

SACBC STATEMENT
ON
UNSCRIPTURAL RACIAL POLICIES (8/6/82)

The southern African Bishops' Conference heartily commended the historical move taken by the ministers and theologians of the white Dutch Reform Church in publicly denouncing the government's racial policies as unscriptural.

In the document (first published in *Die Kerkbode* of June 8), 123 ministers totally condemned the fundamental basis of the apartheid philosophy, that is, that it is impossible for various racial groups to live in harmony in one political system.

High praise for the ministers who had the courage to spell out the implications of the Christian Gospel of love was conveyed in the following message from Archbishop Denis Hurley, president of the Bishops' Conference.

“... Thank God for the 123 ministers and officials of the Dutch Reformed Church who have so clearly and courageously proclaimed their Christian witness. What a day it is for South Africa when these splendid people filled with Christian faith, hope and love, and animated by the grace of God, spell out for their own church and for the country at large, the implications of the Christian gospel of love. I could embrace them all – if they could stand such behaviour from a catholic archbishop. But having said what they have said, I am sure they could.

“They have called on their own church to realise that the Christian gospel demands of it to break down barriers of apartheid and to witness to Christian love. They have spelt out that this love must overflow in Christian social concern, that is, in expressing Christian values in social and political life.

“We celebrated Pentecost just over a week ago. What has happened today is a true Pentecost, a true manifestation of the Holy Spirit working through the magnificent 123.

“May God sustain their courage and strength and carry their words into the hearts of countless members of their church, especially those responsible for political decisions.”

In February Archbishop Hurley described the association of the Dutch Reformed Churches with the Afrikaner people and their history as having been “too close”. He said that a new South Africa would emerge on the day the Dutch Reformed Churches started pointing out the ills in South African society

“Although it could be a very good thing for a church to associate itself very closely with the historical development of a people, there is always a danger that the church

will then limit itself in its spiritual and moral vision just to the boundaries of concern of that people.

“I sympathise when the moment comes from church people in that situation to see more broadly and to realise what has been going on and that they now have to become critical of the very institutions they have helped to shape and form and build up. I would say it is a moment of deep agony, of severe suffering, and I have the highest admiration for the Dutch Reformed ministers and theologians in regard to the difficult stage they are going through now.”