

20.4 POINT OF DESCRIPTION REGIONAL SYNOD PRETORIA : SUPPLEMENTING CHURCH ORDER, ARTICLE 31 (Art 88)

- A. Rev SD Snyman tables the Point of Description.
- B. The Point of Description will be concluded during the Synod session.

C. POINT OF DESCRIPTION

1. Point of Description

That Church Order, article 31 be supplemented by the underlined sentence:

Article 31

If someone complains that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly, he may call upon a major assembly for relief. A decision reached at a church assembly by a majority of votes shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is subsequently proven that it conflicts with the Word of God or the Articles of the Church Order. In essential matters, however, decisions should be taken unanimously.

2. Motivation

2.1 This Point of Description rests on two Biblical principles, namely 1: Our calling as believers and as churches to be one in essential matters; 2: The difference between essential and non-essential matters.

2.2 *About unanimity*

2.2.1 It is the clear teaching of Scriptures that the Lord wants profound unity amongst His children. It applies to them as individual believers, but also to them as organised congregations. E.g. John 17:11, 21-23; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 11:16; Ephesians 4:3-6; Philippians 2:1-2; Acts 15:28.¹

2.2.2 See also the Confessions about this unity, e.g. Belgic Confession 27, 28, 32; Heidelberg Catechism 21:54-55.

2.2.3 An early Reformed Church Order (Synod Dordrecht 1578 article 23) stipulated that votes should only be taken in matters where there are no explicit Scriptural statement on the matter.

Artikel XXIII [23]. ofte VIII [8]

In alle saken (altd uitgenomen, van welke wy een uytgedrukt woord Gods hebben) als de stemme naarstelyk gewoogen zyn, sal men blyven by 't advys der meeste stemmen, om daar na te besluiten, 't welke een yeder Schuldig zyn sal na te komen.

At this Synod there was thus a clear recognition that there are matters about which there may not and ought not be any disagreement, and other matters where we can count votes and in such a way decide which is the best way for the churches. In essence, it is very close to the distinction that this Point of Description is proposing.

The next Synod kept a reference to the Word of God, but unfortunately omitted the elimination of counting votes in a matter that has been clearly expressed in the Bible. This happened when Synod Middelburg of 1581 combined Dordrecht 1578's Articles 19 (*Soo yemand hem beklagt, dat hy door 't oordeel der mindere versamelingen beswaart is, die zal zyn sake voor een meedere mogen betrekken*) and 23 above in their Article 23 which reads as follows:

¹ This unity should be sought between all believers, including those in various denominations. However, this true ecumenical unity lies beyond the (limited) scope of this Point of Description, which focuses on the unity within the GKSA.

Soo hem yemand beklaagt door uytspake van mindere Vergaderinge verongelykt te zyn, deselve sal hen tot een meerder Kerkelyke vergaderinge beroepen mogen, en 't gene door de meeste stemmen goed gevonden is, sal voor vast en bondig gehouden worden, ten sy sake dat het bewesen worde, te stryden tegen het Woord Gods, of tegen de Artykelen in onsen Generalen Synode besloten, soo lange

2.3 *About essential and non-essential matters*

The distinction between essential and non-essential matters is found in Scriptures, inter alia in parts of Romans 14-15, Galatians and Colossians. There are matters in churches in which there should be no difference or tolerance (e.g. Gal 1:6-9; 2:11-19; 3:1-3; 4:9-11; 5:4, 7, 10; Col 2:4-23), and there are other matters in which tolerance is commanded (e.g. Rom 14:1, 10, 13, 19; 15:1-2, 7).

2.4 In the meeting described in Acts 15, which is an example of and a prescription for church assemblies, both principles (see 2.1 above) is recognised. That meeting was about an essential matter (whether circumcision is a necessary prerequisite for salvation, or not). The meeting also keep on deliberating, until they reached the point where a decision was reached without any further opposition.

2.5 This Point of Description will eliminate the danger of binding of consciences, which is a real possibility when decisions are taken purely by majority of votes.

3. Explanatory notes of Point of Description

3.1 Unanimity must be understood with reference to the Word of God, e.g. 1 Cor 1:10. If, in a church assembly, there are only a few left who differ, because of a lack of insight or obedience to the Word of God, it should be regarded as sufficient unanimity.

3.2 Unanimity could also be reached when the minority conform to the opinion of the majority. To conform is to accept the decision by the majority as best and to practise it. The old way of conforming, by a second vote directly after the first, was used as a method of preserving unity. In the case of serious differences, it is, however, an undesirable way of working with persons with deep convictions about matters. It forces people to demonstrate a change of heart which hasn't always occurred so suddenly.

3.3 This Point of Description tries to give explicit content to the principle of striving-for-unanimity.

Decision: The Point of Description is not given effect to.