

## DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

### VOLUME 1

### H. ETHICAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

## Statement on apartheid

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*Not edited.*

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### PREAMBLE

This report concentrates on apartheid as practised in South Africa. However, the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations recognizes that apartheid is only one manifestation of racism. Other forms of racism exist throughout the world. These are not touched on in this statement although their existence is acknowledged. The Biblical principles and the conclusions found in this statement apply equally to all forms of racism.

### I. AIMS AND PURPOSE

It is the aim of this statement

1. to provide information on apartheid as practised in South Africa
2. to examine the ideology and practice of apartheid in the light of Scripture, and
3. to suggest practical conclusions.

### II. HISTORY

Apartheid is an Afrikaans word meaning 'separation' (literally, 'apartness'). It must be seen within the framework of a distinctive historical development which had left South Africa with a high degree of racial, ethnic and cultural diversity.

White settlement began with the arrival of Jan Van Riebeeck in 1652. This was followed by the French Huguenots in 1688. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, 5,000 British settlers arrived at the Cape, of whom many migrated to Natal, and consolidated white control. Between 1848-1858 the German settlers arrived. At this time the indigenous black population of the Cape was small, but there were much larger numbers in the interior. From about 1860 Malays were brought in as slaves and in the latter part of the nineteenth century Indians were imported to work the Natal sugar fields. Four racial groups are

officially recognised in South Africa, viz.

Blacks – the current official apartheid term for those formerly named Bantu and Native (and often referred to as Africans).

White – the term applied to all those who are non-black and of British or Dutch background. This official term does not recognise any division within this group despite the existence of major language and cultural differences.

Coloureds – refers to several groups of people, including those who are deemed to be of descent that is mixed in terms of the apartheid classifications, as well as people descended from Malay slaves and those descended from the original inhabitants of the Cape (the Khoi and the San).

Asians – belong to communities originating from India, China, and other Asian countries.<sup>i</sup>

Anomalies occur. For example, the Cape Malay community which originates from Asia is not classified as 'Asian', but as 'Coloured' and Japanese are regarded as 'Whites' on economic grounds.

Legislative provisions exist for the re-classification of individuals as to which racial group they are deemed to belong. Such re-classification of individuals is gazetted regularly by the government.

### III. IDEOLOGY AND PRACTICE

Apartheid was mentioned for the first time in the South African parliament on 25<sup>th</sup> January, 1944, when Dr Malan described the nature of the envisaged republic, by saying, *inter alia* that it was 'to ensure the safety of the white race and of Christian civilization by the honest maintenance of the principles of apartheid and guardianship.'<sup>ii</sup>

This concept found strong support from some Christian churches in South Africa, especially the Dutch Reformed Church, which asserted,

As a Church, we have always worked purposefully for the separation of the races. In this regard apartheid can rightfully be called a Church policy.<sup>iii</sup>

The present ideological basis for apartheid is the felt need by the Whites to preserve their political and economic supremacy. While the term 'apartheid' has been replaced by 'separate development' or 'multi-national development' and more recently by 'good neighbourliness', nevertheless, the policy and practice remains. It deprives people of equal justice and rights on the basis of racial classification. It does not only mean the legitimate distinction between races; it means discrimination of one race against others according to due process of law. It is not voluntary and self-determined separate development; it is enforced or mandatory separate development with one race determining the future of others, and ensuring the continuation of its own value system. The ideology is a form of racism whereby one race seeks to dominate others, treating them as inferior and worthy of less dignity, having no significant political and economic rights.<sup>iv</sup>

The United Nations International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid (which was adopted on 30<sup>th</sup> November, 1973, and came into force on 18<sup>th</sup> July, 1976) may also be cited. Article II of the Convention spells out, in clauses c) to e), the concrete results of the apartheid policy and legislation which are to be condemned:<sup>v</sup>

- (c) 'Any legislative measures and other measures calculated to prevent a racial group or groups from participation in the political, social and cultural life of the country and the deliberate creation of conditions preventing the full development of such a group or groups, in particular by denying to members of a racial group or groups basic human rights and

freedoms, including the right to work, the right to form recognized trade unions, the right to education, the right to leave and return to their country, the right to a nationality, the right to freedom of movement and residence, the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

- (d) Any measures, including legislative measures, designed to divide the population along racial lines by the creation of separate reserves and ghettos for the members of a racial group or groups, the prohibition of mixed marriages among members of various racial groups,<sup>vi</sup> the expropriation of landed property belonging to a racial group or groups or to members thereof.
- (e) Exploitation of the labour of the members of a racial group or groups, in particular by submitting them to forced labour.'

