

Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf

Lutheran Co-responsibility for Christian Witness in Southern Africa

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In this lecture, held in front of the Mission Conference of Lauenburg in Ratzeburg, the long-serving director of the Bleckmar Mission Society examines the theological stance taken by the Lutheran Church on developments in Southern Africa, where human rights are being violated by the politics of so-called separate development, where violence perpetrated by government is inciting violence from below, thereby provoking the question of a “just revolution”, and where black and white Christians are, in parts, still segregated at the Lord’s Table, even though they profess the same faith. Unrelentingly, Hopf formulates the questions as to the credibility of our witness in the light of these challenges, outlines parallels to the political theology of the Third Reich and searches for ways towards liberation and reconciliation.

(This lecture has been amended for publication purposes.)

Dedicated to many Brothers and Sisters
on both sides of the barriers
of segregated churches, peoples and races
bound by the responsibility
to bear Christian witness
in Southern Africa.

2. Timothy 2,19

Preface

In bearing relevant witness to the Word of God and its application to the matters of this world, the Christian witness will, at times, be heard in a consonance of very different voices – even across the segregating boundaries of opposing doctrines. Consonance in Christian witness! These were some of my parting words after my final visit to Dr. Beyers Naudé in Johannesburg in 1974.

However, consonance in Christian witness requires of all parties concerned the presupposition of a clear awareness of their co-responsibility for this witness. One should also expect to be totally misunderstood, vehemently opposed and ultimately denounced. Only in the knowledge of this risk is the venture possible, which the deliberations that are presented here wish to encourage. Having been edited and amended for publication, they date back to the lecture which I – in my capacity as Mission director in Bleckmar – held on the 22nd and 23rd of May 1978 in Ratzeburg in front of the Mission Conference of Lauenburg.

Hermannsburg, during Advent 1978

Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf

A distress call from South Africa

On Reformation Day in 1976, a tape-recorded message became public in Berlin, which Dr. Beyers Naudé had addressed to the evangelical congregations in Berlin, and, beyond that, to all evangelical Christians in Germany.¹ Beyers Naudé, a decidedly Reformed theologian of South African origin and world-renowned leader of the “Christian Institute” in Johannesburg, has for many years been striving continuously to find a non-violent solution to the South African race problem. The “Christian Institute”, like so many other organisations, has since been banned and closed down.² Beyers Naudé is one of the “banned persons”.³ The quotations taken from that “*Grußbotschaft*” (message of greeting) will be twofold: firstly, a few sentences on the situation in South Africa, then an appeal to the Christians in Germany.

On the situation in South Africa, Beyers Naudé tells us the following:

“Our country South Africa finds itself in distress and crisis – maybe in the most profound crisis of its history. The unrest, which erupted on the 16th of June 1976 in Soweto, has spread over the entire country. Anyone who knows about human emotions, human hopes and human suffering will understand and concur when I state that what is happening in South Africa today is in fact a rebellion, a national uprising against the entire system of Apartheid, of separate development – an uprising headed by thousands of black youths, but not only by them, but fully supported by their parents. The government is attempting, by means of harsh political measures such as arresting black leaders without charging them and by ruthless police operations, to force the black population back into the system of law and order established by the white population – without success, in my opinion. The struggle for justice and liberation will not cease – it will continue to the very end. The call for liberation that is raised by millions of people will not fall silent again. The church in South Africa, too, finds

¹ Text of the “*Grußbotschaft von Beyers Naudé an die Berliner Ökumene*” (31 Oct. 1976) in: Rudolf Weßler (ed.) *Südafrikas Christen vor Gericht. Der Fall Beyers Naudé und das christliche Institut* (Wuppertal 1977). p. 201-203, *ibid.* p.7ff: R. Weßler, *Das christliche Institut in der Apartheidgesellschaft*. – Cf. F.W. Hopf, *Eine Botschaft aus Südafrika*, in: *Missionsblatt Ev.-Luth. Freikirchen* (Bleckmar), 1977, No.10, p. 201ff. – See also the “handout” issued by the External Church Relations bureau of the EKD (Evangelical Church in Germany), provided by Werner Hoerschelmann (Frankfurt a.M., Oct. 1978): “*Was geht die evangelischen Christen in Deutschland die Südafrikafrage an?*”

² On this, see the booklet: “*Zum Schweigen verurteilt – In Südafrika gebannt*” (1978), publ. by the Evangelische Pressestelle für Weltmission in Hamburg, Mittelweg 143. Cf. supplement to booklet 4/1978 of the journal “*Junge Kirche*” (Bremen): *Ökumene – EKD – Südafrika*. *Ibid.* p. 18f. the complete list of organisations banned on 19 October 1977, with a brief overview of each one.

³ “Being banned” means, amongst other things: regularly reporting to the police, a ban on travel and public speaking. No newspaper reports may be written about the persons concerned, their utterances may not even be quoted.

itself in distress in view of this situation – in deep distress. In fact, the church is split internally because of the disparate points of view concerning the race issue, due to the widely differing convictions and aims that separate black from white Christians within the same church community. The white people in South Africa demand that their material security be safeguarded and their identity be preserved, while the black people in South Africa demand a clear testimony for justice and liberation, and these two demands are opposing each other directly in the current situation.

In the present situation of pronounced racial tension and mutual distrust, it is therefore unrealistic and well-nigh hopeless to expect real reconciliation at this time. The appeal to the black people for reconciliation is pointless as long as white people defiantly reject God's call to justice. The institutional church in South Africa finds itself in a situation of powerlessness as a result of the unresolved tension within its own community. Being at odds with itself, it is incapable of setting an example and of leading the people of South Africa out of racial discrimination and injustice and to remove the inequality from its political system. Thankfully there are individual clergymen and laypeople in every church community who are prepared – even though their number might be small – to partake in an open profession of justice, and who are determined to work towards liberation in the name of Christ.

A declared belief in the obedience of the Word of Jesus Christ can only be meaningful in our situation of rising fear and growing acrimony, if it takes effect not only in word, but also in deed. The need of Christians of every race, skin-colour and class for a confessing church in South Africa has never been greater than it is today – for a church that professes, in the name of Jesus Christ, the liberation of the people in South Africa from the unjust social structure of Apartheid.

The crisis has deepened to such an extent that the credibility of the Christian Church and its message is judged according to the answer to the question: What testimony does the Church give in word and deed concerning the racial politics in this country?

The Church in South Africa must finally wake up and realise that it – just as the Churches in Mozambique – has a decisive choice to make: to either declare itself, taking the message of the gospels as a point of departure, to be in solidarity with the hopes and the suffering of millions of people who want to liberate themselves from the unjust system of Apartheid, or to be brushed aside in its capacity as Church as being a 'noisy gong or a clanging cymbal'. The Church in Germany is deeply involved with this decision, as the consequences of the outcome of the struggle here in South Africa will be felt not only in all of Africa, but also in Europe and the entire world. This is why we appeal to you as Christians in Germany: give us

a testimony in your country, through your obedience and faithfulness towards the commandment of Jesus Christ, which will be able to encourage us in South Africa and help us to be a confessing Church in the deepest sense of the Word of God – even if only a relatively small number of members of the different Churches will affiliate themselves with this testimony.”

Thus Beyers Naudé on the situation in South Africa – one year before being banned!

If someone in Germany should subsequently ask: How does this concern us?, one is denied any escape into indecisiveness by Beyers Naudé, who reminds us of the manifold relations and connections of Christianity in Germany with South Africa:

“Through their Churches and Mission Societies, the Christians in Germany are sending out and maintaining pastors, missionaries and workers in our country. They are sending and investing a great amount of money. Many are coming here as tourists, business people and technicians. Their companies are trading extensively with South Africa and are making lucrative profits from the work of our black and white people. The German politicians are increasingly interested in our country, its people and its natural resources.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, by your action and inaction you are impacting on our problems, fears and hopes.”

In the light of these facts, Beyers Naudé concludes with an appeal to the evangelical Christians in Germany:

“For the sake of our shared human and Christian brotherhood we ask of you
to resist racial segregation in your country and ours;
to assist in eradicating it before it is too late, through your pastors and missionaries, tourists, journalists, business people and workers;
not to exploit our black fellow citizens, but rather to support them in their struggle towards the full development of their dignity and their rights;
to resist the ideological bondage of our white brothers in the Apartheid system. Help them to free themselves from it; for the sake of God and all mankind, support us in the struggle for freedom and development of our human dignity.”

Experienced and endured segregation at the Lord's Table

Instead of more citations, which are available in great abundance, I would first like to give an account of a series of personal impressions and observations during encounters in South Africa (1956, 1966, 1974). In 1956, I had the chance to get to know the extent of mission

activity of the Evangelical-Lutheran Free Churches in Southern Africa for the first time, through visits with all their missionaries.⁴ I was able to experience their tireless service amongst heathens and Christians. All the contacts I had with black Africans are due to the reliable interpreting services rendered by them. This was preceded in 1951 by a short visit to Germany by Mission Superintendent Christoph Johannes (1886-1976). We sat together with him: apart from myself, several theology students who were on the verge of a life decision to heed the cry for help from South Africa and to sign up for lifelong service in the Mission of the Lutheran Free Church. We received detailed information and many encouraging personal accounts. But then, suddenly, a remark was made which clearly showed something that none of us had anticipated. This dignified Zulu-missionary, born in South Africa as the child of a Hermannsburg missionary, now seasoned and manifoldly blessed during 50 years amongst Christians and heathens of the Zulu nation, a missionary whose congregation had, through baptisms of adult heathens, increased more than tenfold over the decades; who, in his capacity as Superintendent, was generally acknowledged as bishop of a young church on the brink of becoming independent, the teacher and ordinator of a number of capable black pastors who trusted him implicitly; this man, who was accustomed to speak and think in the Zulu language, had never received Holy Communion together with the black members of his congregation, nor with his black colleagues or even from their hands. He was even of the opinion that, should he for his part make a request to this effect, they would refuse him. He and his large family naturally received Holy Communion in the church of the nearby white German Lutheran congregation. A man who had built many churches and chapels for “his” blacks, who had also administered the Holy Sacrament every time he had preached to his numerous big and small congregations, a man who stood – in his own words – “in the fissure” between black and white his entire life, and had borne untold suffering because of it – yet without ever having received Holy Communion in his black congregations and together with them!

He had no idea how severely shaken we were by this casual remark of a fact that, for him, went without saying. So when I was about to embark on my first trip to South Africa five years later in 1956, this question bothered me ceaselessly: How do I tell my Brothers that this segregation of Holy Communion is not right? Moreover, by doing this, does not the confessionally founded segregation of Communion of the Lutheran Free Church lose its

⁴ Towards an understanding of the so-called Bleckmar Mission Society and its work: F.W. Hopf (ed.), *Lutherische Kirche treibt Lutherische Mission. Festschrift zum 75jährigen Jubiläum, 1892/1967*. Bleckmar 1967 (Contributions by 10 authors, documents, numerous pictures).

credibility towards those Lutherans who are affiliated with unionist churches? A few weeks after my arrival in South Africa, these questions gave rise to lively debates during a missionaries' conference.

Some were reminded of a few instances from a time long ago, where missionaries with their families had received Holy Communion together with black Africans in areas where a white Lutheran congregation of their own church was out of reach – in the Western Transvaal, for example. Back then, a white aspirant missionary had even received the sacrament from the hands of a black pastor; an old missionary told us that he had confirmed his children together with black children – rare exceptions under circumstances that can hardly be imagined any longer! They did not want to admit that this fellowship at the Lord's Table is intrinsic to the sacrament and therefore called for. They talked of the unity of the Church, which is hidden here on Earth and only becomes apparent in the hereafter. My counter-argument to that was simply that the Lord Jesus Christ, who is "hidden" from us between Ascension Day and the Day of Judgement, is nevertheless tangible to us here and now – there, where we can find Him in Communion, Baptism and Word ("...wo wir ihn finden können in Nachtmahl, Tauf und Wort": a German Advent hymn, EKG 8, v.2) – and that, similarly, the hidden unity of the Church becomes apparent to us as the unity of His Body, to which we should testify at the altar across all differences and segregation.

