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# Summons to South Africa

*Testimony in support of the South African Council of Churches presented before the Eloff Commission of the Government of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa, March 18, 1983, and a report to the NCC Governing Board, San Francisco, CA, May 11, 1983.*

Many of the programs of the South African Council of Churches were created to help those brutalized by the apartheid system: the homeless, the political prisoner, the hungry, the poor. Because of its opposition to apartheid, the council had been accused repeatedly by the government of being political. In addition, punitive actions had been taken against the staff of the South African Council of Churches (SACC).

On November 19, 1981, the State president appointed a commission of inquiry into the South African Council of Churches and charged it to investigate the history, purpose, and finances of the SACC as well as “any other matters pertaining to the SACC, its present and past office-bearers or officers and other persons connected with the SACC, on which the Commission is of the opinion that a report should be made in the public interest.” Named to chair the commission was the Honorable C.F. Eloff, Judge of the Transvaal Province Division of the Supreme Court of Africa.

The commission began its work by collecting several volumes of background information on the SACC and the ecumenical movement. It also sent investigators to several countries including the United States, “to make some determination of the level of support for the SACC.” During their visit to the United States, the investigators of the commission did not contact the National Council of Churches or any of the churches which are known to be supporters of the SACC. On the contrary, many of their appointments were

with American individuals and organizations known to be critical of the churches' involvement in justice issues.

In September, 1982, the Eloff Commission began public hearings which continued until March of 1983. During the hearings, the two basic contentions of the commission staff were that the SACC had misused funds and served as a channel of funds to political organizations; and that the SACC was being manipulated by overseas churches because it received major program support from them.

The council was vulnerable to these charges in part because as a matter of long standing policy, council funds had been used to underwrite legal defense of black political prisoners and sustain their families. In the face of such activities, financial support from within South Africa had declined so that soon the council depended for nearly all its support on overseas sources, with the European churches, especially in West Germany, as major donors.

Moreover, the council freely admitted that its financial records were in disarray, partly as a result of lax management over several administrations but also because records were deliberately not kept of the names of some individuals who were assisted or the purposes to which funds were put. It appeared that the council would have difficulty accounting for several hundred thousand dollars of the more than 10 million dollars it had received from 1977 to 1981.

To meet the second charge of manipulation by overseas churches, the SACC appealed for witnesses from its partner churches and councils in West Germany, Holland, Denmark, and the United States. All responded. Dr. J. Oscar McCloud of the United Presbyterian church and I were sent on behalf of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

The first of the two following documents is our report to the Governing Board, which Oscar asked me to write. The first part also appeared as a column in the *Church Herald* (May 20, 1983) from which I have drawn the title for this chapter.

Our report we had time to prepare. Not so, our testimony. When we agreed to go—on very short notice—we were under the impression that our testimony would be a formal statement mostly prepared for us. On the eve of our departure, were handed a packet of background materials, told that the situation was highly fluid, and extended good wishes!

That need to write our own testimony was problematic but also liberating. It left me free to focus on the conflict between the gospel and the ideology of apartheid. That decision was confirmed en route as I read Bishop Tutu's own testimony before the commission, a copy of which we found in our packets. Its spirit is evident in the following excerpt:

Everything we do or say and everything we are must be tested by whether it is consistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ or not, and not by whether it is merely expedient or even acceptable to the Government of the day or whether it is popular. To understand the nature of the Council, its aims, objectives and activities requires that you appreciate the theological *raison d'être* of its existence. Without this biblical and theological justification you will almost certainly misunderstand what we are about. Consequently, I want to underline that it is not the finances or any other activities of the SACC that are being investigated. It is our Christian faith, it is the Christian churches who are members of the SACC who are on trial. It is our Christianity, it is our faith and therefore our theology that are under scrutiny and that the central matters at issue are profoundly theological. As a Commission you are being asked to determine whether our understanding and practice of the Christian faith can pass muster. We are under trial for being Christian. It may be that we are being told that it is an offense to be a Christian in South Africa. That is what you are asked to determine. And that is a theological task through and through.

