

THE DUTCH VISIT — Spotlight on the NGK's dilemma

SPOTLIGHT ON THE NGK's DILEMMA

J H P SERFONTEIN
from the Rand Daily Mail 31.1.78

The visit to south Africa of the six leaders of the Gereformeerde Kerk of Nederland has once again brought the spotlight on the painful dilemma of the Afrikaans churches and in particular on the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk representing more than 90% of all Afrikaners.

Their problem is how to counter and disprove the serious accusations by the black NG churches, the Dutch churches and many of its own members which claim that:

- It is essentially a "volkskerk" (national church) whose loyalty is primarily to the cause of the Afrikaner nation in general and the interest of the National Party Government in particular.
- Scriptural interpretations are "stretched" to "accommodate" Government policies.
- It unquestioningly and unhesitatingly accepts publicly all actions by the Government.

This is the crux of all the internal and international accusations involving the theological and political position of the NGK.

These accusations form the basis for the growing consultation between the three black "daughter" NG churches and the white NGK and are threatening to finally break the historical ties with the Dutch churches.

With the overwhelming majority of its supporters members of the National Party, and with leading members of the Cabinet and Government faithful and active members of the NGK and regular churchgoers, the bond between Church, Government and Party usually seems to be indistinguishable.

More important even is the fact that the majority of ministers of religion are members of the powerful secret Afrikaner Broederbond, consisting 10% of its total membership.

The Broederbond guarantees that Government, Party, Church, State, education and culture form a united Afrikaner national front.

The Church, together with the teaching profession, is the strongest force in the Broederbond. It is always well represented on the Broederbond executive called the UR.

Ds Dawie Beukes, the present Moderator of the NGK, has been on its executive for years, as was Doctor Kosie Gericke, a former Moderator, and Dr Andries Treurnicht, the present Deputy

Minister when he was still editor of the Kerkbode, the official mouthpiece of the NGK.

Of the four NGK representatives involved in the talks with the Dutch, three are Broeders, They are Mr Beukes, Dr Koot Vorster and Ds Kobus Potgieter, who was the first leader of the junior Broederbond called the Ruiterswag.

Dr Frans Geldenhuys is no longer a member, having taken the unusual step of resigning in 1961.

It must be remembered that at a Broederbond executive — which included the NGK leaders — political, economic, and cultural matters are discussed and approved.

As has once again been illustrated by the latest Broederbond exposés in the Sunday Times, highly confidential political governmental matters are often discussed and approved of by the Broederbond leadership, even before the National Party political machine is consulted.

This means that the NGK through its leadership is not only fully aware and informed of what is happening on the national, governmental and political fronts, but is in fact in a wide sense part and parcel of such decisions.

How the Broederbond can influence the NGK, through its church members, was perhaps best illustrated by a special Broederbond circular in January 1961.

In it Dr Piet Meyer, then chairman of the Broederbond, assured members not to be worried about the controversial decisions taken at the Cottesloe meetings in December 1960 which rejected important aspects of Government policy and was supported by the leaders of the Cape and Transvaal NG churches.

He guaranteed that the situation was under control and would be attended to. A few months later the Cape and Transvaal Synods rejected the Cottesloe decisions, thus repudiating their own elected leaders.

Since then the NGK leadership as such has hardly ever been involved in a major confrontation with the Government on policy matters. The only exception was perhaps the issue of defence bonds, which NGK leaders such as Mr Beukes rejected as a lottery, but which other Broederbond leaders such as Dr Gericke and Dr Vorster supported, thus backing the Government.

One of the main points of criticism of both the Dutch and the black NG churches has been that the white NGK has never confronted or questioned the Government on actions such as

bannings, detention and the Biko affair.

But the NGK reply is that on occasions, when necessary, it had frank discussions with Government leaders raising serious misgivings.

However, these were done quietly as the NGK did not believe it was productive to do so publicly as it could cause unnecessary embarrassment and could be exploited for political reasons.

With this close intimate interrelationship between Church, Party and State it is therefore no wonder that the Dutch and black NG churches are worlds apart from the white NGK on pressing theological issues such as human dignity, justice, liberation (in its biblical sense), reconciliation and mercy.