Eventually a missionary who was still young at that time, explained that he had accepted the circumstances as they had hitherto been, also with regards to the segregation of black and white during Holy Communion, without giving it much thought. Now, however, he had realised: It is Apartheid, which also impacts on the altar of the Church! He stated that he was now prepared for Holy Communion in and together with his Zulu congregation. In those days we experienced this kind of "break-through" in many different places, and acted accordingly. However, what happened there did not concern the white congregations.

I had an unforgettable discussion with an old Zulu pastor, whom I told, with the help of the interpreting young missionary, what we intended to do on the following day during the church service of his congregation: The white missionaries and I would go to Confession and receive Holy Communion together with them, the Zulu people. I will never forget how this dignified fellow black pastor looked at me with big eyes and asked: "How did you know that this is what I wanted to talk to you about today?" I could only answer: "I don't know anything about your questions. What is your concern?" He told me: "Yes, that has been our question for a long time: When and where do the missionaries partake of Holy Communion? We have never witnessed this. In all other churches, the missionaries go to the Lord's Table

together with the black people. Why not in our church? The Christians of other churches ask us about this.” I interrupted him: “And what do you say in reply?” “We cannot say anything, for we don’t know. Some of us think: maybe some of the missionaries are not even confirmed.”

What should I say to that? Of course I tried to explain the behaviour of my white Brothers as best I could, and to excuse it somewhat. I pointed to the close ties that they had with the white congregations of our church in the vicinity, in which the missionaries with their wives and children feel “at home” because of the shared mother tongue. I mentioned the fact that a missionary hardly ever has a fellow pastor during a Communion Service, who could absolve him and administer the Holy Sacrament. I was moreover aware of the fact that our Brothers – unfortunately – do not make use of “Self-Communion”, which remains, although well founded and justified in Lutheran tradition, a contentious possibility in some quarters, and they subsequently keep their black fellow pastors in ignorance of this matter. Today I am convinced that I have, with such attempts at an explanation towards a black fellow pastor who was clearly deeply troubled by this existing practise, most certainly not removed the “umbrage” that was taken by him and many others. But I also know that he was exceedingly happy about our Communion that we received together and for which he was deeply grateful. One amongst many, not only there, but probably also in all other congregations!

Back then and since then we have experienced that, without any kind of “demonstration” or even any special announcement, the altar fellowship is now finally and consistently practised and has gradually become a matter of course, at least between the missionaries and their black congregations and especially their black colleagues. That is most certainly no cause to cover oneself with any kind of praise or glory, but rather an indication of the direction into which this development could and should have moved long ago where the practise of altar fellowship between black and white congregations is concerned – incidentally without any form of legal obstruction or interference by the state. In recent years, a few highly encouraging exceptions at special occasions unfortunately have hitherto only served to prove the sad rule that, generally speaking, there is no fellowship at the Lord’s Table between black and white Lutherans. In no way whatsoever should the personal impressions presented above disparage or dim the awe-inspiring stature and fortitude of our old missionaries, whose lifework, being characterised by sacrifice, remains the foundation of all subsequent development. If we then should, aside from this, perceive boundaries that they felt unable to cross, the great responsibility of their black and white descendants lies precisely therein that

they continue the work of the fathers and to deal with those tasks that have hitherto not been dealt with by them.

Specific questions posed by black Lutherans

Let me place a couple of other memories alongside the above account! In 1956 I became acquainted with a prominent Zulu educator, who was in charge of a big school and who, during long conversations, struck me as being a confessionally aware Lutheran. One evening a few of his colleagues had gathered at his house. A definite question emanating from this group was put to me: Where does the Lutheran Church stand on the politics of race of the South African government? The well-known support of the Apartheid policy by the Dutch-Reformed churches was pointed out to me. They were aware of and mentioned the criticism and protests of the Anglicans, the Wesleyans, the Roman Catholics and other Christian groups. What should I say – at a time when the inner-Lutheran discussion on the hot potato that was Apartheid was still at its elementary stage? My interpreter was an old Zulu missionary, a German South African of the third generation, completely at home in the Zulu language and Zulu mentality, but equally bound to the patriarchal distance that exists between white and black, and equally rooted in the subordinate mentality towards the government and its police violence. Patiently and willingly, he translated what was said between me and my black discussion partners, but eventually he sighed: “Let’s call it a day now, or else we might end up in prison.” Even back then he was obviously alert to black watchdogs and informers of the police. I then attempted in a simple way to propound more or less the following thoughts: Our Lutheran Church, too, has to respond to the issues of the Apartheid policy. It is, however, a question of *how* this is done, whether through resolutions and declarations that become generally known through the press and radio, or maybe, to begin with, through personal discussions with accountable politicians. If we as Lutherans are more reticent than other churches, this is because we let our stance be determined by the Word of Christ: “My kingdom is not of this world”. With this we are, in our capacity as Church, prevented from interfering directly in political events. However, wherever public injustice takes place and outrages occur, we as Lutherans are obliged to speak up against this to world leaders as well. The question remains, as ever, how to conduct such protest in the right way. However – I added to the discussion with my black conversational partners – you, too, are compelled as Lutheran Zulu Christians to bear testimony before your chieftains and in your tribe if an injustice occurs there. I readily admit that, in those days, in spite of my fundamental and *ab*

initio rejection of Apartheid, I was relatively oblivious to its dreadful effect, especially since many things remain hidden and concealed from every European visitor.

Ten years later I visited that Zulu principal again and realised that he still knew exactly what I had said in 1956 in his house. I had a last meeting with him in 1974. On this occasion, he was filled with hope for the end of Apartheid, the gradual demise of which he expected with great certainty and oddly enough with much confidence, deeming this to be one of Vorster's ultimate objectives (!). With this, I was vividly reminded of what was repeatedly and strongly emphasised during this trip to South Africa in other discussions with black South Africans as well: What we hope for is to be fully recognised as human beings and to obtain justice! With this in mind, the question of Lutheran testimony concerning the criteria for human rights in their immense topicality therefore also begs to be heard and answered.⁵

The call for independence

Before we turn to the subject of the immense challenges where Christian testimony in Southern Africa is concerned, I would like to interpolate a few words at this point on the issue of the aspirations for independence of young African Churches. The assistance to be rendered towards a genuine attempt at coping with this huge task must increasingly be recognised as an absolutely essential part of our co-responsibility for Christian testimony in Southern Africa. I would not want to venture any kind of judgement as to whether the objective of independence is reached in those instances where the term "partner churches" is used with good reason and understandable emphasis these days, or where the previous opposite position of the "mother church" towards her children or daughter (subsidiary) churches is deliberately replaced by referring to "sister churches". I also do not wish to continue the debate over the famous "Three Selves" that have, since the previous century, been repeatedly applied as criteria for the independence aspired to and attained by a mature young Church that has arisen out of missionary work: self-preservation, self-rule, self-expansion. Criteria that certainly are not adequate but remain nevertheless useful and helpful, serving in any event to compel us to remain sober in our judgement of what has already been accomplished.⁶

⁵ On this topic, cf. the exceedingly insightful collection: Winfried Baßmann (ed.), *Menschenrechte in Südafrika. Perspektiven von Widerstand und Unterdrückung*. Munich 1978. Series Piper 179.

⁶ Cf. on this: Peter Beyerhaus, *Die Selbständigkeit der jungen Kirchen als missionarisches Problem*, 1956; F.W. Hopf, *"Selbständigkeit der Kirche" nach evangelisch-lutherischer Lehre*. A series of theses (1952), published in: *Lutherische Kirche treibt Lutherische Mission* (see footnote 4), p. 161-164.

I wish to include only a few remarks, dating back twenty-odd years or so, when grappling with the process of true independence was, at least for certain Lutheran Churches in South Africa, still at its elementary stage. In those days I encountered a prominent black educator, who had grown up as a foster-son in the house of a German Lutheran missionary, and who saw himself entirely as being a grateful child of the “mother church” and a product of its mission work.⁷ On the question of the patriarchal position of authority of the white missionaries in the Church, he said: “We old people, who have grown up under the old missionaries, we know why things have turned out this way. But our young people no longer understand this. And if you do not help us to gain our independence soon, it might come to a break-away – and not only a break-away from white leadership, but also a break-away from the Lutheran Church.” With this, he thought of those syncretistic African groups that were generally referred to as “sects” in those days, but that have since been understood to be “independent churches” and are taken seriously as such. Thus this far-sighted man spoke, dreading the eruption of a Black-African nationalism, twenty years before “Soweto”. What a parallel – and maybe a help for us towards an understanding of what is busy unfolding on the political front, whether it be in open revolution or in the underground! A definite either-or: either a genuine gaining of independence of a young generation that is no longer able to understand the old relationship of dependence and no longer willing to endure it – or a revolutionary break-away from white leadership under the rallying cries of a black African nationalism.⁸

On this subject, I have another memory of that great Lutheran Tswana Christian, Nun Mokone, who came to Germany in 1957 “to thank the mother church”. In Hamburg, he spoke about becoming a church in South Africa. On that occasion, he was asked amongst other things about the confessional allegiance of the young Lutheran church and the differentiation towards other churches this entails, and also about the boundaries within Lutheran churches. Mokone cautioned against hasty unions. He emphasised two things: Firstly, help us to attain a thorough knowledge and true understanding of all Confessions of our Lutheran Church by means of translations and by training a theologically well-educated and discriminating class of pastors. We need people who are able to discern and decide for themselves whether we are

⁷ Remarks by him in the booklet: *Vater Mokone erzählt. Ein lutherischer Bantu-Christ aus Südafrika spricht mit seiner Mutterkirche in Deutschland*, Bleckmar 1960.

⁸ On this, the recent significant contribution of a young black South African: Ben Khumalo, *Schritte auf dem Wege zur Selbstbefreiung*, in the collection “*Menschenrechte*” (see footnote 5), p. 106-115.

at one with others.⁹ Secondly, an example to illustrate this: In the old days, when a stranger came to our kraal, and we saw him walking towards us over the plateau, we held our hand over our eyes to shield them from the sun and to discern as to whether the approaching person was indeed one of ours or not. In the same way, where the Confession of our Church is concerned, we want to verify and discern as to whether the others do indeed belong to us and we are able to be dogmatically at one with them. To achieve this, we need the Confession in all its facets, and we need black theologians who can understand and apply it. – With these words, this black Lutheran expressed in no uncertain terms the only criterion that was, according to him, valid for the true unity of the Church: Unity in doctrine! (cf. Conf. Aug., Art. VII), but also, who it is that has to ultimately apply this criterion in African churches: the Africans who are bound to the Confession themselves!

Four questions pertaining to the witness of Christians

The purpose of the deliberations so far has been to illuminate the background in front of which our Lutheran co-responsibility for Christian witness in Southern Africa is the matter at hand. In doing so, a deliberate attempt has been made to dispense with data and information about individual Christian groups and also with a characterisation of the various Lutheran missionary efforts with their ecclesiastical gains, as well as with the unions hitherto achieved. Now the discussion turns to four pressing problems, which constitute such an enormous challenge to the entire Christian witness in Southern Africa, that we as Lutherans must also recognise our co-responsibility – be it that we are direct participants in a mission organisation in South Africa, be it that we belong to a church which is bound to South Africa by specific obligations, be it that we are confronted, within and outside the Lutheran World Federation, with the ecclesiastical and political decisions in Southern Africa, be it that we as “Christians on the whole” are called upon to pray and be aware that all members of the body of Christ experience empathetic suffering there, where the suffering of our fellow Christians becomes known to us – where, along with this empathetic suffering, the shared responsibility to reflect on agonising questions and unsolved problems can and must form a part of this. The four pressing problems pertaining to South Africa to be discussed here against the backdrop of our Lutheran co-responsibility are the following:

⁹ More on the translations of the Lutheran confessional documents into Zulu and Tswana, cf. the instructive reports in the Anniversary Edition of Bleckmar (see footnote 4): by Dr. Johannes Schroeder (p. 117-124) and Dr. Wilhelm Weber (p. 125-135).

