



# RACISM IN THE CHURCH?

PACSA FACTSHEET 4

PC 11/11/3/4



## CONSULTATION ON RACISM: HAMMANSKRAAL 11 - 15 February 1980

Racism in the Church affects every Christian in South Africa. Racism is sinful in God's eyes, particularly in the Church, where it divides and destroys the unity which is of the essence of the one body of Jesus Christ. God calls us to face this and to take action against it wherever we find it, for in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek . . . for you are all one in Christ Jesus". (Galatians 3 : 28 ). In response to this the Hammanskraal Consultation on Racism took place. Every morning started with the Eucharist, followed by silent prayer. On most days, Bible study sessions were held. Political, economic, labour and social structures were all examined in separate workshops. A number of resolutions were adopted.

### AN ULTIMATUM

After a great deal of discussion, the following declaration was agreed on:

We, the Black representatives in this Consultation, wish to place on record the painful realization that the Churches to which we belong have conformed to the patterns of a racist society. The persistent cries of the Black people that the Church is not consistent with the demands of the Gospel of Jesus Christ have fallen on deaf ears.

We acknowledge our participation in the sin of the Church. We are aware that God has been calling and continues to call his Church to be a community that transcends all barriers of denomination and race.

We realise that the racial situation in this country has reached a critical stage and that God is calling the Church as a liberating and reconciling community to identify itself with the oppressed and poor in their struggle for the dignity which is theirs as human persons created in the image of the Triune God.

We call upon Black Christians prayerfully to seek the guidance of God in our desire to understand what obedience to God means in this situation.

We further call upon White Christians to demonstrate their willingness to purge the Church of racism.

If, after a period of twelve months, there is no evidence of repentance shown in concrete action, the Black Christians will have no alternative but to witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ by becoming a confessing Church.

('Black' need not refer to skin colour so much as to identification with the poor and oppressed.)

### WHAT IS A 'CONFESSING CHURCH'?

The term 'confessing Church' was adopted in the 1930's by those members of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches in Germany who refused to associate with the rest of the Church, which had been taken over by the so-called 'German Christians' who were sponsored by Hitler and attempted to combine Nazi and Christian doctrines.

### BISHOP DESMOND TUTU

Bishop Tutu concluded a letter to Church Leaders with the words: "I believe that if this consultation fails to produce worthwhile results, then it will be the last such consultation to be called in South Africa."

PACSA

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## WHAT CAN WE DO?

*Some of these suggestions come from the Church in Latin America but have been adapted here to our situation in South Africa.*

1. Stop all racist practices in the Church concerning wages, housing, family unity and educational opportunities - for all Church employees.
  2. Try to ensure that people of different cultures and values hold key positions in the Church so that not only one culture and one set of values is imposed on Church organization and priorities.
  3. Try to ensure that Christians with racist views do not hold leadership positions in congregations or be given teaching opportunities.
  4. Disobey unjust and dehumanising laws. For example, if the caretaker of a church building wishes to have his family on the premises with him, this should be made possible.
  5. Decide, with prayer and fasting, in what ways the Church supports an unjust status quo. Repent. Make a firm statement committing the Church to the cause of the poor and oppressed.
  6. Let the Church be seen to be among the suffering - celebrate the Eucharist with the homeless, perhaps in the ruins of bulldozed communities. Attend meetings where people's grievances are aired and strategies planned. Church representatives can then take back to their churches the problems and plans. (In Brazil, Bishop Perez took into the Cathedral the uprooted plants which had been destroyed by the Militia to stop the peasants using the land which was rightly theirs. With the withered plants on the altar, he told the story of the peasants).
  7. Take a firm non-violent stand against injustice. Join in peaceful demonstrations whenever possible - as the Church, that is, wearing vestments or carrying a cross or church banner.
  8. Help in training programmes for non-violent protest against injustice, encouraging unity and Christian values. (Brazilian peasants used slogans such as: *No killing, No wounding, No retaliation.*)
  9. Stress the need for White liberation as well as Black. Search for 'antidotes' to fear, self-interest and other poisons. Use resource people from the Psychology Departments of the universities.
  10. Give money for vital services - scientific research, legal advice, transport, community and education centres, advice offices and self-help programmes. Pour resources into God's liberating work. Communities and individuals who 'hunger and thirst after righteousness' will find themselves living simply, whether planned or not.
1. Fund academic research which could make objective analyses of the situation. Use the information at Synods, Bishops' Conferences and Conferences; in making resolutions and decisions; in applying pressure to stop unjust practices; and in making Christians properly informed and aware of the intricacies of our racist structures and their often ugly outworkings.
  2. Be prepared for persecution from the supporters of the unjust status quo (John 15:20); the goal is not so much worldly success as a Church true to its calling.
  3. Love the Lord your God with *all* your heart, *all* your soul and *all* your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is *like it*: Love your neighbour as yourself. (Matthew 22:37-39)
  4. Be neighbour particularly to the robbed and deprived (Luke 10:30-37).

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