

## **21.3 PETITION OF PROTEST: REFORMED CHURCH POTCHEFSTROOM-DIE BULT AGAINST THE DECISION OF SYNOD 2009 ON WOMEN IN THE SERVICE OF ELDER AND MINISTER (Artt 33, 36, 245)**

- A. Rev HS Coetzee tables the Petition of Protest
- B. **Decision:** Further handling of the matter awaits decision iro Report Deputies Unity in Diversity (21.1).
- C. **Decision:** Refer to Special Synod (See 21.1 Report Deputies Unity in Diversity art 245 : All the relevant Petitions of Protest deal with women in the particular service. In light of the Synod's decision that the matter of women in the particular service is a significant issue, it is recommended that the Petitions of Protest be referred to the Special Synod.

### **D. PETITION OF PROTEST**

#### **1. Decision protested**

*The assembly accepts the suggested recommendation, 4.2, that women may not serve in the special services of ministers and elders (Acta 2009:666-667). See Annexure for details of the decision-making process.*

#### **2. Motivation of the protest**

*Synod adopted a conscience-binding decision on the strength only of the conviction of the majority without sufficient Scriptural justification available.*

#### **3. Reasoning**

- 3.1 The manner in which Synod arrived at the adoption of the decision indicates that Synod did not find it possible to produce a binding finding on clear Scriptural grounds.
- 3.2 Synod proceeded to decision-making after extensive discussion. The recommendation of the Deputies in their Report (Deputy Report 10.15 and 12.10.2) that a choice should be made between the two options in compliance with Scripture, was not brought to a vote.
- 3.3 In dealing with the Deputy Report Synod made no finding or commitment regarding the two divergent interpretative possibilities of certain Scriptural texts set out in the Report: it was merely noted (Acta:665, 12.10.1).
- 3.4 Synod furthermore appointed an Advice Commission to advise Synod on dealing further with the matter of women in the services of elder and minister in light of the discussions and proposals tabled (Acta:666). The recommendation of this Commission (p667, 4.2) to Synod was approved, viz that the wording of the possible choices proposed in the Deputy Report be amended by omitting the words "in compliance with Scripture", thus leaving it to be decided merely by means of a ballot to choose between support for or opposition to the conviction that women may serve in the special services.
- 3.5 By approving the recommendation of the Advice Commission Synod chose not to make a clear finding on the matter on Scriptural grounds, i.e. "in compliance with Scripture", but to decide according to the "conviction" of Synod.
- 3.6 The chosen modus operandi indicates that Synod did not, despite, or perhaps even because of the availability of the results of extensive prior studies, find clear and binding Scriptural grounds on which a decision could be reached "in compliance with Scripture."

- 3.7 Because the decision was adopted in accordance with the conviction of the majority of the attendees, a later synod might come to a different conviction founded on the same Commission Report.
- 3.8 In our opinion the appropriate Scriptural and Reformed approach to decision-making on matters of principle is to take decisions on clear Scriptural authority or, if such authority is not available, not to take conscience-binding resolutions. Acts 15, Rom 14, Rom 16:17-18, Gal 5:1-11, Col 2, 1 Cor 8 and our confession (BC, art 32) teaches us that believers should not bind each other's consciences in matters that do not relate clearly and essentially to the belief in the redemption of Jesus Christ alone.
- 3.9 The consequence of the manner in which the resolution was worded and taken is that Synod does not provide any motivation for the resolution that women may not serve in the particular services of minister and elder. The resolution however implies without any justification a preference for the interpretive options in the second column of the Deputy Report. The omission of making any express finding on the nature of the difference between the two points of view, but merely noting it (Acta:666, 12.10.3), brought about a failure on the part of Synod to provide principled guidance on the matter within the denomination.
- 3.10 In our opinion a Synod can not justifiably make a choice between the two sets of exegetical results set out in the Deputy Report because adequate pronouncements on the matter are not to be found in Scriptural revelation?
- 3.11 Over-extension of Scriptural enquiry on this question should be guarded against.
- 3.12 The differences in the denomination on the question of whether women may serve in the service of minister and elder are in our opinion important, but not such that the unity of the Church of Christ may be jeopardized. Different views in this regard should be tolerated with love.

#### **4. Conclusion and request to Synod**

The Church Council is of the opinion that, after all the years of study within the GKSA and worldwide, no clear Scriptural justification could be found that is sufficiently clear to allow for a conscience-binding decision on women in the particular vocations of minister and elder. *The Church Council therefore requests Synod to revoke the resolution of 2009 in terms of which women may not serve in the particular vocations of minister and elder.*

#### **5. Implications of the decision**

- 5.1 By revoking the resolution of 2009, Synod will signify that there are no adequate Scriptural grounds regarding the question of whether women may serve in the vocation of minister and elder according to which consciences should be bound.
- 5.2 It will furthermore cause churches to accept responsibility themselves to decide whether women may be admitted to the vocation of minister and elder in the congregations concerned.