On the most fundamental biblical concepts there are totally different biblical interpretations. With the Dutch it seems that the emphasis is non-ideological theological. The NGK, on the contrary, is open to allegations that its theological thinking is coloured by ideological considerations and affected by predetermined norms.

"The theology must be fitted into this thinking and ideological framework of apartheid" an NGK academic told me recently.

The position of the white NGK is further weakened by the existence of separate black, Indian and coloured NG churches — although there is no confessional, theological or other differences and all accept the same dogma of the white NGK.

Its critics claim that there are no biblical grounds for these separate churches which are in conflict with the claim of the white NGK that it accepts unity in diversity.

Moreover, the white NGK at its general synod in Cape Town four years ago refused to condemn laws such as the Immorality Act and the Mixed Marriages Act, although some of its leading theologians had rejected it as unbiblical.

This has merely strengthened the convictions of critics who claim that the interests of the National Party Government had priority over the demands of the scriptures.

OOR DIE BESOEK VAN DIE GKN

NOUDAT DIE HOLLANDERS WEG IS . . .

Allan Boesak

Daar was 'n kollektiewe sug van verligting toe die delegasie van die Gereformeerde Kerke in Nederland uiteindelik uit Suid Afrika vertrek het. Dïe keer het hul verblyf meer losgemaak as ooit vantevore. Daar is 'n spanning in die lug, nie net tussen die GKN en die wit NGK nie, maar ook tussen die NGK en die swart NG kerke hier in Suid Afrika. Dit spreek vanself dat hierdie spanninge in die Gereformeerde kerke self gereflekteer sal word. Die intensiewe gesprekke, die volgehoue aandag wat op die delegasie gefokus is, die drukke diskussie tydens die besoek en daarna in koerante, op die radio en televisie, bewys dat hierdie besoek vir die N.G. kerk (en by implikasie vir die regering) van groot belang was.

Maar om daarom te beweer dat hierdie besoek deur die regering uitgebuit was, is te veel gesê. Of die Nederlanders hoegenaamd moes kom, was van die begin af 'n vraag — nie net vir hulle nie, ook vir ons. Per slot van rekening: wat het hulle gemeen om te bereik? Sou daar werklik 'n gesprek moontlik wees met die blanke N.G. kerk?

Die vraag strek selfs dieper: kan vanuit Nederland 'n gesprek gevoer word met die wit NGK terwyl die gesprek tussen hierdie kerk en die swart kerke nog eintlik moet begin? En kan die Nederlandse kerke, hoe goed ter wille ook, werklik tussen die onderdrukker en die onderdrukte kom staan en die een sowel as die ander vashou? Is die GKN self, met die verdeeldheid wat t.o.v. die kwessie Suid Afrika in eie geledere heers, bevoeg om hierdie rol te speel? Trouens, solank as daar in die GKN se sinode nog min

of meer rassistiese geluide ter verdediging van apartheid opgaan wat die sinode kan laat vassteek in sy beraadslaginge en beïnvloed is sy besluitvorming, en hierdie geluide feilloos deur blank Suid Afrika uitgebuit word, kan die GKN versoener wees tussen onderdrukker en onderdrukte in Suid Afrika?

Bowendien moet dit vir elkeen duidelik wees dat die N.G. kerk in die laaste jare al hoe ongeduldiger geraak het met die kritiese opstelling (hoe verskonend en skoorvoetend soms ook — want die Gereformeerde kerke het waaragtiglik nie baklei gesoek nie) van die GKN en dat daar rede gesoek word (Kuitert, Wiersinga, Verontrustes) om die argumente komende van hierdie dwalende suster kragteloos te maak.

Hierdie en ander vrae het by ons almal meegespeel en in die huidige spanninge in Suid Afrika, in die kerk en daarbuite, kom hulle nog met groter dringendheid na vore.

Ook was ons 'n klein bietjie beangs vir die delegasie. Uit ervaring weet ons hoe naief buitelanders kan wees en hoe maklik hulle soms om die bos gelei kan word. Nederlanders is in hierdie opsig geen uitsondering nie en ook hulle word wonderbaarlik liggelowig (om niet te zeggen bijgelowig) as veral 'n "verligte" blanke met bypassende hartseerstem vertel "hoe dit hier eintlik is". Stoere, ou Hollandse "nugterheid" ten spyt.