

# THE RUSTENBURG DECLARATION (1990)

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During November 1990 a very significant church conference took place in Rustenburg, Transvaal. It was attended by delegates from 85 South African churches and was one of the most representative church conferences ever held. This was a result of the initiative of the State President, F W de Klerk. For many reasons it was a very important event. Among others, the Ned Geref Kerk publicly confessed its support of apartheid after which Archbishop Desmond Tutu accepted the confession in a spirit of forgiveness:

## **Preamble**

We, participants in the National Conference of Church Leaders in South Africa, have come together in Rustenburg under the authority of God's Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We have been convinced anew of God's amazing grace by the way in which, despite our wide variety of backgrounds, we have begun to find one another and to discover a broad consensus through confrontation, confession and costly forgiveness. We have sought a spirit of patience, mutual care and openness as we have tried to discern the mind of Christ and have often been surprised how our views on many issues have converged. Some of us are not in full accord with everything said in this conference, but on this we are all agreed, namely the rejection of apartheid as a sin. We are resolved to press forward in fellowship and consultation towards a common mind and programme of action.

Coming from diverse Christian traditions, histories, political persuasions and cultural backgrounds, we engaged amidst joy and pain, love and suspicion, in a process of soul searching and wrestling with the theological and socio-political complexities of our country. In the process, we had a strong sense that God was at work among us. We became aware that He was surprising us by His grace which cut through our fears and apprehension. We give praise to this liberating God who is forever faithful in visiting His people in their hour of need.

## **1 Context**

1.1 The conference has met at a critical time of transition in our country. The signs are that this is a period of gestation with the hope of a democratic, peaceful and just dispensation emerging for our nation. Yet many people are continuing to suffer immensely under ongoing structures of injustice. Recent months have also seen the upsurge of violence in black areas and much brutalizing of innocent people. There is also extensive alienation among young blacks and a seemingly interminable crisis in black education. Unemployment has reached unmanageable proportions and is aggravated by grossly inadequate housing in the black community. All this is leading to the social and economic disintegration of our society.

1.2 We believe, however, that we stand on the threshold of new things. There appears to be the possibility of a new dispensation and the promise of reconciliation between all South Africans as both black and white leaders begin to negotiate together for a new and liberated nation of equity and justice. In this context Christians are called to be a sign of hope from God, and to share a vision of a new society which we are prepared to strive for, and if needs be, suffer for.

1.3 We acknowledge that this hope will elude us unless we can break completely with the past. Accordingly we make the following confession.

## **2 Confession**

2.1 While in this document we focus attention on apartheid, we recognise that there are many other sins in our society which call for repentance. Once all vestiges of apartheid have been abolished, the Church will still be challenged by many other social evils which will threaten our society.

2.2 As representatives of the Christian Church in South Africa, we confess our sin and acknowledge our part in the heretical policy of apartheid which has led to such extreme suffering for so many in our land. We denounce apartheid, in its intention, its implementation and its consequences, as an evil policy, an act of disobedience to God, a denial of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and a sin against our unity in the Holy Spirit.

2.3 We remember with sorrow the victims of apartheid who have suffered and continue to suffer humiliation, dispossession and death. We pay tribute to those who have stood resolutely for justice and cared for the oppressed.

2.4 We know that without genuine repentance and practical restitution we cannot appropriate God's forgiveness and that without justice true reconciliation is impossible. We also know that this process must begin with a contrite church.

2.5 We therefore confess that we have in different ways practised, supported, permitted or refused to resist apartheid:

2.5.1 Some of us actively misused the Bible to justify apartheid, leading many to believe that it had the sanction of God. Later, we insisted that its motives were good even though its effects were evil. Our slowness to denounce apartheid as sin encouraged the Government to retain it.

2.5.2 Some of us ignored apartheid's evil, spiritualizing the Gospel by preaching the sufficiency of individual salvation without social transformation. We adopted an allegedly neutral stance which in fact resulted in complicity with apartheid. We were often silent when our sisters and brothers were suffering persecution.

2.5.3 Some of us were bold in condemning apartheid but timid in resisting it. Some churches failed to give effective support to courageous individuals at the forefront of protest against evil. We spoke out for justice but our own church structures continued to oppress. We blamed other churches and were blind to our own inconsistencies.

2.6 Those of us who have perpetuated and benefited from apartheid are guilty of a colonial arrogance toward black culture. We have allowed State institutions to do our sinning for us. In our desire to preserve the Church we have sometimes ceased to be

the Church. We have often been more influenced by our ideologies than by Christ's Gospel. We have continued to move in separate worlds while claiming to be one Body. We have insulated ourselves from the pain of black Christians. By failing sufficiently to challenge the violence of apartheid, its military actions and the system of conscription, we have permitted a culture of violence in which our people believe that force is the only way to deal with any dispute. Human life has become cheap. By our faltering witness we have allowed families to be broken, children to go uneducated and millions of workers to be denied work. We have erected economic systems based on race. By our disunity and disrespect for other people's beliefs and opinions we have encouraged a fragmented and intolerant society. Most of all, we have been unwilling to suffer, loving our comfort more than God's justice and clinging to our privilege rather than binding ourselves to the poor and oppressed of our land.