Happily, just before departing I had decided that my favorite ecumenical sermon might be of some use! I used it as the theological heart of my testimony. I also made the most of my special Dutch Reformed relationship to the Afrikaners who dominate South Africa and my sense of their use of biblical imagery in mythologizing their own history. When we returned to the Khotso house (Zulu for "house of peace") after giving our testimony, Bishop Tutu was dancing with joy. He had already received an angry phone call from the commission saying, "No more sermons." I had, it seems, struck a nerve. He was delighted. I was pleased. The long urgent trip had been worth the effort.

More than worth the effort. I had stood arm-in-arm with Beyers Naude, long one of my heroes, visited in the homes of my friends Desmond Tutu and Alan Boesak, and met their families and developed friendships with a number of other South Africans as well as my traveling companion, Oscar McCloud.

## **A Report to the Governing Board of the NCCC USA**

“So you have come to visit our mad and beautiful country.” An unusual greeting, but South Africa is an unusual land and our host, Beyers Naude, an unusual man in an unusual situation.

Long in the forefront of opposition to apartheid, Beyers Naude was banned by the South African government in 1977 for advocating and organizing opinion contrary to the policies of the ruling National Party. Banning is a South African punishment directed specifically against those who have been effective in communicating opposition to the prevailing ideology of white supremacy. The person banned may not write for publication, speak in public, be quoted by name in South Africa, or even speak privately to more than one person at a time. (After more than five years of banning, our host was now permitted to speak to more than one person simultaneously.)

Banning is one form of South African madness. The South African Council of Churches (SACC) is now confronted with another form of madness clothed in a recommendation from the chief of the Security Police that the council be declared “an affected organization.” Such a declaration would prohibit the receipt of funds from overseas and deprive the SACC of 80-90 percent of its support. The police argue that the council is a tool of foreign conspiracy (read Communist) operated under the direction of “the world church.”

All testimony is being taken by a commission of inquiry called the Eloff Commission, after the surname of the judge who chairs it. Such commissions of inquiry are used by the South African government from time to time

to “investigate matters of public concern.”

Bishop Desmond Tutu, general secretary of the South African Council of Churches, took us directly from the airport to the hearing room so that we could “get a feel for the situation.” The feel was conspiratorial. The Rev. Case Roos, Synod president of the Netherland Reformed church, had given testimony that morning and was being cross-examined by the attorney for the commission. The questions were frequently based on second-hand sources. They were full of inferences, innuendoes, and insinuations. Under the guise of an inquiry for facts, the attorney for the commission was conducting a fishing expedition, hoping to catch a conspiracy.

That night, our hosts invited us to join other overseas witnesses at dinner. After dinner, we watched a film shown to the Eloff Commission a few weeks earlier as part of the Security Police’s case for declaring the SACC an affected organization. We watched Bishop Tutu preach a gospel sermon. In an interview, he warned against the dangers of injustice. We observed Peter Storey, white Methodist minister and president of the SACC, preach to his racially mixed Johannesburg congregation. We heard Allan Boesak speak of the need for freedom. We saw the people of South Africa’s churches celebrating their Christian faith and hope in worship. We watched for evidence, until as the credits flicked across the screen, we sat amazed that this film could be the case against the SACC. Then we sat, sobered at the paranoia that could be read into these gospel promises of peace, signs of “the total onslaught on South Africa.”

Sitting among those South Africans who resist apartheid in the name of Christ, we had a powerful sense of people living daily by the strength of the gospel, nourished by the bread and wine of life offered in the Eucharist. How else, they said, can we be saved from assimilating the harshness and madness of those we oppose? How else can we keep from sinking into anger and despair? How else can we maintain our sense of humor about South Africa?

In presenting our testimony the next day, we particularly stressed our conviction that the SACC would not be the object of inquiry concerning alleged financial and management irregularities if the council were not an articulate critic of apartheid. Second, we stated that this policy and all other policies of the SACC were of its own making and not ours, and that our support was given in response to specific requests of the SACC. Thirdly, we explained

that we supported the work of the SACC because its commitment to justice in society, truth in politics, and peace among the peoples were gospel commitments integral to the church's mission rather than secular political programs as Lieutenant General Coetzee, chief of the Security Police, had charged. Fourth, we declared that any action of the government would not and could not cut us off from the Christians of South Africa, but rather that the government would succeed only in further isolating itself from the world community.

Later that day, we went to visit with Beyers Naude, who opened our visit with the greeting with which we introduced this report. At the end of our visit, we stood together, a Black Presbyterian minister and a Dutch Reformed minister, both from the United States, with our arms around one another and our banned Afrikaaner host, also a minister of the gospel, praying for peace and justice and freedom for all the people of South Africa—Black and White.