1. The question of witness concerning a practised fellowship between black and white within churches of the same confession.
2. The question of Christian witness concerning the policy of “separate development” (Apartheid) and its ramifications.
3. The question of Christian witness concerning the abuse of government- and police force.
4. The question of Christian witness concerning the acknowledgement of a rebellion as being a “just revolution”.

Within the framework of these deliberations, we can neither proceed chronologically by rendering a prehistory of Apartheid in its formative process, nor theologically in a systematic way by elaborating on certain doctrines in their concrete application. Instead, a concentric depiction is to be attempted – namely from the inside outwards. We begin with the innermost and most internal problem: the question of a practised church fellowship between black and white. Then we will progressively push forward and outward – towards the Apartheid policy, towards the abuse of power and the so-called just revolution.

What is essentially the *de facto* situation concerning the extension and validation of church fellowship between black and white – there, where it is a matter of Christians belonging to churches of the same confession? Or let us ask specifically: What is the situation concerning the fellowship between black and white Lutherans? We proceed by leaving aside two desperate and painful problems: for a start, all the hardships, the suffering, distress and doubt suffered by Christianity as a result of its fragmentation and division into a myriad of confessions and denominations. That is not the subject at hand. Furthermore, we refrain from a discussion about the aggravation of this distress in places where Lutherans, due to inner-Lutheran church boundaries, are separated from each other despite undisputed, even spiritually affirmed neighbourliness.¹⁰ We therefore contain the subject by speaking of black and white Lutheran Christians in churches that are affiliated to one another. The problem exists in Natal, for example, in the erstwhile operational area of emissaries from Hermannsburg between white congregations mainly of German descent on the one hand, and Zulu congregations that have resulted from the Hermannsburg heathen mission on the other. The same applies to the operational area of the Lutheran Free Church emissaries from Bleckmar. Elsewhere the situation is similar, for example in Namibia or in areas where black congregations that have emerged from the work of the Berlin Mission Society are adjacent to

¹⁰ On this distress and how to deal with it, I refer to the Lutheran Free Church article: “*Erklärung zur Frage nach der Zusammenarbeit lutherischer Mission in Südafrika*” of 1953, published in the Bleckmar Anniversary Edition (see footnote 4), p. 165f.

white congregations. A document of particular importance that was unanimously agreed upon in 1975 by the delegates of the federation of almost all Lutheran churches in Southern Africa should be mentioned here:

The Swakopmund Appeal

from which a few characteristic sentences will be cited.¹¹ It should be stated at the outset that the Swakopmund Appeal, for its part, cites a number of declarations and memoranda from the preceding years, so that one can speak of a learning process, the fruits and result of which are distinctly noticeable here. The document carries the heading: “Appeal to Lutheran Christians in Southern Africa Concerning the Unity and Witness of Lutheran Churches and their Members in Southern Africa.”

There we can read the following:

“The confessional foundation of the Lutheran Church compels every Lutheran Christian, as well as the individual church institutions and the Federation of Evangelical-Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa, to unanimously resist alien principles which threaten to undermine their faith and to destroy the unity of doctrine, witness and practise of the churches.”

Three of these “most dangerous alien principles” are mentioned:

1. “An emphasis on the attachment to an ethnic group, whereby Lutheran Christians are induced to conduct their Lutheran church service as being dependent on birth, race or ethnicity, and to insist that the Lutheran churches in Southern Africa remain individual churches, segregated along ethnic principles.”
2. “The notion that, where the unity of the Church is concerned, it is only a matter of spiritual unity, which does not need to be made visible.”
3. The notion that the social structure and the political and economic system of our country should only be structured along the lines of natural laws determined by creation, or only according to considerations as to their practical expediency, without being subjected to the criterion of the Love of God as revealed to us in the message of the Bible.”

With ruthless candour, the document of Swakopmund speaks of the repercussions of these alien principles:

¹¹ A German version of the Appeal was published in the “*Handreichung*” (1978)(see footnote 1), p. 42-45; previously, sections thereof in booklet No.11 of the series: “*Zur Sache. Kirchliche Aspekte heute*”: Jürgen Jeziorowski (ed.), *Lutherische Gemeinschaft im Kontext Afrika*, Hamburg 1977, p. 120-124.

“The consequence of the influence of these alien principles on our church life is that the communion of pulpit and Eucharist amongst Lutheran churches can only be put to practise in a very limited way. It was not possible to create any church structures that can effectively bear witness to our unity and that are conducive to combined action. In many cases, it is not possible for our churches to decisively speak up for people whose freedom and rights are being curtailed and whose dignity is being infringed by the political, social and economic structures, as well as by the legislation of the Republic of South Africa. We call on Lutheran Christians to subscribe to this appeal, to commit themselves to reject these alien principles and to make sure that they do not determine our personal behaviour and our church practises. With this appeal, we commit ourselves to espouse a true and credible expression of our unity in faith and witness.”

Following this, the appeal cites quotations from documents of recent years, amongst them the following:

“We believe that affiliation to the One Church and membership of the congregation ... is, also from an organisational and legal point of view, not a secondary issue, but rather ... forms part of the essence of the Church. All Christians, regardless of race, are members of the One Church through baptism, and, through the preaching of the gospel and the Sacrament of the Altar, share in and are entitled to the fellowship of all believers. Therefore anyone who, for racial reasons, wants to segregate Christians or keep them segregated by legal or organisational means, and does not afford his Christian Brother a share in and an entitlement to the Sacraments and the preaching of the gospels in fellowship at all times, excludes himself from the fellowship of the faithful and congregational membership. Thus, the person who does not want to allow a preacher to proclaim God’s Word or to administer the Sacraments in his own congregation because he is of a different race, is destroying the evangelical ministry and the unity of the Church.”

Gaborone 1977

To be sure, the Swakopmund Appeal (1975) speaks of a practised church fellowship between black and white Lutherans; it does, however, not yet propose a formal organisational integration of both groups into one church body. Since then, however, this objective has increasingly been strongly emphasised as a requirement, particularly in connection with the preparations for the 1977 summit of the Lutheran World Federation in Dar-es-Salaam. A few months prior to this significant World Federation summit, representatives of Lutheran

churches from all over Africa convened in Gaborone, the capital of Botswana, amongst them 83 black Africans. The following was reported about this exceedingly important Pan-African consultation of February 1977:¹²

“The white Lutheran minority churches in Southern Africa are urged to actively participate ‘in the process of incorporation into the native churches’ of this region. This demand has been called for emphatically by the Pan-African Lutheran Regional Consultation, which was in session from the 7th to the 16th of February 1977 in Gaborone, the capital of Botswana. The three representatives of the four white, German-speaking Lutheran churches in Southern Africa were in some instances severely reproached by the black delegates of this consultation, that their churches did not seek any true fellowship with the other black Lutheran churches of Southern Africa.

The black church leaders expressed their keen impatience with the German-speaking sister churches of this region. It was emphasised that the proposition of the Pan-African Lutheran regional consultation was to be the last conciliatory gesture on behalf of the black churches. It was stated that, back in 1970, the white churches in the Republic of South Africa and Namibia had already emphatically been called on by the Fifth Plenary Meeting of the Lutheran World Federation to have church communion with the black churches, however nothing decisive had happened from their side since then.

Bishop Daniel Porogo Rapôô of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa recalls that, during the Fifth Plenary Meeting of the LWF in Evian-les-Bains seven years ago, the black and white delegates had become embroiled in an argument over the issue of Lutheran unity in Southern Africa. Back then the white people had, according to the Bishop, ‘almost been excommunicated’, but his plea, as well as that of the Namibian Bishop Dr. Leonard Auala had been heeded, and they had “given the white Brothers a chance.” Bishop Rapôô declared that, if something did not happen soon, he would not put in a conciliatory word any longer, and he said: ‘How much more time are we supposed to give the white churches?’ The black churches were no longer interested in ‘paper statements’, they finally demanded actions.

Bishop E.E. Mshana from Tanzania said that the call by the Consultation on German-speaking churches in Southern Africa to affiliate themselves to the native churches was a ‘brotherly warning’; should it be ignored, they would implement tougher measures.

¹² The report presented here is taken from the “*Information*” of the news service of the Luth. World Federation (Geneva, dated February 1977 (11/77)).

The president of the United Evangelical-Lutheran Church in South-West Africa (VELKSWA), under which the two large Lutheran black churches of Namibia are united, Dr. Lukas de Vries, declared that the black Lutherans of South-West Africa were tired of all those appeals for years on end. The German-speaking churches in Southern Africa were apparently beyond help, and it served hardly any purpose to talk to them. He said that the time had come to make precise, far-reaching demands on them. De Vries stated: 'We keep the door open for them and say: When you are ready, then come.' The VELKSWA president pointed out that it was the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) that kept the German-speaking churches in Southern Africa alive with its financial and personnel support. He added that, by way of contrast, the United Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD) had adopted a clear stance and had made the recommendation to suspend the support given to the German-speaking churches in Southern Africa. The Namibian church leader emphasised: 'In view of this state of affairs, the EKD ceases to retain any credibility as far as I am concerned.'

The Tanzanian theologian Judah Kiwovele – he is a member of the executive committee of the LWF – emphasised that he had, for a number of years, belonged to the committee that dealt with issues relating to Southern Africa. Kiwovele stressed that the African churches had to ensure that their representatives in the following executive committee, to be elected by the Sixth Plenary Meeting of the LWF held in June in Dar-es-Salaam (Tanzania), receive clear mandates on the issue of Lutheran unity in Southern Africa.

The president of the Western Synod of the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus in Ethiopia, Tasgara Hirpo, asked why the Lutheran World Federation, or rather its African division, had 'not done anything' where this matter was concerned. Commenting on the hesitant attitude of the German-speaking Lutherans in Southern Africa, Hirpo said: 'If people choose to go it alone, let them go alone.' He reckoned that white Lutherans who separate themselves from black people could not invoke the Confession, their behaviour amounted to 'adultery', which could not be tolerated according to church ordinances.

The Liberian bishop, Roland J. Payne stated categorically: 'We should appeal to these churches one last time. If still nothing happens, we have to revoke their membership of the Lutheran World Federation.'

The 36,000 members of the four German-speaking Lutheran churches in Southern Africa constitute a scant five percent of Lutheranism in the Republic of South Africa and Namibia. Three of these churches are members of the LWF. All four have joined together in a special organisation, the Federation of Evangelical-Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa

(FELCSA). Those four Churches are the Hermannsburg Church, The Cape Church, the Transvaal Church (the latter not being a member of the LWF) and the German Evangelical-Lutheran Church in South-West Africa.”

(The predominantly German-speaking “white” Free Ev.-Luth. Synod in South Africa and the “black” Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, which emerged from the mission work of the Lutheran Free Church, were neither involved at Gaborone, nor with the Lutheran alliances.)

Demonstration of Brotherhood?

