and testimony at amongst others the Council for Chaplain Services, the Council for Religious Broadcastings, the South African Council of Churches and similar organisations. The assignment was given to the Deputies for Ecumenical Issues (Acta, 1997:176-177, 3.2) and Synod 2000 gave this as an assignment to the Deputies Ecumenicity Internal Churches (Acta, 2000:216-217, 3.5).
- 2.2.8.2 From this it is clear that the claim of the petition of protest that the Deputies acted as assignment givers is not valid and that their statement that Deputy groups caused manipulations in decision-making of previous Synods is ungrounded.
- 2.2.9 In 2.6 it is requested that the Synod should refer unfinished issues, not to deputies but to the churches. It can happen in this way but do not always. If it happens all the time it would be contradictory to the regulation of art 49 CO on deputies. Deputies are not apart from churches. Churches have as decided by the synod (Acta 2000:537, 2.1, 2.2 and 2.6) the opportunity to suggest persons for the naming on the deputies. Deputies can in the execution of their assignment, as and when necessary, connect to churches from which the issue came. The method that is suggested in 2.6 does not provide any motivation to uphold the ground of protest against the decision.
- 2.2.10 The motivations in 2.1 to 2.6 is summarised in 2.7. No new grounds are conveyed to motivate the ground of protest. The request of the church council/regional synod is worded in this point. It is asked here that article 49 should be upheld and the decision of synod 2000 against which the protest was made should be disregarded. But the protest failed in the ground of protest or in the motivations for the ground of protest to prove that the decision of synod 2000 is contradictory to article 49 of the church order. Therefore the request cannot be satisfied.

Decision: Points 2.1 to 2.2.10 noted.

3. Finding

The protest and its motivation fail to prove that the decision of synod 2000 (Acta 2000:538, 3.2 and Acta 2000:537, 2.2.3) is contradictory to the Church Order.

Decision: Noted.

4. Issues for decision-making

4.1 *Recommendation*

The protest fails.

Decision: Approved.