But for now, the madness prevails. For anyone outside South Africa, the situation is incomprehensible. How can a cluster of some 4 million Whites think they can forever hold more than 20 million Blacks in bondage, without vote, without justice, without freedom, without shelter, even without bread? How can they turn words inside out so that “homelands” are places where the people assigned to them have never lived and where families are systematically torn asunder as fathers are forced to work and live in faraway cities visiting their families only rarely? How can they designate certain areas in which Blacks are required to live and then refer to them as “Black spots”? How can White South Africa continue to believe that it can define Black South Africa?

Even the luxuriant beauty of the land plays a part in the madness. Blacks, and other people who are not certifiably White, may view the extraordinary beauty from the public highways and sometimes even in the far distance from within the “Black spots” to which they are confined. But they may not possess the land—even for a roadside picnic. Some, in self-defense, have decided no longer to notice the beauty of the land. For others, the deprivation feeds anger or despair. The more resilient are able still to drink in the beauty with joy and thanksgiving as they wait in faith and hope for the day when South Africa will be “my land” as well as “your land.”

Of special concern to the churches—all churches—is the role of the

Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK) as the architect and ideological mainstay of the policy of apartheid. Incredible as it may seem, this church and the other Dutch Reformed churches in South Africa claim that the scattering of nations described in Genesis 11 as God's punishment on human arrogance in building the Tower of Babel is not really punishment at all, but actually the working out of God's will for the nations. The people of the earth, they say, should be kept separate—with the Whites in control.

In our testimonies, we had noted that our two churches had both been active in extensive discussions with the NGK. The United Presbyterian church had participated in consultations with the NGK in September, 1973, and in June, 1980, to no avail. In the summer of 1981, it declared apartheid a heresy. The Reformed Church in America had engaged in a thirty-year dialogue with the NGK about apartheid until, in June of 1982, it voted to "suspend further dialogue until such time as the NGK renounces apartheid and enters into conversation on an equal basis with other Reformed churches in South Africa." In August, 1982, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches meeting in its 21st General Council in Ottawa, Canada, declared that a condition of *status confessionis* exists with respect to apartheid. The Lutheran World Federation had taken such an action already in 1977.

The NGK nevertheless persists in its heretical dehumanization of other people. This heresy prevails because of a romanticized piety which reduces spirituality to sentimentality; a legalized ethic which reduces human relations to imposed legislated arrangements; and a rationalized theology which reduces justice and freedom to abstract principles. Thus, people are cut off from other people, first in the minds and hearts of the powerful and then in their laws.

Regrettably, the Reagan administration, claiming United States self-interest, supports the government of South Africa as a bulwark against Communism and as a bastion of free enterprise in Africa. United States business supports South Africa through heavy investments which strengthen the economy and the political power of the ruling National Party. Consequently, the resistance movements are seeking support elsewhere, wherever it may be found. America is thus on the side of oppression rather than on the side of freedom.

The problems, it must be said, are totally unlike those we face in the United

States—politically, numerically, and economically. At least in law, the United States government has been on the side of justice for the oppressed, whereas the South African Nationalist government is the source of oppression. When everyone shares power equally in the United States, Whites will still be in control. In South Africa, Blacks will be in control.

No one expects that kind of change to come peacefully. Blacks expect that one day tens of thousands of them will die. The South Africa Council of Churches works in that highly charged society *as the only remaining peoples organization in South African society where Blacks and Whites can meet one another openly and as equals*. Maintaining its ministry is, thus, urgently important for the sake of all the peoples of South Africa.

Indeed, for all our sakes. When the revolution comes, the United States will also be confronted with a choice. We are on the wrong side now. It is also the losing side. But by lending it our strength, we are prolonging the struggle and multiplying the suffering.

The government of South Africa, and our own government, must *know now* that the churches in the United States and their members do care about the suffering of our sisters and brothers in South Africa. They must *know now* that we think it completely wrongheaded and unjust to restrict the work of the South Africa Council of Churches. Letters of support to the South African Council of Churches, P.O. Box 31190 Braamfontein 2017, Johannesburg, South Africa, are urgently needed—NOW.

