

The Present Crisis in the life of  
the Christian Church in S.A.

Oct. 1982

(2 Chr. 7:11-20, 1 Peter 2:4-9, Matt. 21:12-16)

Seventy eight (78) years ago in Oct. 1904 - two years  
after the end of the Anglo Boer war, the foundation-  
stone of this Church was laid - a building which would  
be erected from hewn rock <sup>to build the Golden City</sup> taken from the quarries of  
the Witwatersrand, the Reef. <sup>To-day</sup> I wish to call to  
mind, as I believe God wants us to do, not so much  
the ceremony of that day as the question: what ~~is~~  
the real purpose of erecting such a building?

The answer is provided in the passage of 2 Chr.  
7:11-20 where God reveals His understanding of the  
purpose the Temple should serve which Solomon had  
built. In effect God is saying that a church  
building as a place of worship is a symbol, a visible  
sign of a confession of love and obedience <sup>to God</sup>. What  
is important is not the edifice of stone and wood  
and glass - however beautiful it may be - but the  
life it will offer, the love it will impart, the comfort  
it will provide, the justice it will seek in obe-  
dience to Christ, its Head and Lord. And God is also  
telling Solomon that if the worshipping people of Israel  
refuse to fulfill this purpose, this divine charge, then  
its people will be uprooted from the land, its rit-  
ness will be rejected, its life will be destroyed.  
But if it obeys God's purpose, it will flourish and  
prosper and become a source of love, of <sup>life</sup> justice,  
of the power of justice, of liberation and reconciliation.

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This was the message which God wanted to convey to Solomon and to the people of Israel; this was the message which Christ wanted to convey to the Jewish Church of his time when He met one Jerusalem, the city of God, and when He cleansed the temple. It was God's lament over his church because they had refused to heed his pleas for love, for compassion, for justice, for reconciliation. ~~Now~~ This is the <sup>same</sup> message which God is conveying to his church in S.A. to-day: any Christian community holding whatever doctrine or confession and claiming to be part of the church, the body of Christ, but which violates the fundamental purpose of its existence by distorting the truth of God's word for its own selfish ends will inevitably have to face the judgment of God.

This is ~~not~~ what essentially is happening to-day in S.A. in the life of the Reformed Churches where recently the 2 S.A. white D.R. Churches (N.G.K. & N.H.K.) have been suspended by the World Body of Reformed Churches representing 70 million Christians for their support for apartheid which has been declared a heinous. Is it only the irony of history (or is it in fact part of God's judgment) that the two church bodies, one of which (N.H.K.) tried and convicted Prof A.S. Geysen of heinous and the other (N.G.K.) declared the Christian Institute to be a heretical movement - that both these bodies have <sup>now</sup> been condemned by the whole Reformed church world for the heinous of their belief in and support of apartheid?

① especially to understand what God is trying to say to them

⊕ In refusing to speak or act it does in fact speak or act.

Importance of DR churches in sight of God

(3)

I believe that the moment of truth has arrived for these churches - they are standing before the Tribunal of God's judgment, and therefore they need our prayers as never before. But you may ask: but what has all this to do with other Christians and other churches? We are Anglicans - and this fight within the B.R. Churches doesn't really affect us; we have never tried to justify ourselves on biblical grounds! -

→ If we probe a little deeper I believe we shall discover that the whole Christian Church in S.A. is on trial, never before in our history have so many different denominations simultaneously been challenged so strongly to face up to the fundamentals of the faith they profess as ~~today~~ is happening in S.A. <sup>today</sup> especially as this faith relates to the political, social and economic policies of this land. No longer can any church, regardless of whether it is Reformed, Anglican, Methodist, Lutheran, Roman Catholic or Pentecostal, avoid taking a stand. Too long too many churches and Christians have avoided to <sup>face the issues</sup> comment themselves on the basis of the Gospel. And the judgment of God extends itself over the ideological blindness and the refusal to openly acknowledge a Bibl. Truth (as in the case of the white DRC's) <sup>as well as</sup> a false compromise for the sake of econ. gain (as in the case of many Engl. speaking Christians) or material comfort. For the B.R. Churches not sure important in Gospels right than other

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Churches in S.A. is not going to diminish - I can  
 only see a deepening of the crisis and a sharpening  
of the confrontation before true reconciliation could  
 be effected. It is only <sup>through</sup> the heat of the  
crucible that the Church's life can again be purified.  
 Therefore we must prepare ourselves for a period  
 of suffering and pain. (Econ. crisis - 24% - uproot)

But out of the agency of suffering, the conflict  
of interests, the clash of two fundamentally opposed  
interpretations of the Christ. faith <sup>in depth</sup> a new life will  
eventually be born, a new unity will grow,  
 a new recognition of God's image in every  
person will be given and an authentic and  
meaningful reconciliation will take place // One

moving example of this action of God's grace  
 already at work is the proposed new confession  
 which the Synod of the N.G. Sendingkuk adopted  
 as a draft confession. It contains 5 articles deal-  
 ing with <sup>his</sup> God's concern for the church, the true  
unity of all believers, the meaning of reconciliation,  
the challenge of justice and the price of obedience.

This draft confession could form the basis of the  
establishment of a united <sup>non-racial</sup> Reformed Church of Southern  
Africa. It could go even further: it could be  
the beginning of a wider church unity, which could  
contribute, even in a small way, to heal the  
painful wounds which apartheid have inflicted  
on the body of Christ.

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May I end on a personal note: somebody  
 asked me the other day whether I was not  
angry or saddened by the fact that at  
 this crucial period in the life of the  
 church in S.A. my voice has been  
 silenced and I said: yes, at times  
 I get <sup>very</sup> angry, at other times I'm <sup>not</sup> sad -  
 but I rejoice in the knowledge that  
 despite the silencing of individuals <sup>the truth will</sup> <sup>be</sup> <sup>supported</sup> <sup>and</sup> <sup>spread</sup>  
 and that through the suffering of many  
~~the truth can never be suppressed~~  
God will achieve his purpose with  
this church, with His people, with His  
land