

20.5 POINT OF DESCRIPTION REGIONAL SYNOD PRETORIA : GUIDELINES FOR DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN ESSENTIAL AND NON-ESSENTIAL MATTERS (Artt 10, 81)

- A. Rev SD Snyman tables the Point of Description.
- B. **Decision:** The Point of Description are referred to the Commission Doctrinal (see art 81 Commission report regarding 21.1 Report Deputies Unity in Diversity pt 6.1.3).

C. POINT OF DESCRIPTION

1. Point of Description

That church assemblies will make allowance for the distinction between essential and non-essential matters in decision-making, by making use of the following guidelines for this distinction:

1.1 *Essential matters*

- 1.1.1 Matters (convictions, doctrines, rules of order) which come directly from Scriptures.
- 1.1.2 Matters which can be deduced from explicit Scriptural principles in a valid way.
- 1.1.3 Matters which rest on a normative example of the apostles.
- 1.1.4 Matters which contains the following “weights”:
 - 1.1.4.1 it concerns the truth of the Word of God;
 - 1.1.4.2 it concerns faith in God;
 - 1.1.4.3 it is expressed in the confession of the church;
 - 1.1.4.4 it concerns conscientious, actual obedience to the Lord;
 - 1.1.4.5 it is necessitated by grave and unavoidable causes.
- 1.1.5 It boils down to this: It is matters which affects in themselves or in the way in which they are motivated or used, the honour of God, the salvation of people and/or the trueness of the church.

1.2 *Non-essential matters*

- 1.2.1 Matters which are not explicitly contained in Scriptures or can't validly be deduced from explicit Scriptural principles.
- 1.2.2 Matters which are not explicitly mentioned in the confessions or can't be validly deduced from them.
- 1.2.3 Matters which needn't be maintained by all and everywhere for grave and unavoidable reasons.
- 1.2.4 Matters which, according to Scriptures and the apostolic practice, were left to the discretion of the different churches.
- 1.2.5 Matters which have to be agreed upon to live together as churches, but which don't directly affect the honour of God, or the salvation of persons, or the trueness of the church.

2. Motivation

- 2.1 For the necessity of making allowance for this distinction, see Point of Description 20.3 (about CO, art 31) 2.1 and 2.3.
- 2.2 These guidelines were deducted from Scriptures, e.g. Matthew 6:33; Romans 14:17; Galatians 5:6; Philippians 3:8-9; also from parts of Scriptures in which differences about matters were allowed or not allowed (e.g. Rom 14:1–15:7; Gal 5:1-12; Col 2:16-23).
- 2.3 It also rests on data in our Confessions, e.g. Belgic Confession, 2, 7, 29, 32.
- 2.4 It applies the underlying principle of CO, art 85 also to the local churches if the GKSA. It also recognises the distinction met in several articles in our Church Order, namely that we needn't do everything uniformly. E.g. Church Order, articles 4 (the paragraph starting with “first”), 22, 27, 38, 62, 67, 69, 75.

3. Explanatory notes of Point of Description

- 3.1 The definition of non-essential matters in this Point of Description is a bit wider than the usage in CO, art 85. In CO, art 85 it is used for the so called “adiaphorae”, that is matters which can be left to the discretion of churches. But in this Point of Description it can also refer to matters in which we are forced to take a decision, but which do not directly affects the honour of God or the salvation of persons or the trueness of the church. An example of such a matter is the number and composition of major assemblies.
- 3.2 The expression *guidelines* is used, because the above is not necessarily complete, and may be supplemented and refined by assemblies when using it.