#### IV. BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES AND PERSPECTIVES

Racism, including apartheid, is to be evaluated in the light of the following biblical witness.

1. God is the creator of all members of the human family irrespective of genetic differences (Col 1:16). The Bible speaks of nations and families (Gen 10:9–12; 12:3; 28:14). God is the Father 'from whom every family in heaven and earth is named' (Eph 3:15).
2. All tribes and nations, with their languages and culture, have their origins from the creative word of God and are sustained by the blessing of God, the creator and preserver of the world, who has bound himself to it in a covenant relationship (Gen 9). There is no biblical basis for the claim that one group of people (all black people, supposedly the descendants of Ham) were ever ordained to be subservient.
3. In the genealogy of Genesis 10 no people – not even Israel – is considered to be superior to any other. All are equal, despite ethnic and/or cultural differences. There are expressions not only of the uniqueness of peoples but also of the creative power of God.
4. The scattering and dividing of peoples (Gen 11) follows God's judgment and friction between those belonging to different ethnic and/or cultural groups is the result of sin against God.
5. God entered the resultant chaos and scattering of peoples and their confusion of languages with his election of Abraham and his descendants to be bearers of a new word of blessing. In Israel, all the families of the earth are to receive blessing (Gen 12:3).
6. The promise of blessing to all families is fulfilled in Christ, the seed of Abraham. In him, God reveals his desire for 'all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (1 Tim 2:4). Through his death and resurrection, our Lord became the redeemer of all people, and brought eternal life and communion with
7. In Christ, Jew and Gentile are united, for he has broken down the dividing wall of hostility (Eph 2:14,15). All who are united with him in baptism are one in Christ and share equally in the promise of salvation. In this context, ethnic and/or cultural differences play no role (Gal 3:27–29).
8. The Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost on 'all flesh' (Acts 2:17). It is his work to bind men and women, regardless of ethnic origin, into the one family, the Church.

9. Through the Holy Spirit's guiding, the early church learned that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). The hated Samaritans were included in the Church, and an Ethiopian eunuch was baptized (Acts 8), then a Roman centurion and his household (Acts 10 and 11). Finally, the Gospel spread to the entire Gentile world. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Church became the universal communion of all believers.
10. The universality of the Gospel and of the Church was fore-shadowed in the ministry of Jesus. He breaks through the 'apartheid' of his day in associating with Samaritans (John 4) and in holding up the actions of a Samaritan as an example to be followed – in contrast to those of a Jewish priest and Levite (Luke 10). He also showed mercy to those who were not of the house of Israel, like the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:24–30).
11. Christ, in his life and death, is the example for his followers (John 13:15; 1 Pet 2:21). They are to hear and to heed his new commandment, 'that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another' (John 13:34; cf Matt 22:39,40; Rom 13:8; Gal 5:14; Col 3:14; James 2:8). The Christian's faith is active, 'working through love' (Gal 5:6). Such self-giving love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom 13:10) as it is expressed in relationship to God and to the neighbour, irrespective of racial origin.
12. Baptismal incorporation and Eucharistic communion have eschatological significance. The Lord's Supper already here anticipates that final community meal which will be celebrated forever. At that heavenly meal, when 'many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven' (Matt 8:11), perfect peace will have been realized (Eph 1:9,10).

In the light of this biblical witness, the following points are made –

1. While a sense of ethnic identity has its place in this world, it can easily be distorted by human pride and greed. In particular, racism involves not only prejudicial judgments on other people; it also constitutes an affront to the Creator.
2. Members of the Church, as followers of Christ, are called to be peace-makers (Matt 5:9). The Gospel of forgiveness requires forgiveness of others. The gift of reconciliation with God implies the need for reconciliation with others. It is the Christian's duty, therefore, to work earnestly for the removal of racial tension and to promote justice in the face of injustice.
3. Because the Lord's Supper is the Sacrament of unity, racial considerations should not be allowed to encroach on it. It is impossible for Christians to tolerate a situation in which apartheid divides the people of God at the altar.

## V. THE CALL TO REPENTANCE

Before registering our protest against apartheid and any form of racism, we acknowledge the following truths:

1. As members of the world-wide human family we share the suffering of those who are subjected to injustice. Yet we also share the common burden of sin and guilt with the perpetrators of injustice. This is so even if we are not directly involved in maintaining the system of apartheid.