American business should *know now* that their investments do perpetuate injustice in South Africa by making it possible for the prevailing political power to persist in its policies of oppression. Our churches and our members should divest now in protest.

We who confess Christ need not, and cannot, wait for the revolution to come before we choose. The choice for us is clear. The gospel compels us to step forward and to stand with the oppressed. We must encourage all those in South Africa who are joining together to support peaceful change. We must oppose those, especially in the White churches, who support the system of apartheid. We believe that the gospel requires that we place our support behind the Black churches and the SACC, that freedom, justice, and peace may come to that land.

# Statement Before the Eloff Commission, Pretoria, South Africa

Mr. Chairman, first allow me to thank you for permitting me to present testimony to this commission.

My name is Arie Brouwer. I am an ordained minister in the Reformed Church in America. Since 1977, I have served the denomination as its general secretary. I am testifying today on behalf of the Reformed Church in America and on behalf of the National Council of Churches in Christ in the United States of America, which I serve as a member of its Governing Board and Executive Committee. I am also a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. I chair the National Council of Churches committee on relationships with churches in the Soviet Union and I am active in cultivating relationships with churches in socialist societies, thus seeking to strengthen their position and witness. I also represented the Reformed Church in America at the 21st General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Ottawa, Canada, August, 1982.

I might say in passing that the ecumenical relations of the Reformed Church in America worldwide are coordinated through its Commission on Christian Unity. That commission is meeting this week during the time of my trip to South Africa. Although it is their once annual meeting and I am its executive officer they have released me from that meeting in order that I might be directly involved in this ecumenical relationship with the South Africa Council of Churches and its member churches which the Reformed Church in America considers to be one of its most important relationships with any church body anywhere in the world.

The importance attached to this relationship is related to the long history of relationships between the Reformed Church in America and the Dutch Reformed churches in South Africa. The first congregation of our denomination was founded in 1628 on the southern tip of Manhattan Island in what was then Nieuw Amsterdam—about the same time as the Dutch Reformed churches were founded on the southern tip of Africa. Our churches in North America and in South Africa spring from the same ecclesiastical and ethnic

roots in the Netherlands. Our piety too has traditionally taken on similar experiential forms, heavily influenced by the Old Testament and frequently finding expression in the plaintive pleas and exuberant praise of the Psalms.

I may say, Mr. Chairman, that this common heritage is personally precious to me since my immigrant mother herself taught me the treasured cadences of the Dutch psalter as she learned to sing the Lord's song in a strange land.

These common origins and ethnic bonds are treasured in our church.

They were the main impetus for beginning, more than two decades ago, an extensive, and intensive, correspondence and conversation with the NGK about the policies of apartheid. We were especially distressed that those to whom we were twice bound (both as brothers and sisters after the flesh and as brothers and sisters in the faith) should espouse as gospel a doctrine which was and is inherently in conflict with the gospel. We were, and are, puzzled and distressed that a people who had suffered so terribly at the hands of oppressors during the Boer War could themselves put on the heavy mantle of oppressors. We therefore took up the apostolic teaching to admonish and exhort one another while at the same time recognizing and confessing our own failings and shortcomings. Indeed our interest in the South African situation was motivated in part by our awareness of and participation in racial oppression in the United States and the efforts of the churches during the 1960s to shake off that oppression.

Our discussions with the NGK have continued intermittently almost up to the present time. In 1979 our General Synod sent to the NGK a lengthy response to its statement on *Human Relations in the South Africa Scene in the Light of Scripture*. The response of the NGK received in the autumn of 1981 did not seriously engage our fundamental points of criticism. Rather it dealt in large part with a lengthy explanation of the ethnic complexities of South Africa and set forth both implicit and explicit defenses of "separate development." We in the Reformed Church in America do not discount the complexities of the South African situation. We do however, insist that the gospel not be tailored to that situation. We hold rather that the gospel must be fully affirmed at all times and in all places so that in the light of its grace we can openly and freely confess our sins and thus escape the judgment of God.

To claim, as the NGK does, that God's judgment upon sin in scattering and

separating the peoples of the earth from one another (Genesis 11) should rather be seen as the working out of God's purpose for the world, is to turn the Bible inside-out and to set the stage for a denial of the gospel. What judgment will befall those who then use this false gospel to uphold sinful and oppressive structures which crush the life out of God's children we do not know. We do know that we must cry out against such a false gospel and against such an evil policy. There can be no compromise on this point. Apartheid and separate development are contrary to the Word of God. That Word cannot be compromised. We must stand and confess whatever the difficulties and whatever the cost.

