

SECTION III : FEATUREWHERE ARE THE BLACK N G CHURCHES MOVING TO?

Whereas before the middle of 1973, the mention of the N G Kerk "family" provoked thoughts of apartheid and all that it stood for, the trend today has changed radically.

Although the White N G Kerk, particularly in Black minds, is still inextricably identified with the Nationalist Government and its policy of separate development, the opposite has become true with its Black "daughter" churches, the N G Kerk in Afrika (African), Sending Kerk (Coloured), and the Reformed Church in Africa (formerly Indian Reformed Church).

Developments which emerged in mid 1973 when 100 Johannesburg African ministers publicly denounced apartheid, seemed to have changed the public attitude towards the Black churches in general.

Before this surprise declaration (which was first published by EcuNews), people outside the N G Kerk appeared to make no distinction between the attitude of the "mother" church and her "daughter" churches when it came to the country's race laws. They were all seen as collaborators in the implementation of the apartheid policy. This led to Blacks in general, having a low regard for those Blacks who belonged to this church.

The uneasiness experienced by Blacks belonging to the N G Kerk family as a result of this stigma, had been echoed by outspoken ministers such as Os Sam Buti, Scriba of the N G Kerk in Afrika. He constantly complained of the hardships of Black members of the N G Kerk family from Black circles. "We are constantly accused of belonging to an apartheid church which oppresses the Black people," Os Buti told a multiracial meeting in Johannesburg last year.

In White circles however, especially at civil service level, Blacks belonging to the N G Kerk, it was generally accepted, received preferential treatment once their church affiliation was established by White officials.

The 1973 anti-apartheid declaration which sent some shock waves through the mother church, was followed by hush-hush meetings between leaders of the African church and the White N G Kerk. Subsequent reports revealed that the Black ministers who had stressed that their rejection of apartheid was based on theological grounds, were uncompromising.

This move which brought much focus on the N G Kerk in Afrika, was further emphasised at the general synod of the N G Kerk in Afrika held in Worcester, Cape, last June.

Among these was the emphatic endorsement of the rejection of apartheid, laws forbidding mixed marriages, migratory labour and mixed worship. Of far reaching consequences was the synod's decision to join the S A Council of Churches, a body which is regarded with hostility by the N G Kerk.

Another blow came when the synod overwhelmingly committed itself to unity with the four N G Kerk family members. They asked for a single synod of the churches instead of the present Federal Council which recognises the autonomy of each of the four churches.

This synod was followed by meetings between the three Black churches who seemed committed to the idea of unity. It became clear from these informal meetings that the Black churches were set on a head-on collision with the separatist policies of the mother church.

At the end of last month, the synod of the Reformed Church in Africa (formerly Indian Reformed Church), which is also the smallest of the N G Kerk family, endorsed most of the decisions of the N G Kerk in Afrika, although its synod adopted a softer line to that of the NGKA.

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