2.7 Those of us who are the victims of apartheid acknowledge our own contribution to the failure of the Church. While colonialism and oppression have damaged our self-esteem and eroded the fibres of ubuntu (humaneness) which held our communities together, we acknowledge that many of us have responded with timidity and fear, failing to challenge our oppression. Instead we have acquiesced in it and accepted an inferior status. Some of us have become willing instruments of the repressive state machinery. Others have reacted to oppression with a desire for revenge. Many of us who have achieved privilege have exploited others. An indifference to suffering has crept into our communities, often leading to ostracism of those who have stood courageously for justice and truth. Some of us have failed to be instruments of peace in a situation of growing intolerance of ideological differences.

2.8 Those of us who are male confess that we have often disregarded the human dignity of women and ignored the sexism of many of our church structures. By limiting the role and ministry of women - as was reflected in this Conference - we have impoverished the Church. We have been insensitive to the double oppression suffered by black women under sexism and apartheid.

2.9 Therefore in the above ways, all the representatives at this Conference confess that we have often let the world mould us rather than the Gospel and we have served our selfish interests rather than Christ.

2.10 With a broken and contrite spirit we ask the forgiveness of God and of our fellow South Africans. We call upon the Government of South Africa to join us in a public confession of guilt and a statement of repentance for wrongs perpetrated over the years.

### **3 Declaration**

3.1 To the World-Wide Church we declare gratitude for loving care, confrontation, prayer, support and solidarity over many years. We ask you all to continue to stand with us.

3.2 To Political Leaders, we address and appeal that you meet urgently to negotiate a new and just order for our country. We call on the Government to repeal as a matter of urgency all apartheid laws, such as the Group Areas, Population Registration, Homelands, Black Local Authorities, Black Education and Internal Security Acts, also to grant indemnity to political exiles and release all political prisoners. We assure all leaders of our prayers in these historic and demanding tasks.

3.3 To the Nation we declare the compelling necessity for all to renounce and turn from personal, economic, social and political sin, most especially the sin of racism in both our souls and our structures. We call every South African to be positively involved in nationbuilding.

3.4 To the Church of Jesus Christ in South Africa we address an appeal to adopt our confession and pledge itself to restitution. We call for an end to racial disparities in clergy remuneration: to deploy clergy without regard to colour or social status; and to end all discrimination within the church on the basis of sex or race. We call on church leaders to carry the confessions and commitments of this Declaration into the life of every congregation in the country

### **4 Affirmation**

We affirm and highlight the following:

#### **4.1 Justice**

The Bible reveals God as a God of compassionate love who has a special care for the sinner, the downtrodden, the poor and all who suffer injustice. Obedience to Christ therefore requires that we develop an economic system based on justice, compassion and co-responsibility, so that those in need benefit more than those who have more than they need. More equitable wealth distribution must go hand in hand with economic growth.

After decades of oppression, the removal of discriminatory laws will have to be accompanied by affirmative acts of restitution in the fields of health care, psychological healing, education, housing, employment, economic infrastructure, and especially land ownership. For many years, greed has led to the taking of land from the poor and weak. But church and state must address the issue of restoring land to dispossessed people.

#### **4.2 Church and State**

In the past we have often forfeited our right to address the State by our own complicity in racism, economic and other injustice and the denial of human rights. We also recognise that in our country the State has often co-opted the Church. The Church has often attempted to seek protection for its own vested interests from the State. Our history compromises our credibility in addressing Church-State issues.

We therefore commit ourselves to the struggle for a just, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist South Africa so that our witness may carry greater credibility when we address Church-State relations in the new dispensation.

Our highest loyalty as Christians is always to God. The State is always under God, its power is limited and it is a servant for good, firstly to God and then impartially to all the people it represents. We therefore support the separation of Church and State, with freedom of religion and association guaranteed equally to all.

On the basis of biblical and ethical values, we call upon those negotiating a new South African constitution to respect the following principles in the Constitution:

- (i) The exclusion of all racial or class interests in the implementation of justice.
- (ii) The acceptance of the Rule of Law under an independent judiciary.
- (iii) The entrenchment of a Bill of Rights subject to the judiciary alone, noting the Christian conviction that basic human rights are God-given and not therefore conferred or removable by any State.
- (iv) The establishment of a democratic elective process based on one-person, one-vote.
- (v) That the power of the security machinery of the state, including the police, be limited for the protection of the population.
- (vi) The embodiment of the right of individuals or religious groups to preserve and protect the moral values that affect marriage, family life and particularly the moral norms pertaining to youth. This should be available to all religious groups in terms of their life and world view.