During more than two decades of correspondence and conversation, the NGK has again and again and again failed to engage the issues we have raised. Instead they have side-stepped, misinterpreted, and set aside those issues with pleas for continued "tolerance, patience and love."

We in the Reformed Church in America finally and reluctantly concluded that these discussions had failed and indeed that they had become counter-productive. We found that they were being used to deflect attention from the absence of dialogue here in South Africa and to put at ease what should have been an uneasy conscience in the NGK for not conducting such dialogue. Because of the failure of these talks—and *it was because of the failure of these talks, because of the refusal of the NGK to deal with these issues*—the Reformed Church in America decided in June, 1982, to "suspend further dialogue until such time as the NGK renounces apartheid and enters into conversation on an equal basis with other Reformed churches in South Africa."

We and other churches around the world have taken such action neither vindictively nor punitively, but in great sorrow and with much prayer in hope that in the growing international silence, the NGK and the other white Dutch Reformed churches in South Africa will find the grace and the will to give ear to their Black brothers' and sisters' cries for justice, peace, and freedom and to hear in those cries the renewing and saving word of the living God.

We in the Reformed Church in America have begun to hear their cry—at least in part. Slowly, too slowly, in the last few years we have built bridges to those *on the other side* of the barriers of apartheid—to those in the NGK in Africa, the Sendingkerk, the Reformed Church of Africa and to those in the

Broderkring and in the Alliance of Black Reformed Christians of South Africa, and finally in the South Africa Council of Churches. We have moved slowly and very reluctantly to sever our ties with the NGK, yet we have been compelled to do so because those ties had dwindled to little more than ties of the flesh which are now in conflict with the ties of the Spirit which bind us to our Black sisters and brothers. In them we have found our brothers and sisters in the Spirit believing the gospel in spite of everything in the world around them. We have found them walking in faithfulness on the reformed way. Hoping against hope, they have blessed us.

During that same period we have moved with equal reluctance away from a policy of advocacy with American corporations doing business in South Africa in the hope of changing policies which would bring about justice. The failure of these efforts—and again *I emphasize that it was the failure of these efforts, and the unwillingness of the corporations and the government of South Africa to listen* that compelled us to adopt a policy of prudent divestiture—prudent in that we are still open to conversations with corporations that show genuine signs of change.

I rehearse all of this, Mr. Chairman, so that you may know that I speak today as one who is bound to the Afrikaner people of this nation by ties of blood and history and heritage. I speak as one whose initial impressions of South Africa were formed not by liberation movements or by cries for justice from the poor and oppressed. I speak as one who grew up experiencing a sense of family solidarity with those who had struggled valiantly against their English oppressors, solidarity with a people with whom we shared a treasured faith. I and many others with me in the Reformed Church in America have been compelled *against our natural sympathies* to turn away from this solidarity with the Afrikaners in order to embrace another people suffering oppression. Whatever word I have spoken on other occasions, and do speak here today against the policies and practices of this government and of the Dutch Reformed churches which have fostered and do still foster the policy of apartheid, is spoken *against* the current of those powerful natural sympathies and with a prayer that those natural ties may one day again be a source of joy.

For the present and under the prevailing conditions, this cannot be. The people of the Reformed Church in America have declared that it cannot be.

The churches of the Lutheran World Federation and of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches have declared that it cannot be. Many of the member churches of the National Council of Churches have declared that it cannot be. I testify here today on their behalf because our faith demands that we join our voices with those who oppose the policies of apartheid. In order to speak the truth, we are compelled to condemn apartheid unequivocally and without qualification. So today, in the name of God, the Reformed Church in America and the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America stand here in solidarity with the South Africa Council of Churches and its member churches.

In the name of God, I say. There are those who claim that the South Africa Council of Churches in its work of justice and reconciliation conducts a secular program. Nothing could be further from the truth. The church is God's agent of reconciliation *for the world*. God's purpose is not merely to bind together the church in Christ. It is to bind together the whole world and all its peoples. Ephesians 1:9-10 says that in almost exactly those words. For the church to stray from that purpose or to settle for anything less or to permit itself to be diverted from fulfilling that purpose in the world, is for the church to be unfaithful. For this government or any government to hinder the church of Christ in that purpose is for that government to obstruct God's purpose for the church. No amount of Orwellian obfuscation or doublespeak can conceal that fact from the world church or from other people of goodwill scattered among the nations.