He who has ears to hear is able to hear the cry from all these voices for a demonstration of witness through practised church communion between black and white Christians and congregations. Many members of white congregations, and, very likely in most cases their pastors too, are probably never or hardly ever aware of the feelings experienced over this matter by their black brothers in faith, and of how sharply they criticise the fact that the church community that exists on paper is not afforded to them in real terms. With a great number of white people, the point cannot be reached where the necessary awareness is raised, simply because they never broach these kinds of subjects with “their” black people, as they neither know nor make a serious effort to have genuine encounters with black conversational partners, who are by all means capable of discussing these matters. This does not in any way apply only to these urgently needed contacts with convinced Christian black politicians, but equally to the entirely feasible discussions with pastors and teachers, for example. In this regard, too, the possibility of exceptions proving the rule is given, and welcome attempts by the young white generation give rise to a modest sense of hope. The overall picture has, for now, hardly changed because of this.

Many years after the constitution of independent “black” churches, their congregations are waiting in vain for a demonstration that they are being fully recognised by their immediately adjacent “white” sister congregations. In many white congregations that share his faith, a black Lutheran Christian still has to expect to arouse rejection, agitation and outrage if he should dare to go and visit a “white” church service.¹³ In certain congregations it is still

¹³ Concerning this, cf. the letter of a group of white Lutherans in Greytown, dated 13.2.1972 to the then Governing Body of the Ev.Luth. Church in South Africa (Hermannsburg), in which they perceive “the threat to our Church which calls itself Lutheran” in various “circumstances”, and the “removal” of which they deemed to have to “demand”. As one of these “circumstances” described as a “threat”, they expressly cite: “The demand to hold communal church services with the blacks.” (!) For a copy of this letter and other documents, see Klaus Kremkau, *EKD und Kirchen im südl. Afrika*, epd-dokumentation 12, 1974, p. 230ff. The written reply by

impossible for a white South African-born missionary to receive his ordination in his native white congregation, in the event that black assistants should be involved on this occasion, and in case the highlight of the “white” church service would be that of black and white communicants receiving Holy Communion together.

It is highly doubtful whether it was the right thing to do to have concealed all these extremely painful and deeply humiliating experiences of this nature in the oral and printed coverage of Missions in South Africa up until now. In any event, there are Christians in Germany who, after having prayed and donated for the Mission work in South Africa for decades, are now asking reproachful questions: Why has no-one ever told us anything about this? The following sentence, written in a report by a participant in a “work camp” attended by 25 youths from different white congregations, who assisted a black congregation in executing their building project, is therefore all the more comforting: “To conclude the days of work ... an unforgettable church service, during which we could place ourselves under the Word of God and go to Communion together with our black fellow Christians. Reverend Tiedemann preached in German so that we could understand him, and Pastor Khumalo preached in

President Hahne to the *Greytowner Kreis* (Circle of Greytown) refers to a “statement” of said Circle; it is missing from the documentation by Kremkau, however, but is nevertheless repeatedly quoted by Hahne. It emerges from one of these quotes (p. 234) that, what is meant with the “demands” of communal church services is an “expectation” in this regard from the Lutheran World Federation, to which the Greytown Circle has the following to say: “What the LWF expects from us can be described with one word: integration ... We are fed up with this unsolicited interference from overseas” (p. 234). Immediately following this quote is the highly significant sentence in Hahne’s reply: “The Governing Body of the church is also of the opinion that the interference in our situation by others is impermissible, and therefore rejects it. For the Governing Body, as well as the General Synod, the dissolution of our congregations and churches, or a fundamental change in their structure and organisation is out of the question...” (p.233)

On the further development, cf. the remark by Heinz Eduard Tödt in his Dar-es-Salaam report (in the volume: *Lutherische Gemeinschaft*, see footnote 11, p. 89ff.): “Members of the white Lutheran churches continue to feel that they are sweepingly and unjustly condemned, since they are making a considerable effort to gain full communion, including pulpit and altar fellowship with the numerous black congregations, while, at the same time, losing many members to the Lutheran Free Churches who have unequivocally sided with the Apartheid system” (p. 106). To this highly revealing statement, which undoubtedly refers to many a discussion during personal encounters outside of the official proceedings at the World federal summit in Dar-es-Salaam, two things should be stated:

1. The plural “Lutheran Free Churches” does not apply, as there is only one white church that is generally called and known by this name: the Free Ev.-Luth. Synod in South Africa. At best, the plural might therefore refer to its congregations.
2. An official statement from this “Free Church” on Tödt’s contention has hitherto not become known, but would nevertheless be urgently needed. One would like to know unequivocally and officially “whether these things were so.” One should not have to rely on statements made by other white South African Lutherans who claim: “We all know that.”

A parallel to Tödt’s contention lies in the merely insinuating sentence about the pastoral co-responsibility of the EKD “to rouse the consciences in the German-speaking churches” of South Africa. In this instance, a possible severing of ties with the latter is a matter of concern: one would “achieve a hardening rather than an overcoming of the status quo, and potentially push the vast majority of white Lutherans into church groupings in which the critical political service of a church rendered to society is denied.” (Hand-out, cf. footnote 1.)

Zulu.”¹⁴ One asks oneself in the light of such impartations: are these merely exceptions, ventured into by young people outside of the congregational life of white people? Or is this the dawning of a new day? “Watchman, how far gone is the night?”

This much is certain: For a long time, “black” African churches have been waiting longingly, albeit patiently, but increasingly with growing impatience for a demonstration of church communion with their white fellow believers, which is practised fully and very regularly, without reservation. They have great patience. But for how long? How long will they remain silent about everything? It may be that many black pastors, especially those of the older generation, do not make any radical demands, nor do they represent any radical tendencies and that they continue to want to have white missionaries as pastors in their congregations – not only for the sake of their co-operation, but rather for the sake of unity with white people, which is achieved through their presence. Whether this also applies to the younger generation, however, is questionable to say the least. And when it comes to what the emerging youth of the congregations, especially those in the cities, is thinking, remains – as one occasionally hears – hidden to a large extent, not only to the white missionaries, but also to their black colleagues. Many amongst them have possibly long since given up the hope of having a fellowship with white people inside and outside the Church, seeing that their parents and grandparents have been expecting it for such a long time without avail.¹⁵

Many years ago already, the unforgettable president of the African National Congress, Albert Luthuli, who, as an emphatic Christian, also in his capacity as Zulu chieftain, became world-renowned not only as Nobel laureate but also as a “banned person” by the South African government, had the following to say:

“To what extent do these churches (of the white people) represent something that is alien to the Christian spirit, and to what extent are they patronising, social institutions of sorts? Do not in fact many Christian clergymen speak to us condescendingly, instead of coming down and walking among us, as Christ did and still does? Africans suffer these things patiently and for a long time, but they are aware of them. A white, patriarchal Christianity – as if white people had invented the Christian faith – alienates my people from Christ. Hypocrisy, the fact of double living standards and equating white skin with Christianity all achieve the same goal. As I and many of our people see it, we have to brace ourselves for a veritable movement

¹⁴ Parish Magazine of the Free Ev.-Luth. Synod in South Africa “*Bekennende Lutherische Kirche*”, vol. 5, Nov/Dec. 1978, Nr. 11/12, p. 90. Cf. on this: Gerhard Schmolze, *Gemeinschaft bei passender Gelegenheit*. In: *VELKD-Informationen*, Nr. 34, 1.3. 1979.

¹⁵ Cf. on this, the shocking examples from Namibia in a book to which far too little attention is being paid: Theo Sundermeier, *Wir aber suchten Gemeinschaft*, 1973, Erlanger Taschenbücher No. 21.

of apostasy... It is not too late for white Christians to heed the gospels and to realise their responsibility in a new way. But I warn those, if I may take the liberty to do so, who hold Christianity dear and who want to “go into all the world and proclaim the gospel”. In South Africa, this opportunity has existed for three hundred years. It will not continue indefinitely. Time is running out.”¹⁶

When these words were printed in Germany in 1966, and German congregations in South Africa were also made aware of them through a Mission journal, they unleashed a storm of indignation. Any form of confrontation was avoided. The worst thing in this matter apparently was that it was the voice of a “banned person”. To cite him was forbidden!

Resulting from what has hitherto been said, and posing a further challenge for Lutheran co-responsibility in South Africa is

The question of Christian witness concerning the policy of “separate development”

(Apartheid) and its impact. One faces this question especially if one adheres to the Lutheran differentiation between the two offices ordained by God (potestates), that of the Church and that of secular government (Conf. Aug., Art. 28), and also if one wants to resist an intermingling of their competencies.¹⁷ Where this matter is concerned, it is primarily about the people; the Church owes it to them, for the sake of their eternal salvation, to call for penance as clearly and concretely as possible, to bear the witness of sin and grace.

Called to this witness are, first and foremost, the members of the clerical ministry, but together with them all Christians, called upon to bear witness not least through their life in

¹⁶ Quote in the “*Missionsblatt Ev.-Luth. Freikirchen*” (Bleckmar), vol. 58, March 1966, No. 3, p. 67, taken from the “*Bericht einer Südafrikareise*”: Karl Friedrich Weber, *Kreuz zwischen Weiß und Schwarz*, Breklum 1966.

¹⁷ An urgent call should be made that one is obliged to refer, above all, to the Confession of the Lutheran Church concerning these two offices (potestates), and that one should not continually bandy about the ambiguous theologoumenon about the “two kingdoms”. One should never apply this so frequently misused expression as if one were, with this keyword, to encapsulate a “doctrine” or even an application thereof that is, even only to some degree, widely understood in the same way. Just one look inside the *Göttinger Ev. Kirchenlexikon (EKL)* should alert one to this fact, as, under the keyword “*Zwei-Reiche-Lehre*” (doctrine of the two kingdoms), two considerably varying interpretations had to be placed alongside each other (III, 1927-1947). Therefore one has to challenge any use that is made, without comment, of the doctrine of the two kingdoms by way of a superficial catch phrase: “Could you tell me in what sense you mean it?” Over and above this, one should not entirely forget that it could be ascertained: “The consolidation of the terminology around the doctrine of the two kingdoms only took place, following the documents hitherto known, during the Thirties of this century...” (Ulrich Duchrow, ed. *Zwei Reiche und Regimente*, Gütersloh 1977, p.9ff., in the Introduction.) Of course, the issue itself is old. However, the expression does, to my knowledge, neither appear with the great Lutherans of the 19th century, nor with Werner Elert, for instance, in his “*Morphologie des Luthertums*” (1931/32). On this subject matter itself, cf. §35 (“*Zwei Reiche*”) in his work “*Das christliche Ethos*” (1949), p. 379 ff. as well as his lectures in the volume: “*Zwischen Gnade und Ungnade*” (München 1948), especially his Mission lecture: *Regnum Christi* (1946), p. 72-91.

their capacity as congregations and churches. They owe their witness to all who are affected by Apartheid, not only the underprivileged black people, but also the privileged white people, not only the governed, but to no lesser degree the governing, especially those responsible for legislation and those who react to them in some way.

With every contribution towards a Lutheran assessment of the question of Apartheid, one has to, at the outset, object to that fatal defensive attitude with which South Africans repeatedly declare uncomfortable words from Christians world-wide to be unlawful “interference in foreign affairs”, in order for them to subsequently fail to hear these words and to hush them up. One should rather bear in mind the solidarity that has its roots in the New Testament and that knows something about the suffering of one’s brothers in the world (1. Peter 5,9; cf. Hebr. 13,3), transcending all civil and political boundaries.¹⁸

At the World Federation summit in 1977 in Dar-es-Salaam, many Lutherans apparently acknowledged and agreed to a large extent that the situation in Southern Africa presented Lutheran churches with a bona fide *status confessionis*, and that especially the “white” Lutheran churches should realise this. During the discussion, it was clearly emphasised what was meant with the term *status confessionis*: not the confessional position, but rather the confessional act. Drawing on the commonly used terminology during the German church struggle, we can also say: it is a matter of confessional acts through which a confessional attitude, being in accordance with the confessional position, is unequivocally expressed.¹⁹ In the declaration on “Southern Africa: Confessional Integrity”, it is stated: “This means that churches, on the basis of faith and to manifest the unity of the Church, must publicly and unambiguously reject the existing Apartheid system”.²⁰

This sentence constitutes a special appeal to the Lutheran churches in Southern Africa. Here it is not a question of the impact and consequences of Apartheid on matters related to the Church, for instance; what is in fact demanded and declared is the public and unequivocal rejection of the entire system of Apartheid, not only by some individuals and their witness, but by Lutheran churches in their entirety.

