

The conference will stress that unreached people can be found anywhere, in tribal settings and in cities. Kyle stresses that the church hasn't yet developed an effective working strategy to get the message of Christ to those people. "If we focus on unreached people, at Urbana, and get students to take 'bites' out of small groups, we can start to take the Gospel to places untouched by missions efforts to date".

2.7 REPORT ON THE FIRST CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE PROMOTION OF CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION (15-22 AUGUST 1984, AT THE CASTLE NIJENRODE, THE NETHERLANDS) BY PROF. B.J. VAN DER WALT (DIRECTOR, IRS, PU FOR CHE, POTCHEFSTROOM, 2520 RSA)

The first, but actually the fourth

This conference was offered as being the first conference of the ICPCHE, an assumption which might be taken as being correct if one sees it as the first conference arranged by this Council.

The history of the preceding nine years, however, should not be lost in the mists of time. Whoever does that will understand very little of what happened at the present conference.

After the Free University of Amsterdam could not be persuaded to arrange a first international conference for Christian Higher Education, the PU for CHE took the initiative and offered this conference at Potchefstroom from 9-13 September 1975. At first the Free University was also invited, but when they later informed the committee that they would be including their honorary doctorandis Beyers Naudé in their delegation, Prof. H.J.J. Bingle withdrew the invitation. This signalled the beginning of the struggle between the Free University and the P.U. The Free University could not go along with the politics of apartheid, and the P.U. refused to go along with the increasing secularization of the Free University. In the meantime two more conferences followed in the USA: one at Calvin College (August 1978) and one at Dordt College (August 1981).

The pendulum completed its swing after nine years when the Hosting Committee

(on which the Free University dominated) in 1984 refused to allow the Rector of the PU for CHE to assume a seat at the conference of the ICPCHE.

Host and venue

The Hosting Committee consisted of representatives of the Free University (the majority) and the Theologische Hogeschool, Kampen (one representative only). It was clear that the Free University would put its stamp on this firstling of the ICPCHE - even to the extent that the host would ignore resolutions made by the Council.

A few minutes' walk from the pretty Dutch town of Breukelen, on the banks of the Vecht River, there is the Castle of Gijsbertus van Nijenrode, dating from the end of the thirteenth century. Across the arch to the entrance of this medieval castle, in which the conference was held, the Latin word *Credo nulli* appear, meaning that I do not give in or concede. Little we knew, when first crossing the moat and entering through the arch of the castle, how applicable these words would be for the conference-goers from the ranks of the PU for CHE (Professors Lourens du Plessis, Elaine Botha and myself). This exquisite castle was not only besieged in the Middle Ages - it would be besieged again, in 1984, but this time it would be a political siege, and not a military one.

Theme and Programme

The special programme committee from the Third World Countries decided on **Critique and Challenge of Christian Higher Education**. This theme was illuminated, in seven different lectures, from a variety of angles. (All the papers will still be published.)

Following each lecture a **response** was offered, and after completion of each two lectures three people offered **statements** to act as introductory material for the discussions. The conference-goers then broke up into three groups to deal with the subjects further. After the three groups had reported on their discussions in plenary fashion, general discussion followed.

On the last day of the conference there was an opportunity, in the course of two sessions, to reflect on **Strategies for Christian Higher Education**. Nothing came of this, however, seeing that all the available time was taken up with the discus-

sion of the resolutions of the conference.

On Sunday morning 19 August the conference-goers could attend a special service in the (Synodial) Reformed Church in Breukelen, led by Prof. K. Runia. The text for discussion caused a great homesickness in me: It was Psalm 36:9b: "In thy light shall we see light!" - the first sermon that I have heard on the credo of the PU for CHE.

On Monday, 20 August, the conference-goers were taken on an interesting tour of the province of Zeeland (Deltawerke and Middelburg). The tour was concluded in the evening with a pleasant dinner in Vreeland.

Attendance from all over the world

According to information provided by the organizers, the conference-goers came from all the continents, from 39 countries. The list of participants showed something like 140 participants. I was able, however, to note down the names of at least three people whose names were on the list, but who were definitely not at the conference. There might have been more, and of course there might have been people at the conference whose names did not appear on the list. Attendance at the plenary sessions of the conference came to about ninety people.

In comparison with previous conferences, there were many new faces at this conference - especially from Third World countries such as the various countries of Africa not represented before (for example Cameroun, Egypt, Uganda, Ghana, Botswana, Tanzania, Liberia), South American countries, as well as from the East (including Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Philippines, India). As had been the case during the other conferences it was a great privilege to meet with these Christians from all over the world.