This mission of the church to participate in God's mission to unite the world is firmly rooted in the biblical story of creation. The Bible says that the creation was called into being by the word of God. The biblical account's repeated emphasis on the creative word of God teaches that the world was intended for God's communication with the creation and especially with the human creation.

When Adam and Eve broke their connection with God and thus broke the connection between God and the creation, God's judgment was almost immediately offset by the promise of a Savior to reconcile God and his human creation and to reconcile all creation to itself, and to God.

When shortly thereafter the peoples again set themselves together against God, God scattered and separated them. And once again God showed mercy.

From one of those scattered bands of people God called out Abram and Sarai to be blessed in order that they could be a blessing to all the families of the earth. They were to become a holy nation—an instrument of God’s saving purpose for the world. In the unfolding history of that nation, God repeatedly renewed the covenant with the holy nation, and charged the prophets to call the people and their kings and priests to keep the covenant. The prophets revealed a God who called for justice and truth to realize the promise of peace. This God showed a special partiality for the poor, the widow, and the sojourner. The prophets who showed partiality for the rich and the powerful thereby demonstrated that they were *false* prophets and not the servants of the Lord God of Israel. Prof. David Bosch has put this point well in his testimony before this commission, in saying that the treatment of the poor, the orphan, the widow, and the sojourners “at the hands of the privileged and the authorities became the touchstone for the way in which society as a whole was judged.” The pattern of God’s judgment is inexorable. The wise kings of Israel heard and obeyed the word of the Lord and realized God’s promise of peace. The foolish kings did not hear, did not obey, and did not survive—and the land perished with them. The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

The words of the prophets eventually coalesced in the vision of the peaceable kingdom which the New Testament writers saw fulfilled in Jesus Christ who is our peace. Our Lord’s own declaration of mission in Luke 4 is a paradigm of the prophetic call to justice and peace.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind;  
to set free the oppressed  
and to announce that the time has come  
when the Lord will save his people”

Luke 4:18-19

We have already noted that Ephesians, the most comprehensive of New Testament books, sets forth God’s grand design that all things and all people

be united in Christ. This is an incredible dream. Little wonder that the human heart and mind and will fight against it with unfaithful deeds and false ideology. But it is an abiding dream which has survived sword and fire and hanging and starvation for century after century. God is making the world one, however we humans may struggle to divide it for our own purposes.

In Ephesians, *alienation, separation, and division are described as the essence of God's judgment on sin*. And not only there. That is the message of the whole long history of human alienation, to which I have already alluded, beginning in the third chapter of Genesis where Adam and Eve are separated from one another by shame, from God by guilt, from the animals by fear, and from the earth by hard labor and the threat of returning to the dust in death.

Finally, in the familiar story of the Tower of Babel recorded in Genesis 11, this alienation infects even the language of the human community. People are no longer able to understand one another and they are driven to the separate corners of the globe.

All this is background for the good news proclaimed in Chapter 2, verse 13:

“BUT NOW,” says the writer,  
Christ has brought the Gentiles near  
Made Jew and Gentile one  
Broken down the wall  
Abolished commandments and ordinances  
Created one new humanity in place of two  
Reconciled both to God in one body through the cross  
Preached peace to both  
Given both access in one Spirit to the Father  
Made the Gentiles no longer strangers, but fellow citizens  
and members of the household built upon one foundation.

That is the central insight of Paul's ministry. Hebrew of the Hebrews, Pharisee of the Pharisees, proud son of Abraham, persecutor of Christians, despiser of the lesser breeds without the Law saying, “*We are one, we are one.*” The divisions are destroyed. The barriers are broken down. See what Christ has done. If God in Christ can bridge this unbridgable gulf between

Jew and Gentile, the deepest division of Paul's experience, then he can destroy all divisions including that between White and Black in South Africa. His eternal purpose to unite all things in Christ can be brought to fulfillment.

In Chapter 3, the scripture teaches that God will do this *through the church*. Not the world-wide church of the twentieth century, but a ragtag assortment of the weak, the poor, the ignorant, the despised. Their unity is the wave of the future, the sign of things to come, *the demonstration of God's purpose for the whole of creation*.