What the Lutheran co-responsibility for Christian witness in Southern Africa therefore entails, is that we either affirm the Dar-es-Salaam appeal as well as, for our part, encourage

¹⁸ One should recall of what great significance certain calls to Christians in Germany were during the years from 1933 to 1945, when churches outside of Germany or individual Christians encouraged us. What stood behind these words was a co-responsibility for Christian witness in those nations who were terrorised by National Socialism.

¹⁹ On the matter in question, cf. Hanns Lilje, *Bekennntnis und Bekennen, Vortrag beim Deutschen Lutherischen Tag in Hannover (2.bis 5. Juli 1935)*, in the series: *Bekennende Kirche*, booklet 32, München 1935.

²⁰ epd – documentation, volume 18: Dar-es-Salaam 1977, ed. By H.W. Heßler, Frankfurt/Main, p. 212.

and strengthen our Lutheran fellow believers in Southern Africa in acts of witness to that effect, together with all its consequences. Or: that we give them different counsel. The word *status confessionis* can and may only be applied if it is understood and used in dead seriousness. That means: the matter at hand in the *status confessionis* is the choice: “confessing or renouncing”. Either one confesses and bears witness to the living and present Lord of the Church – or one renounces him. Ultimately, the Dar-es-Salaam appeal thus amounts to the following: Whoever wants to confess the living Lord Jesus Christ here and now, has to condemn and reject the Apartheid system and can no longer submit to its demands. Churches that approve of this *status confessionis* have to instruct office-bearers, congregations and individual members accordingly and encourage them where the consequences are concerned. Whoever is not willing or able to do this, should not speak of the *status confessionis*.²¹

After these words on the concept of actual confession, a reflection on the content of the postulated decision has now to ensue. A missionary from Hermannsburg who worked in Soweto until 1977, and who, even after the 16th of June 1976 during the time of unrest, dared to go into the township on a daily basis, emphasised in a report that Lutheran churches had for years denounced Apartheid as being unbiblical and not according to the gospel, and had, just like other churches, supported a change in the political and social structure of South Africa.²² Unfortunately, this can by no means be said of all Lutheran churches, so that one was consequently able to easily ignore that condemnation and obliterate it by contrary statements.

²¹ To forestall any misunderstandings and misinterpretations of these sentences, it has to be expressly stated: To speak of the Church and its members confessing or renouncing the Lord Jesus Christ is only possible with the prerequisite of a specific insight, which has, in the light of the Word of God, become a certainty, and from which his judgement is subsequently determined. He will then be compelled to help his fellow believers reach the same insight. He may, however, not denote them as renunciators of Christ, if they are (as yet) unable, according to the extent of their insight, to agree with him. He is, however, obliged to emphasise: If I were to agree with you, or if I were to let myself be silenced by you, that would, for me, amount to a renunciation of my Lord, whom I encounter especially in the least of his brothers (Matth. 25,35ff. 72ff.). That is why we unfortunately part ways at this point – hopefully not for ever.

²² *Hermannsburg Missionblatt*, Dec. 1976; copy: *Missionblatt Ev.-Luth. Freikirchen (Bleckmar)*, 1977, No. 1, p. 12-19.

Contrary interpretation of the doctrine of the two kingdoms

A clear rejection of the Apartheid system by Lutherans took place for the first time in 1967 during an extremely well attended Pastoral Conference in Umpumulo²³! Back then, seventy participants documented their position in a widely regarded memorandum, to which many black pastors also contributed. It dealt with the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms, in its application to the South African situation. A certain conclusion to a discussion, having begun years earlier and carried on mainly by white people was reached at that occasion, the interesting individual stadia and phases of which cannot be particularised here. Wolfram Kistner has reported on this matter in detail.²⁴ The most important aspects of his account are presented here:

To begin with, we learn that the Lutheran churches and mission societies of South Africa only came across the doctrine of the two kingdoms after the Second World War and in view of the Apartheid policy of so-called separate development, and subsequently proceeded to invoke it in a very different way. During the course of the arguments, two very different, positively conflicting views on the doctrine of the two kingdoms opposed each other. On the one side is the traditional view, as it were, according to which the Church is, with its proclamation and witness, only concerned with the spiritual realm amidst keen separation from the things of this world, which is the sole responsibility of political authorities and

²³ This was preceded by the formation of the Federation of Evangelical-Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa (FELCSA). "It provided thirteen churches of Lutheran tradition with the opportunity for regular deliberations over communal issues, over relations of Lutheran churches with each other and with other churches, and over professing the gospel amidst the circumstances in South Africa. In this way, the Federation's member churches were able to work out guidelines towards a joint ecclesial plan of action. The Federation became the driving force of the Lutheran churches during the negotiations towards unity. In 1975, the negotiations resulted in the merging of four black Lutheran churches in the Republic of South Africa; the members of the various congregations of these churches add up to 400,000. The newly constituted church goes by the name of 'Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Southern Africa'. It is represented, as an organisation, at the Federation of Evangelical-Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa, as well as in the South African Council of Churches." (Wolfram Kistner, *Der Hintergrund des Umpumulo-Memorandums von 1967*. In: Ulrich Duchrow, ed. *Zwei Reiche und Regimente*, Gütersloh 1967, p. 161.)

"The first conference that was held by the FELCSA after its formation in 1966 was a Pastoral Conference about the Lutheran Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms. It took place from the 3rd to the 14th of April 1967 at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Umpumulo. The key result of the conference was a document, which was, due to the lively discussion it elicited in South Africa and the attention it attracted overseas, named the 'Umpumulo Memorandum'. With this document, delegates from almost all Lutheran churches in Southern Africa expressed, for the first time, their open condemnation of the policy of separate development" (Kistner, loco citato). Not taking part in the FELCSA and its Umpumulo Memorandum was the "Lutheran Church in Southern Africa" (Lukisa), which was constituted in 1967, after having originated from the Mission Society of the Lutheran Free Church (Bleckmar). Just like the (white) "Free Evangelical-Lutheran Synod in South Africa" (Felsisa), it belongs to the Lutheran churches that are outside the Lutheran World Federation.

²⁴ W. Kistner, loco citato, p. 161-187 (including references). Cf. also his essay in the year-book of the *Martin-Luther-Bund* (Erlangen), vol. 12, 1964.

which Christians are obliged to obey. The only limitation to this servile obedience is a situation where the obligation to obey is in conflict with God's Commandment, and where the *Clausula Petri* would therefore apply, Acts 5,29: We must obey God rather than men! However – as Kistner shows – this borderline case will only be considered if a situation should arise where secular powers interfere in the proclamation and the religious life of the Church. Evidently, non-obedience in a political situation is not what comes to mind here.

This whole traditional view of the two kingdoms doctrine, with its all too familiar justification in Rom. 13 is characterised by Kistner as being a dualistically charged “passive adaptation to existing power structures.” Each one of these words is significant: one acknowledges an adaptation, one remains passive, one thinks dualistically! The consequence of this adaptation is a non-committal attitude towards all political controversies. One emphasises, in one's capacity as Christian, as Mission Society, as Church, one's fundamental neutrality; by doing so, one does not realise that one is defending precisely those ruling forces and the greater powers against those people who are dominated, oppressed and disenfranchised by them. What ensues – whether intentionally or not – is an unmistakeable adaptation to existing power structures, however questionable they may be, but in any event a fundamental eschewal of any attempt to change the situation.

Kistner then proceeds to show where this adaptation to power structures leads to during the course of further confrontations. It reacts hostilely when confronted with a new interpretation of the doctrine of the two kingdoms and, in doing so, formulates a justification of Apartheid, as the latter is seen to prevent imminent chaos.²⁵ The initially passive adaptation to the existing power structures eventually turns into its active, uncritical, almost unconditional affirmation.²⁶

²⁵ Typifying this are certain remarks made by white South Africans in the wake of the Soweto unrests (1976) to the effect that Vorster's police regime still “remains the lesser evil”, compared to a swamping of the country by black hordes “under red leadership”. It is a well-known fact that even the most humble and cautious critic of the system is immediately branded, vilified and discriminated against as being a “communist” or maybe even a “terrorist”. Perhaps a word by Werner Elert might be able to affect, at least in some Lutherans, a beneficial thought-provoking impetus: “Terrorism exists not only from below, but also from above. From below, it consists of arousing fear and trembling through the system of political assassinations, from above of arousing fear and trembling through the application of a not legally bound method of governance. In Russia, these two were in tune with one another as a violin and a piano are in chamber music. Forever remaining a part of our own most horrendous memories of the Hitler era is the Gestapo, not only because it terrorised all of us, but also because, by doing so, an entire nation was morally contaminated...” (W. Elert, *Zwischen Gnade und Ungnade*, München 1948, p. 32, in a lecture “*Theokratie und Bolschewismus*”, 18.9.1945.)

²⁶ A particularly embarrassing example of this is the statement issued by the synodal committee of the Free Evangelical-Lutheran Synod of South Africa in 1975 (periodical “*Bekennende Lutherische Kirche*”, vol. 2, 1975, No. ¾, p. 26-28). Soon after its publication, it began to be perceived as being the regrettable counterpart of that infamous “*Ansbacher Ratschlag*”, dated 1934, in which prominent Lutheran theologians glorified Hitler

This dualistic-passive interpretation of the two kingdoms doctrine was, however, countered by a fundamentally different one. One can call it: the dynamic view and interpretation, where the matters of this world, and with it the entire political sphere, do indeed remain differentiated and separated from the spiritual realm, which has to do with forgiveness, life and salvation. This does, however, in no way mean that the secular-political realm should be allowed to be beyond the standards of the Word of God and its application. The doctrine of the two kingdoms has one single purpose only: namely the differentiation between church and state! The Church is obliged to remind the state of its actual functions. It has a right and a duty towards protest and insubordination, if the state violates the Will of God in its own sphere of activity. Hence the doctrine of the two kingdoms is misunderstood and abused

and his government, despite numerous atrocities that were known at that time. (Cf. Kurt Dietrich Schmidt, *Die Bekenntnisse ... zur Kirchenfrage*, vol 2: *Das Jahr 1934*, Göttingen 1935, p. 102ff.)

A comparison: *Ansbacher Ratschlag* (1934):

“... With thanks towards God, we as Christians honour every regime, and therefore every authority, even in its deformed state, as being an instrument of divine unfolding; however, as Christians we also distinguish between benevolent and quaint rulers, healthy and deformed regimes.

With this realisation, we as believing Christians give thanks to God our Lord that he has, during its time of need, given our nation the Führer as a ‘devout and faithful ruler’ and, with the National-Socialist state, wants to present us with ‘good government’, a government with ‘self-control and a good reputation’.

We are therefore accountable before God to assist the work of the Führer in our occupation and profession...”

Resolution of the Free Synod (1975), prompted by and as a defence against a declaration by the South African Council of Churches (SACC), in which the latter had advocated conscientious objection to military service, when Christians should, amidst looming military conflicts with “liberation movements”, refuse to defend the Republic of South Africa within the structure of the Apartheid system, according to the dictates of their conscience (1974). After immediately having distanced itself from the SACC in a radio broadcast, the Free Synod followed this up in the next year with a “detailed statement”, in which, apart from an array of references to biblical passages and confessional statements that are self-evident to Lutherans, one can also read the following:

“ ... We acknowledge in our present South African government the ordinance and order of God.