It must have cost the Free University and the Society many thousands of guilders to pay especially for the travel and lodging of the many conference-goers from financially poor countries.

Resolutions

The last morning of the conference (Wednesday 22 August) saw the Structure Committee submitting five resolutions which had, in the course of arduous discussions, become resolutions of the conference.

The first resolution on apartheid, especially, had caused furious discussion. More strongly worded alternative and/or additional wordings, however, were not incorporated.

The second resolution read: "The conference makes an urgent appeal to the Council of the PU for CHE to open the doors of this institution unconditionally to all students desiring Christian higher education, so that its pretension of being a Christian institution should not be denied".

With regard to the third resolution (that the Council should go on to the establishment of an organization of individual Christian scholars as soon as numbers and funds allow) there was - visibly - strong urging from the Third World that it should be an organization of individuals and institutions, seeing that purely individual membership would render it not only financially weak but also less effective.

The fourth resolution really involved the suggestions of the conference-goers with regard to a future conference. It is interesting that the idea was put forward that such a future conference should be held in a Third world country, and also that it should only take place every four years to allow for two-yearly regional conferences to take place.

Suggestions for a future conference included the following: **The role of Christian leaders in a secular world; How to integrate, implement and fully realise the Christian character of an institution for Christian Higher Education; Christian education and nationalism; Man and technology in a world context; Contextualized education (especially with regard to theology) in a "primitive society", during transitional phases and in a secular society; Concreteness with regard to curriculum at a Christian institution and reflection on how it would influence the students and the community within which the institution is situated; The relationship between the church and Christian higher education; CHE in the midst of scientificated culture; What has already been done to realise ideas born at previous conferences; Theory and practice, the nature of theory and Christian theory; CHE as a peacemaker in a torn world; The unifying world, and last, but not least, Apartheid.**

The themes which seemed to have most support were contextualization in world context; secularization, technology, justice and peace, and Christian Higher Education. There was general consensus that the latter theme (What is the basis,

the structure, methods and strategies for Christian higher education?) should be looked at in terms of future conferences.

The final resolution then also stressed the necessity for Christian universities in Hong Kong (which will become part of Communist China before the end of the century) and in North America (Calvin College, Dordt College and the Institute for Christian Studies are not (yet) universities).

The PU for CHE: Five times the target

The first shot was fired in 1983 when the Council would not accept the annual contribution of the PU for CHE (\$2 000,00 US) on the grounds that it came from an so-called apartheid institution and that the Free University would not act as the host if it should be accepted. The issue was not discussed at the conference, and would only be discussed at the subsequent meeting of the Council in Amsterdam.

The next move on this chess board came in June 1984 when the Hosting Committee - after they had already accepted Prof. Tjaart van der Walt's application for admission to the conference - informed the Rector that he should regard the invitation as "not having been written". For an objective observer it is very clear that the Hosting Committee did not have the least right to act as it did (the Free University called the tune on the Hosting Committee).

In the meantime it had also become clear that the Free University had also negotiated with the Dutch Government to see to it that Prof. Van der Walt should not obtain a visa to enter the Netherlands. Even before the Dutch government could make known its decision, (Prof. Van der Walt also had to attend the Reformed Ecumenical Synod in the U.S.A. and asked his passport back) the Hosting Committee had revealed its colours all too clearly.

According to information received from Prof. L.M. du Plessis the Council, following the conference - with great reluctance and difficulty - decided to assume responsibility for this unpleasant action on behalf of the Hosting Committee and to offer a written apology to the Rector.

This third step aimed at shunting the PU out of the way was, at first, not even to respond to a request from the IRS to have, as at the three previous conferences, a book exhibition - and then, when the books were already in the Netherlands,

to inform us that no book exhibitions would be allowed. Thanks to people who were more sympathetically inclined towards us, the book exhibition could go on - not without evoking protest from the Hosting Committee upon their discovery of the fact.

The fourth boycotting step was also very clear: no staff member of the PU (or from White South Africa) had the privilege to act as speaker, respondent, introducer of discussion groups or during the opening or closing ceremonies of a day. The censure of the Council and of the Hosting Committee would have been felt through the thickest skin!

But the most important (fifth) move on the chess board would still come. This too happened with the approval (encouragement?) of the host.

My recommendations for a travel subsidy for one person from the Black community of South Africa who could make a contribution to the conference were fruitless. On the opening day (Wednesday) of the conference, we were astonished to discover no less than thirteen of our Black and Coloured compatriots from South Africa. They all seemed to be members of the Belydende Kring (Confessing Circle - previously Circle of Brethren), and thus not representative of the entire spectrum of the South African population. When their names became known, it appeared that none of them have (at least outspokenly) in South Africa emerged as supporters of a Christian form of scholarship. They also definitely did not attend the conference at their own cost. Could one be blamed for thinking that the Hosting Committee had brought in a fairly expensive Trojan horse?