The mighty structure of imperial Rome may crumble under the weight of history but the church of Christ will endure through the ages as a sign of the age to come when all divisions shall be destroyed, all barriers broken down and we shall all be one.

With Chapter 4, the apostle launches into some specific instructions as to how this unity given in Christ is to be lived out in the church. The church is one.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call,

One Lord, one faith, one baptism,

One God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.  
Eph. 4:4-6

It was such teaching that led the founding fathers of the world ecumenical movement earlier in this century to speak of the divisions among the churches as a *scandal*. Unity, they said, and the Bible says, is not merely a desirable option; it is a part of the essence of the church. We confess it each time we use the Nicene Creed when we say, "I believe in One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic church." *Unity is an article of our faith*.

The church is compelled to unity by God's call to express and demonstrate God's eternal purpose of binding up all things in Jesus Christ. Councils of churches are signs that God in Christ can redeem even the differences that divide us and make them again the *diversities which enrich us and thus give us a fuller experience of being human*. As a White man I testify that I cannot

know myself as a human being created in the image of God as long as I deny—or try to deny—that same knowledge and experience of human dignity to my sisters and brothers who are Black. When they are diminished, I am diminished.

Ecumenical organizations like the South Africa Council of Churches are promises—promises that fear can give way to freedom and that love can overcome estrangement. The councils of churches are foretastes of the unity which may be ours by moving closer to one another as we all are drawn together in Christ.

Of course living out these promises will bring the councils of churches into conflict with the world. It happens in South Africa; it happens in the United States; it happens in most countries around the world. It even brings the councils of churches into conflict with the churches because the councils have been asked by the churches to inhabit a land which the churches have themselves not yet reached. The councils are the servants of the churches, but they are also called to challenge the churches by being signs and foretastes of the one great universal Church which is still coming into being.

The end of God's purpose is vividly portrayed in the vision of John the Apostle in Revelation 21 and 22. Against the background of a new heaven and a new earth, the new Jerusalem comes down from heaven as a bride adorned for her husband. We may best understand this city as representing the church about to be fulfilled in union with its Lord. In that great and glorious vision we see fulfilled God's long mission of binding together the broken nations. A mission begun with Abram, signaled in the captivity in Babylon, and portrayed in the tongues of Pentecost, we see fulfilled when we read that the leaves of the tree of life set in the heart of the city of God are given for the healing of the nations.

We have seen then that the mission of the church and of the councils of churches is to be a sign, foretaste, and instrument of unity, justice, and peace, and reconciliation in the world and that it *is thoroughly biblical*. It is first of all the central burden of the prophets. It is also our Lord's own perception of his calling. It is the mystery at the heart of the church which is brought to fruition in the fulfillment of the church in the new Jerusalem. To call this work a secular program is to challenge God's purpose for the world and commission to the church. In its work for justice and peace, the South Africa

Council of Churches has not strayed from this mission of God. It is doing the long work of God to bind us all together again in communion with one another, with all creation and with the Creator.

It is generally known, and I am sure is known to this commission, that this calling to shape society in accordance with God's law has traditionally been a special burden of the Reformed churches. I do not therefore repeat here the teachings of Calvin and other leaders of the Reformed churches to the effect that the state dares to infringe on this calling of the church only at its own peril.

In summary, that teaching proclaims that Jesus is Lord, that God will protect the church, and that God will prevail in history. Beyers Naude and others may be banned and, God forbid, Bishop Tutu or Allan Boesak be separated from their own people and from the world church. But the word of God will not pass away. New prophets will be raised up. The will of God will be done among the nations.

This call to unity which I have been expounding from the scriptures which is the only rule of faith and practice in our Reformed churches, is of course also a mainspring of the ecumenical movement. In that movement we seek to be obedient to the apostles' teaching to build up one another in love, and to bear one another's burdens.