We are grateful for the fact that, nowadays, it possible in our country for the Church of Jesus Christ to carry out the task given to it by the Lord. ... We therefore oppose the fact that, in the ‘Declaration of the South African Council of Churches’, the violence perpetrated by terrorists is put on a par with that of our peacekeeping forces. The unlawful use of violence by terrorists aims to destroy the order, which is ordained by God, and in which we live and work and in which even the ‘South African Council of Churches’ is able to hold its conferences.

We furthermore object to the fact that our state is being described as a ‘fundamentally unjust and degrading society’.

What we find lacking in this judgement is the love and appreciative understanding that is prepared to acknowledge the sincere attempt of the responsible people of our country to establish a just order...

We also notice a lack of the sober realisation that, in this our passing world, no-one is able to bring about an absolute justice.

We note the lack of a grateful recognition that our government is still protecting the law and maintaining the peace.

We note a lack of the biblical cognizance that ‘there is no authority except from God’ (Rom. 13,1).

We also regret the encouragement of conscientious objection to military service. It is based on the false assumption that our state is an unlawful one. We however see, even in our state, an order of God. It is because of this that the existing order may not be compromised by a general conscientious objection to military service. As the prevailing order makes the existence of the nation as a whole and individuals within it possible, a Christian, in particular, may not refuse to play a part in maintaining this order. ...”

wherever it is interpreted and applied as being a “license for Christians to relinquish matters of the state.”²⁷

This dynamic view of the two kingdoms doctrine forces us to analyse each given situation of the church in its environment, but also to analyse its own structures and the circumstances arising from these structures. In the South African situation, the implication of this was threefold: the Church was no longer able to evade a criticising stance towards the Apartheid system and its consequences. It had to acknowledge the significance that is attached to the structures of church segregation along racial, ethnic and tribal lines. It was no longer allowed to overlook what consequences a justified, necessary, Christian church protest can have for unjust laws and actions of state institutions. The importance of this new understanding of the doctrine of the two kingdoms, which has merely been outlined here following Kistner’s presentation, is that the Lutheran church is, at least in part, made responsible for a critical cooperation in creating a just society in South Africa.

In view of this task, the author of the contribution submitted here has, over the years, repeatedly supported the position²⁸ that the fellowship between black and white Christians should be lived and practised on an on-going basis – most profoundly during a church service and at the altar of the Lord, but by no means only inside church buildings but also in the entire living space of the South African environment, and, by doing so, to consciously and purposefully transcend racial boundaries. Wherever the risk of this implication is taken, not only in exceptional cases, but abundantly and on a daily basis, its effect will be that of an erected “sign”, and, in this way, will also become a “political issue”. All these insights are enclosed by the great and profound learning process, which preceded and stands behind the Umpumulo Memorandum of 1967, but which is also stimulated and carried forward by its propositions.

A proposal presented by Peter Beyerhaus

Before we proceed to cite this crucially important document, another witness should have his say with his proposal: Professor Peter Beyerhaus in Tübingen, who became world-renowned through his contributions on recognising the Mission’s “shaken foundations”, through his determined campaign against the policies of Genevan ecumenism, through his brusque criticism of the anti-racism policy of the World Council of Churches, as well as through his

²⁷ Kistner, p. 175.

²⁸ In numerous direct and indirect references by way of comments in the “*Missionsblatt Ev.-Luth. Freikirchen*”.

authoritative justification of the declarations of the theological convention of the Conference of Confessional Communities in the Evangelical Churches of Germany.²⁹ Less well-known amongst his friends and adversaries these days is the fact that Peter Beyerhaus was, before being called to Tübingen, active as an emissary of the Berlin Mission Society in South Africa, initially as missionary and finally as lecturer at Umpumulo. In 1966 he held a lecture on “The Lutheran message in contemporary society”.³⁰ In it he speaks, amongst other things, of the resistance against the state, which becomes necessary if the warning voice of the church is overheard.

Here are some of Beyerhaus’ theses and his conclusion:

Thesis 15: Our present internal political situation, which is determined by the legislative power of Apartheid, places a high percentage of the black population in intolerable social and economic circumstances. With this, their legitimate desire for civic equality is thwarted and they are denied the basic prerequisites for a stable society: the right to a permanent residence and a normal family life.

Thesis 16: While the legislative power of Apartheid is, on the one hand, a manifestation of collective selfishness by the ruling minority, and has, on the other hand, a devastating effect on the social development and morale of the African majority, the divine laws, being at the basis of each organisation in God’s worldly kingdom, are not reflected in these laws. Hence they are not binding on one’s conscience in the sense of Rom 13,5.

Thesis 17: Although the Church does not have a political mandate where administrative work is concerned, it is obliged to serve as prophetic corrective by urging state authorities to take heed in God’s worldly kingdom of His will, which determines all human relations.

Thesis 18: When the secular authorities do not heed the warning voice of the Church, the latter is justified as well as obliged to support civil resistance against laws that assail the dominion of Christ.

Thesis 19: With this resistance, measures of varying degrees can be discerned: spiritual resistance, legal political resistance, illegal passive resistance and illegal violent resistance. Of these, the Church may only never call for the last two mentioned.

²⁹ Cf. on this some of the publications by Peter Beyerhaus: *Humanisierung einzige Hoffnung der Welt* (bad Salzuflen, 2nd ed., 1970), *Die Grundlagenkrise der Mission* (Wuppertal 1970), q.v. p. 28ff.: *Die Frankfurter Erklärung vom 4.4. 1970, Bangkok ’73. Anfang oder Ende der Weltmission?* (Bad Liebenzell, 1973), *Ökumene im Spiegel von Nairobi ’75* (Bad Liebenzell, 1976).

³⁰ Here quoted after Kistner, p. 176-178; q.v. the verbatim reproduction of Part Three, in which “the political aspect of our social responsibility” is addressed (Thesis 13 to 22).

Thesis 20: While the Church as such may only apply legal means, it has to advise its members in their capacity as citizens that they should only resort to more radical forms of resistance when all other legitimate forms of resistance have already been deployed.

Thesis 21: The political witness of the Lutheran church in South Africa is, to a large extent, being obstructed by the fact that its own church structure is participating in the general fragmentation of South African society along racial and tribal lines.

Thesis 22: Before the Lutheran church can begin to emphatically bear political witness, it is therefore its most pressing responsibility to first get its own house in order and to do its utmost to create the greatest possible unity amongst the different groups to which their members belong.

Conclusion: To sum up, we have to ascertain that the apparent missionary stagnation of our Lutheran church in South Africa is to a great extent due to the fact that the gospel is not perceived by us and our audience in its social relevance. The dated Lutheran message that a person is declared to be justified before God through the death of Jesus is potentially socially explosive. It frees a person to serve God in His dual reign, his spiritual kingdom and every form of ordered society.

A few paragraphs will now follow from the Umpumulo Memorandum itself, the content of which can be summed up in the sentence: “Departing from the basis of a dynamically understood doctrine of the two kingdoms, the Church has the function of service towards the state, and, in the case of injustice, the function of protest. From this point of view the politics of the country were rejected...”³¹

From the Umpumulo Memorandum

“After we had looked at the doctrine of the two kingdoms from a biblical and historical perspective, we came to the conclusion that the Church has an active and responsible function towards state and society: The Church has to take a stand against the secular government if blatant injustices have been committed. Furthermore, the Church has been entrusted with the positive function of expounding the ordinances of Creation to secular authorities, and to advise them in view of supporting and realising all spheres of human life, like marriage and family, civil society and culture, state and government. For believers, this entails prudent and responsible political engagement.

³¹ Hans Häselbarth, *Lebenszeichen aus Afrika*, München 1978, p. 70.

On the basis of these theological principles, we debated the policy of separate development, which is presently being propounded as a solution to the racial problem in this country. In its practical application, this policy of separate development curtails the human rights of non-white citizens, as for instance the labour law, the right to purchase and to property, the right to free and comprehensive education, the right to freedom of speech and to full participation in political and social life. It is for this reason that we reject the policy of separate development.

The main and decisive danger posed by the policy of separate development may not lie in its practical application, however, but rather in its ideological orientation and motivation. The defenders of this policy lay claim to biblical support for their programme and demand the right to be able to pass it off as Christian policy. However, we find no justification for this view in the Bible (cf. James 2, 1f.).

In this situation, it is a heavy burden to us that the Church has, until now, been incapable of bearing coherent witness. The conflicting voices of the Church of Christ in South Africa hinder the spreading of the gospel of Christ. We admit guilt in the lack of unity and are keenly aware of the urgent need, firstly for unity in the Lutheran family, and secondly in the broader ecumenical community. The Church of Christ cannot remain silent and refrain from its social and political witness. We therefore strongly urge the FELCSA, our pastors and congregations to take active steps, in order for us to achieve a more unified witness and to strengthen our unity in Christ with respect to racial separation, not least because of those people whose consciences are unable to find any peace, due to the sufferings within the Church of Christ, which are caused by prejudice and discrimination, as well as rising alienation between church members of different nationalities.³² In addition to this fundamental rejection of the system of Apartheid, whose ideological foundations are as irreconcilable with Christian faith as is its impact, we now raise the question of the

Abuse of state- and police authority

which challenges the Christian witness. The premise that both the state and its police institutions cannot and may not forego the use of force remains undisputed – but within the boundaries allocated to them! In Dar-es-Salaam, on the 16th of June 1977, during the commemoration of the events that had taken place in Soweto exactly a year earlier and that

³² A copy in: Johannes Althausen, *Christen Afrikas auf dem Wege zur Freiheit*, Erlangen 1971 (Erlanger Taschenbücher, vol. 17), p. 245-248; this quotation, p. 246f.

had been repeated on numerous occasions since then,³³ it was the North American Lutheran Professor Lazareth who, with unmistakable clarity, strongly emphasised that the approval of government force in the sense of Rom 13 did “of course not” mean that Christians “should uncritically endorse any kind of government force, especially if it is an unjust dictatorship or a cruel tyrant. Christ alone is our Lord! It is rather government force as such of which Paul says that it comes from God, as a means to protect, with the sword, the weak and innocent from the oppression of evil people.”³⁴

In an impressive way, Lazareth leads one from Rom 13 to chapter 13 of the Revelation of Saint John: “To be sure, Rom 13 teaches us to respect and obey civil authority as part of our ‘responsible concern for creation’. In the light of Rev 13, one has to ask, however, whether the South African government is increasingly losing its entitlement to moral and legal authority. Does the institutionalised violence of the Apartheid system not tear apart what God himself has united in the form of black and white members of the same ‘new community in Christ’? Are we not approaching a time in which a unanimous church community will throw a prophetic ‘No’ at the South African government as a faithful witness to God’s holy law?

Certainly the Church will, in its capacity as church, continue to merely react by preaching the Word of God: in the hope of bringing about a peaceful and just reconciliation by proclaiming God’s judgement and forgiveness. However, what each Christian will do as a citizen is a matter of scrupulous analysis and painful conflict towards a more just society.

It has to be emphasised once more: I speak of revolution and of warfare as something in which Christian civilians may only participate ‘with fear and trembling’, if it is truly a matter of a very last resort against the oppression of an illegitimate government. Of course I hope and pray that, because of the extent in which aware Christians and churches campaign even more effectively for justice and liberty on the part of the people, revolution and war will not be necessary any longer.

In any event the churches must, for the sake of all the exploited people all over the world, stand in the frontline along with the prophets and fight to let judgment roll down as waters, and righteousness as an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5,24)”.³⁵

³³ Cf. on this, amongst others: Gisela Albrecht, *Soweto oder der Aufstand der Vorstädte, Gespräche mit Südafrikanern*, Reinbeck bei Hamburg 1977; Reinhard Brückner, *Südafrikas schwarze Zukunft. Die Jugendunruhen seit 1976, ihre Ursachen und Folgen*. Frankfurt a. M. 1977.