Further we call for the negotiation of a new constitution by a body fully representative of all South Africans. We ask the Government to discuss with other political parties mechanisms for electing democratically a non-racial national assembly to govern in the transitional period until new constitution has been agreed upon. We call upon the Government to allow all South Africans to vote on whether to accept or reject a new constitution, not only the white electorate.

#### 4.3 Peace

In both Old and New Testaments God's Peace or Shalom speaks of a comprehensive wholeness and rightness in all relationships, including those between God and his people, between human and human and between humans and creation. In South Africa Peace and Shalom are shattered, not only by personal but also by social and structural sin. The consequences are devastating: racial alienation, mistrust, humiliation, exploitation of humans and the environment, privation of basic needs, denial of self worth. Perhaps most devastating has been the emergence of a social climate in which violence and death rather than cooperation and life have become the norm.

The causes of violence include:

- \* The denial of full political rights to most South Africans.
- \* The resulting struggle by black South Africans against an oppressive white political system, culminating in violence becoming the norm for political response.
- \* The apparent emergence of 'third forces' dedicated to sowing confusion.
- \* The uprooting of families from their traditional homes, leading to the breakdown of family structures and parental authority.
- \* The resulting spiritual problems.

We need to respond to the violence by:

- \* Mobilising church agencies to help collect evidence about violence and present it to the authorities.
- \* Supporting victims materially and spiritually.
- \* Encouraging all South Africans to enter the process of negotiations.
- \* Convening a task force to coordinate church strategies, and
- \* Calling a peace conference to bring together leaders who can help end violence.

#### 4.4 Spirituality, Mission and Evangelism

The Church's work of mission is a consequence of its worship, prayer, fellowship and spirituality. We commit ourselves to deepen these aspects of the practise of our faith. We resolve to fulfil the Great Commission, to bring men and women to repentance and personal faith, new birth and salvation and to help them to work this out in a witness which engages the world. We recognise our need for the equipping fullness of the Holy Spirit's fruit and gifts and we call on God's people to pray for spiritual renewal in the land.

### 5. Restitution and a commitment to action

Confession and forgiveness necessarily require restitution. Without it, a confession of guilt is incomplete.

As a first step towards restitution, we call on the Government to return all land expropriated from relocated communities to its original owners, to open 'white' schools to people of all races, and to embark upon programmes of affirmative action at all levels of black education.

We call for a National Day of Prayer for the purpose of acts of confession, forgiveness and reconciliation. We urge that these be accompanied by a declaration of intention to engage in a common witness to God's love and justice. Conference requests the formation of an interim liaison committee to plan such a day of prayer.

We ask the interim liaison committee to set up a task force on land issues with a view to making church property available for those without land and identifying land expropriated by the Government to be restored to its original owners.

Conference asks churches which own private schools to review their policy on such schools with a view to making them accessible to the underprivileged.

We request the liaison committee to provide study material for use by the churches seeking to equip members with a better understanding of their mission in a new South Africa.

Conference asks churches to make available financial and human resources to enable the work of reconstruction and renewal of South African society. Conference asks member churches to co-operate in programmes for the welcoming and rehabilitation of such people.

Conference affirms the initiative taken by the NG Sendingkerk and the NG Kerk in Afrika to call on other members of the DRC family to a meeting in December whose purpose is to set their house in order.

Conference requests churches and organisations present to place on their agendas as a matter of urgency the following:

- \* The need to work towards a new economic order in which the needs of the poor can be adequately addressed.
- \* Provision of work for the unemployed.
- \* Provision of adequate homes and essential services for the service.
- \* The need to work towards parity in standards of living between black and white people.
- \* The need to eradicate poverty and hunger.
- \* Affirmative action to enable transfer of some of the economic power presently in white hands.

Conference authorises the steering committee to pass any information it considers might be of interest to community organisations.

## **6 Conclusion**

We give thanks for Gods past grace and faithfulness, by which He has seen fit to use so many of His people here, in spite of our many weaknesses and sins, to bear witness to His Name, to proclaim His Saving Gospel and bring blessing to many, to labour for justice and to care for the poor, oppressed and needy. We give praise in our belief that in wrath He has remembered mercy. This being so we are enabled by His Spirit to move forward together in His Name and call others to do likewise so that the Kingdom of our God and His Christ may be extended far and wide both in our land and beyond. And so to that Name which is above every name, even the Name of Jesus, we ascribe all might, majesty, dominion and praise. Amen.