In recent years, this bearing of burdens has included offering financial support to the South Africa Council of Churches. It should be noted that the Reformed Church in America and other member churches of the National Council of Churches offer support to councils of churches in many parts of the world. We have offered this support to the South Africa Council of Churches because the majority of the people in the member churches of the South Africa Council of Churches are economically deprived and therefore unable to alleviate the sufferings of their sisters, brothers, and neighbors without increasing their own suffering. Their sisters and brothers and neighbors are also our sisters and brothers and neighbors. To deny our financial assistance to those already once deprived by unjust economic structures would therefore be to do them a double injustice. It will also deny us our responsibility to fulfill our Christian vocation. General Coetzee's statement that this cutting off of the South Africa Council of Churches would result in its (I quote from the summary available to me) "emancipation from foreign con-

trol and enslavement of foreign funds” is an inversion of reality and therefore gravely in error.

To suggest that the South Africa Council of Churches is an instrument of international conspiracy is to compound injustice. The truth is that we in the United States and elsewhere overseas are uniquely indebted to the South Africa Council of Churches and its member churches for enabling us to render service through them. In this service we have received blessing far above what we have given. The breadth and strength of the service rendered and the courage of witness which inspires it has given us all hope and cause for rejoicing. For example, after a recent showing of the National Broadcasting Company documentary called “Land of Fear, Land of Courage” our finance office received a number of contributions simply marked “Tutu.” The strength of the South Africa Council of Churches is our strength.

This ministry I have been describing is the ministry of the South Africa Council of Churches and its member churches. We overseas partners are called to hold up their hands, to support them in prayer and through our gifts. We do of course often designate those gifts, but we do so at their request and according to their sense of need. The council does inform us concerning the use of those funds. But we have and we seek no authority in the direction of its work. The mission is God’s. The South Africa Council of Churches is God’s instrument in this place, accountable to its member churches.

With the special epistemological privilege of the poor and oppressed, God’s people in the council and in its member churches have dreamed dreams of service and seen visions of justice beyond our capacity to conceive, much less direct. We respond because their dreams and visions are glimpses of the kingdom of God. We are pleased to walk with these our sisters and brothers towards that kingdom of peace and justice and truth and freedom. To suggest that our doing so is an international conspiracy is to fly in the face of the facts. It is to found a case on fantasy, paranoia, and falsehood. The whole record of the modern ecumenical movement disproves such false theories. It emphasizes, rather, the calling of the world church to be in solidarity with, and at the service of, indigenous churches in every land. To seek to dominate such churches or councils would be untrue to ourselves and unfaithful to our Lord. To join General Coetzee in using these prejudicial opinions as a basis for declaring the South Africa Council of Churches “an affected organiza-

tion” would be an act of extreme prejudice without foundation in fact, and directly opposed to the record.

I assure you, Mr. Chairman, on behalf of a great company in the member churches of the National Council of Churches in Christ in the United States of America, that although such a declaration may cut off the flow of funds to the South Africa Council of Churches, it will not cut us off from that council. Christ has broken down the walls, including those which may be erected through such machinations as declaring an organization “affected.” We are united in one body. We do belong to the one family of God. We will not be cut off. The unity of the church is a central conviction of our faith and a central commitment of our churches. The blood of the martyrs across the centuries and throughout this century has sealed that faith. It is renewed year by year in miracles of reconciliation which transcend national boundaries no matter how firmly they are fixed or how carefully they are guarded or how highly they are raised. The Spirit of God recognizes no boundaries. God moves at will in the world.

No, Mr. Chairman. To declare the South Africa Council of Churches “an affected organization” will not isolate the South Africa Council of Churches. It will, however, further isolate this land, which already stands alone in the world. Such a deed will again testify against this nation in the councils of the nations. More tragedies will follow upon those which already weigh heavily on this land—more plagues one might say—until its peoples, all its peoples, White as well as Black, are free. For they will be free. God’s people will be free. God has promised that the people will be free and the word of God will not return to God empty.

But why must so many die first? Why must Black women, Black men, and Black children suffer every day? Why must the whole nation and its peoples be held hostage to fear?

Our support for the South Africa Council of Churches is given for the sake of South Africa and *all its peoples*. In our view—more and more widely held—the South African Council of Churches is the only surviving mass movement in South Africa where Black and White can come together to speak openly to one another. It is an oasis of grace and peace in a land of injustice, anger, guilt, and fear. It is a sign, a foretaste, an instrument of a new and peaceful society for South Africa. It is the last best hope of this

society. It is a light to this nation and to the world. I say with all reverence and respect, for God's sake, for your sake, for all of our sakes, do not try to extinguish that light.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.