2. St Paul's word that if one member suffers, all other members suffer with it (1 Cor 12:26) also reminds us of our solidarity in guilt with those who confess Christ, yet maintain an unjust system. While we cannot repent for them, we are ourselves called to repentance lest we condemn ourselves in judging others (Matt 7:1–6).
3. We confess that we cannot speak of the sins of other Christians without repenting of our own, and being willing to change our attitudes and actions. Thus we also confess that we have not always been deeply committed to the struggle for equality and against racism in our own land. Our protest against apartheid is thus prefaced with the prayer: 'Lord, have mercy on us'.

## VI. CHRISTIAN WITNESS IN THE FACE OF FALSE IDEOLOGY

In considering the right and duty of Christians to protest against the present ideology of apartheid as is currently practised in South Africa, the following are to be borne in mind.

1. On the basis of the biblical principles and perspectives mentioned above, the ideology of apartheid and its related laws which entrench this ideology can be adjudged to be in contradiction to the Word of God and an affront to the Creator whose image all people bear.
2. The fourth commandment 'You shall honour your father and your mother' binds all Christians in obedience to all lawful and rightful authorities. However, the apostolic testimony, 'We must obey God rather than men' (Acts 5:29) places the limit for the Christian's obligation and duty to obey authority and to oppose human laws, demands and regulations which are contrary to the clear will and law of God.
3. Since governments and state authorities are God's servants for the common good, their laws should enable love for one's neighbour (Rom 13:4,9,10) and neither prohibit nor hinder the exercise of neighbourly love. Because apartheid is an institutionalisation of wrong to the neighbour, it is opposed to the divine imperative to 'love your neighbour as yourself'.
4. Christians, sharing together as members of the Body of Christ, the Church, 'weep with those who weep' (Rom 12:15; cf. Gal 6:2,10; 1 Cor 12:25,26). They share with all people the love of God and Jesus who became a human being. They cannot remain silent when they are forced to sever, or witness the severing of, the bond of their fellowship with others on the ground of ethnic origins. They know that the mission command of Christ (Matt 28:18–20) does not leave any room for apartheid considerations.
5. Spiritual fellowship in Christ cannot be broken by political, social, economic or ideological realities. However, enforced social separation and legalized discrimination against human beings are detrimental to the divinely intended wholeness and well-being of individuals, their families, and their communities. Because apartheid endangers and harms the spiritual and moral health of fellow human beings, Christians are constrained to oppose the ideology and practice of apartheid.
6. While affirming that true brotherhood of all people can become a reality only through God's grace and mercy, Christians are bound to pursue the path of reconciliation. Yet, they are aware that there can be no peace between people without love and justice. Therefore they must raise their voices in

witness against those human laws which are in contradiction with the universal law of God, with God's created order and with his purpose of bringing salvation to all people.

7. Nations of the world have condemned apartheid as an insult to humanity, as blatant discrimination, and as institutionalised injustice. Christians, motivated by the love of God in Christ, have all the more reason to do so.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

The Lutheran Church views with grave concern the growing tension between races, inter-tribal friction and the general escalation of violence in South Africa. All racism is a vicious force which ultimately destroys not only the victim but also the perpetrator. It also affects the silent observer and the uninvolved Christian. On the basis of the biblical principles and duty to witness outlined above, it expresses its opposition to the oppressive policies and discriminatory laws of the South African government. It has a special obligation to thousands of its fellow Lutherans whose lives are affected by the severe injustice of apartheid.<sup>vii</sup>

The Lutheran Church of Australia calls its members:

1. to remember that, in view of the global anxiety over the situation in South Africa, God is the Lord of history, who, despite human sinfulness, guides the affairs of people to his ultimate goal; our Lord is the Saviour and vindicator of those who, in faith, call on his name; he is also the Judge who will call to account those who flout his will;
2. to pray earnestly
  - a. that those in government in South Africa and the supporters of apartheid undergo a change of heart so that reforms may be introduced which promote peace, justice, and harmony;
  - b. that those who seek change and justice may use peaceful, lawful means;
  - c. that lawless forces who seek to use the present unrest for their own selfish ends may be thwarted;
  - d. that fellow Christians, especially those who share our Lutheran faith, may be given insight and courage boldly to confess that God is no respecter of persons, and to call for justice, and to strive for the removal of any racial discrimination in their own communities and churches;
3. to fulfil their call to be peace-makers; while it is understandable that provocation and frustration have led to violence also on the part of the oppressed, there should be a cessation of the use of violence on all sides;
4. to avoid easy judgmental attitudes against others by repenting of their own sins, by combating racist attitudes in themselves and their own communities, and by seeking exact knowledge of the situation in South Africa;
5. to be mindful of the role of the Church's God-given ministry of reconciliation and peace; the Church has been entrusted with a prophetic ministry of calling governments to administer their affairs righteously and justly; Christians have the right and duty to protest against oppression wherever it is to be found in the world,<sup>viii</sup> including apartheid, and to declare their solidarity with those discriminated against, especially with fellow-Christians;
6. to remember that, while the Church is not a political organisation, it can bring its influence to bear on political bodies in the struggle for justice; it is not only