³⁴ epd-dokumentation, vol. 18: *Daressalaam 1977*, Frankfurt a. M. (1977), p. 145.

³⁵ Loco citato, p. 158.

On the concept of the tyrant

For Lutherans, the witness against the abuse of state- and police authority will essentially depend on how and to what extent they reach clarity on the concept of the tyrant or the tyrannical perversion of state authority.³⁶ In the Lutheran confessional documents we come across this concept, mainly in passages where they polemicize against the abuse of episcopal and papal authority. Tyrannical power (*potestas tyrannica*) entails “to judge without any particular laws”. The tyrant does not – as opposed to the power of kings (*potestas regia*) – recognise any laws that are binding for him as person. He “will not suffer any judge (above him)”.

To be sure, Luther can envisage a secular government “where God often permits much good to be effected for a people, even through a tyrant and [faithless] scoundrel” (Smalkald Art. II, 4,3; Conf. Doc. 428, 7ff), however this does precisely not mean that, what is written in the Confession about authority being one of the two greatest gifts bestowed by God, should not be applicable to such a tyrant. For God “does not wish to have in this office and government knaves and tyrants; nor does He assign to them this honour, that is, power and authority to govern, that they should have themselves worshiped; but they should consider that they are under obligations of obedience to God; and that, first of all, they should earnestly and faithfully discharge their office ... Therefore do not think that this is left to your pleasure and arbitrary will, but that it is a strict command and injunction of God, to whom also you must give account for it” (Large Cat. I, 4, 168f; Conf. Doc. 603, 27ff.).

A judge who hands down a wrong or unjust sentence is, according to Luther, under the influence of the devil, just like any other slanderer (Large Cat. I, 8, 263; Conf. Doc. 626, 46). The pharaoh’s hardness of heart was, according to the interpretation of the Formula of Concord “a punishment for his preceding sins and abominable tyranny, which he has repeatedly and often cruelly perpetrated against the children of Israel, against his own conscience” (SD 33, 85; Conf. Doc. 1088, 8ff.). Daniel’s utterances towards his king (Dan 2, 24) are primarily understood to be a call for repentance; however, they are also an admonition towards the appropriate execution of an office of authority: perform the duties of your office, do not be a tyrant but rather see to it that your government benefits the country and its people, keep the peace and protect the poor against the unlawful use of power. (Ap. 3, 143; Conf. Doc. 213, 6ff.). “Aristotle also admonished Alexander to exert his power not to his own arbitrary

³⁶ On the following deliberations, cf. F.W. Hopf, *Vom weltlichen Regiment nach evangelisch-lutherischer Lehre*, in the series “*Bekennende Kirche*”, booklet 49, München 1937, p. 23ff.

will (the image of a tyrant!), but rather for the benefit of country and people. That is well and justly written, neither can one write or preach anything better about the royal office.” (ibid.; Conf. Doc. 211, 39ff.).

All these citations, to which one could add any number of parallels from Luther’s works,³⁷ presuppose that the tyrant overrides existing laws and judicial ordinances, that the law-maker is in fact able to determine the current form of the laws, but that he, in doing so, is bound to a divine justice that is above him. An application and transference of the stipulations of a tyrant who ignores and holds all these obligations in contempt, to conditions as they relate to South Africa in this instance – the same applies in a similar way to numerous other countries³⁸ – must take into account the appalling fact that it is in this instance not merely a matter of a tyrannical abuse of state- and police authority, but rather of the implementation and execution of the officially recognised legislation of a system that is tyrannical as such, and that must never be recognised by Christians as being the good order of God; it may only be suffered as a judgement of God – in humble submission to God’s mighty hand, amidst continuous supplications to bring about a complete change of conditions.³⁹

The last and most difficult problem that faces the Christian witness in Southern Africa is posed by the question:

Can there be a just revolution?

What position can and must Christians take in the event of a revolution? With this, various issues merge into each other that are fraught with very serious problems.

³⁷ Cf. Kurt Matthes, *Luther und die Obrigkeit*, München 1937, p. 130 to 157: *Die Ordnung und die Obrigkeit im Besitze Satans (Tyranis oder Anarchie)*.

³⁸ Cf. the important compilation in the booklet *“Menschenrechte in Afrika”* in the series *“Weltmission heute”*, 3rd ed., Hamburg 1978 (Ev. Pressestelle für Weltmission). Also: *“Evangelium und Menschenrechte. Kirchen in Südwestafrika brechen das Schweigen”*, documentary series of the *“Vereinigte Evangelische Mission”*, No.1, Wuppertal 1972.

³⁹ A.F.C. Vilmar, *Die Lehre von der Obrigkeit. Eine moraltheologische Skizze* (1866) in: *Pastoraltheologische Blätter*, vol. 12 (1866, II), p. 94 to 111; a copy in the essay collection: A.F.C. Vilmar. *Kirche und Welt*, I (1872), p. 228-245. There, p. 244: “Where the legal boundaries are no longer observed by an authority, where peace is violently shattered, where existing laws ... are broken ..., the obligation of Christian obedience completely ceases to be an expression of sanctification, and it can only be a question of a form of outward obedience, imposed by force. Referring to this is the Word of the Lord, John 19,11. Such conditions are nevertheless also “given from above”, they are a judgement, allowed by God, to which one has to submit above all, as to all divine judgements; first of all, one has to submit oneself to this punishment, thereby seeking to achieve deliverance from God’s chastising rod ...” A parallel: A.F.C. Vilmar, *Theologische Moral*, 1871, II/III, p. 179ff.: “...in this instance, obedience turns into an act of penance ...” (180).

To begin with, the theses by Peter Beyerhaus, dated 1966 and already mentioned previously, should be called to mind once again.⁴⁰ What he states there concerning resistance in a specific situation leads us directly to our question about a just revolution. Beyerhaus, being at that time still very much in the middle of the South African struggle himself, initially spoke of a “prophetic corrective”, to be “rendered” on the part of the church “by urging the government authorities to respect the will of God, which determines all human relations in its secular realm” (thesis 17). He then considered the eventuality that “the secular authorities do not heed the warning voice of the church”. For this eventuality, apparently feared even back then, he deemed the church to be “both justified and obliged to support civil resistance against laws that assail the dominion of Christ” (thesis 18). Unfortunately it remains unclear as to what Beyerhaus means by the “dominion of Christ” and what he considers to be an assault on it. It is to be assumed that he does not have a theocracy in mind, not even a Christocracy over political decisions. What he doubtlessly means is a witness of the kingdom of Christ in countries and nations who not only have long since been reached through the preaching of the Word of God in Law and Gospel, but who, because of a frequently evinced self-awareness, are affording extensive freedom to the Church of Jesus Christ. With this, they must also recognise the effect of their message on the existence in this world. Should this freedom of Christians be infringed or curtailed, albeit partially, then this is effectively an assault on the kingly dominion of Him, to whom all authority has been given in heaven and on earth.

We hope that Peter Beyerhaus agrees with this interpretation of his theses, which are possibly able to shine a light on many a judgement call made by him over the last few years. Let us now consider what it is that Beyerhaus tells us in concrete terms on the issue of civil resistance in which the church is justified and obliged to lend its support. He proceeds to discern “measures of varying degrees”. The church is entitled to call for spiritual as much as legal resistance, but never for illegal passive or illegal violent resistance (thesis 19). Finally, Beyerhaus also makes a distinction between that which “the church as such may or may not do”, and that which individual members of the church “in their capacity as civilians” may do under certain circumstances. That the church needs to advise them on this can be discerned from Beyerhaus’ statement that the church should urge them to “only resort to more radical forms of resistance when all other legitimate forms of resistance have already been deployed” (thesis 20). This thesis can only be construed to mean that the church cannot, where individual Christians are concerned, in any way prohibit even more radical forms of illegal

⁴⁰ Above, p. 27-28.

passive and illegal violent resistance under certain conditions, that indeed their church may not, even in these extreme borderline situations, deny them spiritual counsel and support.

Alongside these certainly ground-breaking statements by Peter Beyerhaus – formulated ten years prior to “Soweto” – we find those other widely acclaimed and already cited statements by William H. Lazareth in Dar-es-Salaam, who, spontaneously and in view of “Soweto”, felt compelled to pronounce them.⁴¹ He, too, makes a distinction between what “the Church as church” is obliged to do on the one hand, and what “the individual Christian will do as a civilian” on the other. Lazareth also considers it as “the absolutely last resort against the oppression of an illegitimate government” for “Christian civilians” to allow themselves to engage in a revolution “with fear and trembling”.

The discussion was not without allegations that Lazareth had advocated “the old and disastrous ‘schizophrenia’, which caused the individual Christian to become dissociated from the church to such a degree, that it is effectively impossible for Lutherans to reach joint insights and confessions concerning basic problems.”⁴² What one does indeed find lacking in the remarkably parallel statements made by Beyerhaus (1966) and Lazareth (1977) is a consideration of the nevertheless obvious fact that the boundaries between the church’s renunciation of a call to revolution on the one hand and the release of individual Christians’ dictates of conscience concerning their participation in a revolution on the other, will be fluid, to say the least. For if the “church” should abstain from attesting to the individual “revolutionary”: “It is not right what you are planning to do”, it can and may not deny an indirect co-responsibility for revolutionary events. By the same token: should the church abstain from active and public resistance against an illegitimate system, it can hardly argue against the fact that it is, because of its attitude, effectively and permanently approving of this system or at least indirectly supporting it, and is thereby becoming jointly responsible should a revolution erupt against such structures. Concerning this, a few passages from a report from Dar-es-Salaam by regional bishop Dr. Hermann Dietzfelbinger:⁴³

“The most serious problem of the community in which the political, racial, social and church difficulties have coincided, was the situation in Southern Africa. This poses a challenge to the

⁴¹ Cf. above, p. 61/62. – The final section of this speech by Lazareth, which was originally not intended in this format, was brought about by utterances made by two Tanzanian bishops, who had defended “the right to use armed force in the liberation struggle of South Africans” in the media. Thus Tödt (in: *Lutherische Gemeinschaft im Kontext Afrika...*, p. 91) talks of “a hastily compiled final section”, of “a passage of the hastily written final section” (loco citato) by Lazareth.

⁴² Loco citato, p. 91.

⁴³ *Lutherische Monatshefte*, September 1977, p. 515f. Extracts in the *Missionsblatt Ev.-Luth. Freikirchen* (Bleckmar), vol. 69, No. 10, Oct. 1977, p. 204ff.

Lutheran World Federation with its numerous member churches, whether it likes it or not. Judging by the entrenched position from a political point of view, one can only look toward the future with concern. From the perspective of human rights, which played an important role in Dar-es-Salaam, the system that has enshrined the policy of Apartheid as a privilege right down into its legislation has to be condemned. Where the community of Christians is concerned, it seems clear to me that that Jesus who suffered, died and was resurrected for all of mankind, wants to assemble us in the Communion at His Table without any distinction of skin colour (Gal. 3,28)''.

On the issue of revolutionary resistance against the system of Apartheid, Dr. Dietzfelbinger states:

“‘Lazareth was willing to concede a just revolution as ‘a very, very last resort’. Of course, this question is immediately carried further: does this also apply to other cases in Africa, in Latin-America, and, indeed, beyond? The German participants will have asked themselves what contribution they could make towards the current situation, given our experiences during the Third Reich and the passionately held discussions afterwards about similar ecumenical problems.

Luther, too, was able on occasion to make personal comments that touch on the possibility not only of resistance, but of a ‘just revolution’. However, he was never able to resolve upon a church doctrine that would provide such a possibility – on account of the cross of Christ. Bishop Habelgaarn of the South African Church of the Brethren has therefore probably said something very helpful when he spoke of the power of reconciliation, which, in spite of everything, makes the evolutionary rather than the revolutionary path appear to be more promising to Christians.