the individual who can do something to bring about change; concerted action against injustice should be possible, though individual Christians as members of the Kingdom of God and as citizens of the world-community may have different opinions as to the measures, political and economic, which should be used to achieve positive change in South Africa;

7. to request Church leaders to keep the cause of the oppressed before the forum of world opinion

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<sup>i</sup> Based on 'APPENDIX 1: A GLOSSARY OF APARTHEID TERMS' in *APARTHEID – THE FACTS*. International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, in cooperation with the United Nations Centre Against Apartheid, London, 1983, pp.103-105.

<sup>ii</sup> Quote in Edgar H Brookes, *APARTHEID – A DOCUMENTARY STUDY OF MODERN SOUTH AFRICA*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1968, p.1.

<sup>iii</sup> Die Kerkbode, 22 September, 1948, pp.664, 665, quoted in John DeGruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio, *APARTHEID IS HERESY*, Lutterworth, Gilford, Surrey, 1983, p.6  
It is to be noted that racism including apartheid has been a concern of world Lutheranism since 1947. Attention is drawn to the following Lutheran World Federation Reports.  
1947: *LUND REPORT*, p.88. In Section 3: 'Faith and the Problem of a troubled world.'  
1952: *HANNOVER REPORT*, p.32. Message of the LWF par.8.  
1957: *MINNEAPOLIS REPORT*, p.89. IV: Theses on Christ Fees and Unites, item 4, 'Free for service in the world'.  
1963: *HELSINKI REPORT*, p.415. Report of Resolutions Committee, Document 74, item 11.  
1970: *EVIAN REPORT*, p.158 (First time Africa is specifically mentioned).  
1977: *DAR ES SALAAM*, p.179, 180.

<sup>iv</sup> For evidence of this judgment see: *Apartheid – The Facts*, *op.cit.*; David M Smith, *UPDATE, Apartheid – in South Africa*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985, (Marianne Cornevin) *Apartheid – power and historical falsification*; UNESCO, Paris 1980; and Roger Omond, *The Apartheid Handbook – a Guide to South Africa's Everyday Racial Policies*, Penguin, Middlesex, 1985.

<sup>v</sup> Quoted in *The Attitude of the L.C.A to 'Apartheid'* Dr Daniel Ch. Overduin, December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1985, pp.1,2.

<sup>vi</sup> The 'Mixed Marriages Act' (prohibiting marriages between people of different race) and 'The Immorality Act' Section 16 (prohibiting sexual relation between people of different race) subsequently have been repealed (June 1985).

<sup>vii</sup> The number of Lutherans in SOUTH AFRICA is 710,078 or 2.4 per cent of the total population, viz.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa	552,000
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (Cape Church)	6,387
Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa (Natal-Transvaal)	12,924
Evangelical Lutheran Church – Strand Street, Cape Town	693
Free Evangelical Lutheran Synod in South Africa	3,098
Lutheran Church in Southern Africa	32,100
Moravian Church in Southern Africa (Eastern and Western Region)	102,132
St. Olav's Lutheran Church, Durban	620
St Peter's by the Lake-Lutheran Church, Johannesburg	124
The number of Lutherans in NAMIBIA/SOUTH WEST AFRICA is	551,236
Evangelical Lutheran Church in SWA (Rhenish Mission)	193,000
Evangelical Lutheran Church in SWA/Namibia (ELOC)	349,816
German Evangelical Lutheran Church South West Africa	8,420

(Cf. Lutheran World Information – weekly edition, Release No 1/86, January 6 1986).  
All the larger churches listed above are black.

<sup>viii</sup> Cf. 'Declaration concerning Communist and other Persecutions of Christians', in *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions of the Lutheran Church of Australia*, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1980 and 1985, H35 – H36