‘Crux Omnia probat’ – The cross tests and proves everything (WA V, 179,31). This important statement by Luther was quoted, not by a Lutheran theologian, but by the Catholic bishop Martensen from Copenhagen. That is how ecumenical Luther is! God is powerful amidst powerlessness. Even the risen Christ is victorious in suffering. For South Africa, this was impressively elucidated to us during a Bible study held by the black bishop of the Ovambo-Kavango-Church (in Namibia), who emphatically campaigns for justice for his people, but who also knows about the strength that lies in suffering.”

An attempt at a personal approach

What should we say to all of this? How are we as Lutherans to respond to these issues addressed here? How can we exercise our co-responsibility? To sum up, allow me to venture the following remarks:

1. We are asked whether we must acknowledge any resistance against the system of Apartheid itself with all its consequences and effects as being a just resistance, which is absolutely necessary and entirely possible. Such an acknowledgement of resistance presupposes the clear recognition that the prevailing system in South Africa has, fundamentally and practically, turned into a tyranny and abuses its power in a tyrannical way.
2. With this presupposition, a revolutionary awakening against the system of Apartheid, with the aim of abolishing it as a judgement of God, has to be clearly recognised and attested to unequivocally. On the one hand, the Church will bear witness to this judgement of God as being a just one, on the other hand it will, together with its members and all who are directly threatened and affected by it, bow to this judgement.
3. It is denied to the Church, however, to proclaim itself as being the bailiff of God. It may also not call on others to execute God's judgements.
4. In spite of refraining from an active participation in a just revolution, the Church may leave no doubt that it stands up for *all* who are oppressed and threatened, both for those who are affected by tyranny and who are now rebelling, as well as for those whose plight is desperate due to the eruption of revolutionary forces.
5. Even a justified and necessary resistance with grave revolutionary consequences places all those responsible and all those involved under God's impending judgement, as well as under the promise of his redeeming and healing grace.
6. Lutheran co-responsibility for Christian witness in South Africa also extends to the co-responsibility for the existence of white people in this country and for their future. The urgently required solidarity with black people at present and their struggle for justice and freedom may not be allowed to prevent one from taking the concerns and fears of white people seriously and from assisting them towards an understanding for the necessary total change of circumstances.
7. The call that can frequently be heard for true reconciliation between black and white people in Southern Africa remains, in its credibility and effect, essentially dependent on the prerequisite that the substantial incriminations and barriers preventing a genuine reconciliation can be removed, that flagrant guilt be identified, admitted and forgiven, that a

new beginning can be made with confidence in God's mercy. The Church of Jesus Christ with all its congregations and its individual members is under obligation to the promise of its Lord to prove itself to be a "city set on a hill", the "light of the world", the "salt of the earth". However, when salt loses its savour, it is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled on by people. (Matth. 5,13).

If one reviews the general situation in Southern Africa in terms of Lutheran co-responsibility for Christian witness amongst the people of this subcontinent, one repeatedly feels the paralysing pressure of a certain helplessness and hopelessness. It is easy to distance oneself from certain unbiblical and therefore also un-Lutheran comments made by some ecumenists or liberation theologians. Still, this certainly necessary distancing is only meaningful if we as Lutherans have, for the black people of South Africa, a better, relevant word that is biblically founded beyond reproach. A word that does not skirt the issue of their hardships, but rather specifically addresses their questions and lamentations, and that will, above all, directly respond to their cry for liberation. It will not be too difficult for us as Lutherans to resist fanciful expectations and utopian hopes for the future of "Azania". We might even succeed in encouraging our black Lutheran brothers to criticize, of their own accord, any African nationalistic distortions of the gospel. With this undertaking, impartations of our emphatic "no" to the erring ways of pseudo-Lutheranism in Germany could be of assistance.⁴⁴ Notwithstanding the deep sympathy for the liberation demands of black people, we can however never, in our own experience, conceal the fact that even a true liberation of oppressed people is still in no way tantamount to true freedom of the church and its proclamation.

What has hitherto been done or left undone in South Africa will in all probability force the Church of the near and more distant future onto a crossroads, insofar as it will not, in its external form, anyway be annihilated and steamrolled by the powers of this world. We cannot be humble and modest enough when speaking of insights of this nature. With such considerations, we may in any event never give the impression that we would now want to continue the earlier patronisation towards our black brothers in a new way.

⁴⁴ To be mentioned in this connection are the deliberations by Hermann Sasse in the *Kirchliches Jahrbuch für die deutschen evangelischen Landeskirchen*, 1932, p. 30ff. Article: "Die Kirche und die politischen Mächte der Zeit". Copy: H. Sasse, *In Statu Confessionis, Gesammelte Aufsätze* (1966, 2nd ed., 1975), p. 251ff. Sasse's famous critical stance towards Art. 24 of the National Socialist Party programme (p. 262f.) continues to show the way forward for the testimony of the biblical Lutheran doctrine of sin, even with respect to any opposition from a black African consciousness towards the Christian message. Sasse: "We have to profess that the doctrine of the justification of the sinner signifies sola gratia, sola fide both the end of Germanic morals and the end of all human morals."

And yet, even concerned and resigning prognoses shall not deter us from confidently exercising our co-responsibility for South Africa – in our mission work amongst black, coloured, Indian and white people; we do this without diminishing our resoluteness in the struggle for a pan-Christian witness in view of current political developments. With our contribution towards this witness, may God grant us Lutherans that we are in true accord with the witness to Christ, borne by many Christians and churches segregated from us, whose false teachings we continue to condemn, without forgetting at the same time that our Lord Jesus Christ has His people and resurrects His witnesses amongst them too.⁴⁵

Draft for a missive

To conclude our contribution of reflections on Lutheran co-responsibility for Christian witness in Southern Africa, a draft for a missive is submitted here, compiled by a small circle in the spring of 1977; however, the hope that it would be accepted by others unfortunately remained unfulfilled back then. It was a tentative attempt at expressing that which, to this day, still weighs on the hearts and consciences of many Christians of very different backgrounds in our country:

A draft for a missive by evangelical Christians in the Federal Republic of Germany and West Berlin to the black and coloured Christians affiliated to them in the Republic of South Africa.

Dear fellow Christians in South Africa,

As evangelical Christians in the Federal Republic of Germany and West Berlin, we hear your pleas for assistance during these trying times and would therefore like to testify the following to you today:

1.

Your call for our help is justified. For our Lord Jesus Christ himself has united us through a long history of service by many missionaries who came to you from our country, through prayers for each other, through shared witness, joy and suffering, as well as through many encounters of African Christians with members of our churches. In gratitude towards our Lord, we want to testify and hold onto this connectedness with you, particularly right now. At

⁴⁵ Concerning the accord in Christian witness beyond the indispensable church- and confessional boundaries, cf. F.W. Hopf, *Bekenntnisfragen in Jungen Kirchen*, in: *De Fundamentis Ecclesiae, Gedenkschrift für Hellmut Lieberg*, published by Eckhard Wagner, Braunschweig 1973, p. 153-167, in this instance notably p. 167.

the same time we are made aware of the fact that we have wronged you on numerous occasions in the past. We have had to recognise that the human dignity imparted to you by God has been widely disrespected and continues to be violated. We as Christians and churches have, however, for the most part remained silent on this issue. We knew and know that, in the modern world, the human rights that have been solemnly acknowledged and proclaimed to you have been either totally denied to you or severely restricted by harsh laws and policing measures. Despite this, we did not resolutely stand up for you. We heard about suppression, persecution and torture. Yet we did not raise our voices for you loudly enough before God and mankind. We reached the conclusion that racial segregation, enforced by Apartheid laws, leads to a disdain of God's love towards humans as well as the love between humans. Yet we settled for an all too cautious criticism and have to bear our share of responsibility that our Lord's commandment of love is being denied by Christians time and time again. We were informed of the extent to which you have to suffer under the political power of your country. Yet, out of fear of political consequences, we chose not to protest against glaring injustices before our and your government.

Now we stand before God and before you with a burden of guilt, the extent of which we only now begin to grasp, and we ask your forgiveness for the sake of Christ.

2.

Relations between you and the people in our country have also come about due to the circumstance that people from Germany emigrated to Southern Africa in search of a new home, prosperity and happiness. In our century, many of them came to you for economic reasons because they were badly off or because they were seeking better opportunities to get ahead in their occupations. Unfortunately, we repeatedly had to hear that even the Christians among them rarely made an attempt at establishing a fellowship and brotherhood with you. We, for our part, would like to work towards encouraging these Christians and congregations of German descent that they seek fellowship with you much more than is currently the case, that they treat you with respect and love, that they set an example for overcoming racial barriers through a genuine connection with Christians of another skin colour. For these endeavours, we ask you to support us in prayer and during encounters with these Christians.

3.

We know that the close economic ties between our country and the Republic of South Africa have contributed to a certain improvement in your living conditions. But we also note with

concern that they have equally contributed towards a consolidation of the balance of power in your country. We must openly confess that wealth and prosperity have become worshipped idols in our country to whom many things are sacrificed, among them the communion with the black majority of the countries in Southern Africa, along with the defence of their right, their freedom and their human dignity.

Many German companies made use of the offers available from South Africa and its economy, which is in the hands of white people. They welcome the potential earnings resulting from investments and trade relations, from banking operations and highly-paid jobs. With this, the people responsible do however not take into consideration that, by doing so, they increased the suffering of black South Africans. Now they have a vested interest in keeping the balance of power in your country as it is, so that their investments are not jeopardised and their potential earnings are not reduced.

We as Christians in Germany, however, are ashamed that, through these inter-relations between the German and South African economies, our people are also participating in a system which is contributing in exploiting you and prolonging your bondage. We will therefore not cease in our endeavours for your lamentations and accusations to be heard in our country, to raise awareness of your suffering and your struggle amongst our people and to awaken the conscience of the people responsible that they will heed the call to change their ways.

4.

We know about all your efforts through which you want to bring about a radical change of unjust conditions. We know about your peaceful battle for your human rights that you have been fighting for many decades. We are aware of the repressive measures that have been and are still taken against you by the government of your country.

We abhor the violence that you are subjected to on a daily basis. Together with you, we mourn for all the victims of violence. We are equally appalled by the fact that many of you, because of the violence done to you, have been provoked to give back evil for evil and to also act violently against the abuse of police force, thereby becoming partly responsible for the bloodshed. We know from our nation's own experience during the Hitler era what a terrible strain and how difficult the use of violence against defenceless people is on a society's coexistence for decades afterwards. Precisely because we are confident that no power in the world will be able to prevent your liberation in the long run, we dare to warn you, in our capacity as Christians, against injustice and violence, against hatred and unforgiveness,

against cruelty and a desire for revenge. We ask of you to repeatedly tell us how we can make a concrete contribution towards a true liberation from the unjust use of force and towards a genuine reconciliation with your adversaries.

5.

The multiple connections between your and our churches make it possible for us to mutually serve and help each other with the gifts that our Lord Jesus Christ has given and wants to continue giving to us. You have frequently strengthened our faith and roused our conscience. For that we are grateful to you. You have heard the gospel that was preached to you by missionaries from our country, who have laid testimony to it through works of love in all human weakness. We now also hear the Word of God attentively and with joy from the mouths of your emissaries, when they come to our country. We also never want to forget that there are still many people in your country as well as ours, to whom we owe it to preach the Good News and to prove it in community with them. The tasks of the mission work are by no means complete.

That is why we need each other. Let us, together and for each other, discover and bring to fruition that which we as Christians and churches – separately, yet all of us together – can and must do so that God's name be hallowed, that His kingdom come, that His will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.