The Thursday afternoon (16 August) saw the purpose of the mission becoming clear by way of a written document to the Council. Via Prof. L.M. du Plessis the Council informed the other two lecturers from the PU with regard to the document.

The trio, however, took the credo of the medieval castle as their point of departure: **Cedo nulli!** Concede nothing! If we should be thrown out with a fully written-out list of reasons, we would go - otherwise we would stay.

From the document by the Confessing Circle (C.C.) it was clear that they had come to the conference with a clear command, which was to put obstacles in the way of the White South Africans, even those who are critical of the policy of apartheid, and especially those from the PU for CHE. A compromise was excluded, either the C.C. or the PU would be excluded. Prof. J.C. van der Stelt,

secretary of the ICPCHE, later confirmed that he had had prior notice via minutes of the C.C. in which this specific method of blackmail had been agreed upon.

The Council was faced with the dilemma - and while they were trying to find a solution, the members of the C.C. used the accommodation but did not attend the conference before the Council gave in to their request to have the white heretics removed (apartheid has been declared the newest heresy). Unofficial attempts at conciliation by the Whites also did not have any success.

Especially some of the local conference-goers from the Netherlands had by this time expressed their disgust in writing to the Council, stating that they could use their time more fruitfully. Those coming from afar simply had to go along with precious conference time being squandered in this way.

On the Friday the conference programme was temporarily moved aside in order to try and solve this sticky dilemma. A great many unclear issues had to be dealt with. It seemed, among other things, that the C.C. was not at all informed as to what had happened at conferences over the past nine years. Because there is only an independent Council in existence, and no organization with members, it can merely arrange conferences, and the conferences have no authority, as in the case of organizations which arrange congresses. The conference therefore had no right to decide about the admission or otherwise of participants. The C.C. could not understand that they had not been invited as the C.C. (that is, as an organization), but only as individuals and thus also not as a pressure group.

It has to be stated to the credit of the Chairman and of the Secretary that they put their foot down in no uncertain terms. It was clearly stated to the C.C. that they well knew beforehand that there would be Whites from South Africa at the conference. They had ample opportunity, beforehand, to negotiate with the Council by way of correspondence or otherwise, and to air their objections, but this they had not done. The programme was compiled by members from the Third World (and one of the members of the C.C. actually served on this committee!), and yet they were not satisfied. They should also have realised clearly that this would be an academic and no political conference. If they wanted to participate, they could have made their influence felt along the accepted channels, such as discussion of the lectures and the eventual resolutions. It was put to them that the Council had clearly stated that all persons would be welcome as participants. (Only speakers and financial contributions would, in accordance with the Statement

of Clarification, be subject to refereeing.) The Council could thus not approve of their attitude that either they or the White Africans should participate.

The final outcome was that a task force was named on apartheid to come up with a recommendation on the next day about the following: apartheid, the relationship between apartheid and Christian higher education, and the future structure of the conferences, so that similar problems could be avoided. The commission consisted of a representative of the Council (the chairman, Prof. J.B. Hulst), a representative from the Hosting Committee (Prof. J. Verheul of the Free University), two representatives from the C.C. and one representative each from Africa, Asia and Latin America (no single White from South Africa!).

When the ad hoc committee on the Saturday morning submitted their draught conference resolution on apartheid, the members of the C.C. were also present in the hall of the castle. After a long wrangle about formal issues (amongst others, about what the consequences would be for the present conference if the resolution should be accepted/rejected), and when it became clear that the C.C. would not gain their objective, Dr. G.D. Cloete (of the University of the Western Cape) got up and announced on behalf of the members of the C.C. that the time had now come for them to leave the conference. They immediately followed the suggestion, and the rest of the conference-goers looked on a little dazedly - perhaps relievedly?

It had now become clear to many other conference-goers from other Third World countries, who had at first been sympathetic to the cause of the C.C., that they were not willing to discuss issues like good Christians and good academics. Even before the gist of the issue could be discussed, they had already left.

The coup d'état was therefore a failure. It must have been something of a blow to the Free University (in the shape of the Hosting Committee) seeing that it must have cost a large sum of money, and that the University Council would doubtless demand an explanation of the debacle...

Following these events I made an effort to seek contact with the members of the C.C., and to make a suggestion that we should, in concert, submit a conference recommendation along the correct channels. The Rev. Shun Govender, however, resolutely refused to talk, simply accusing me of hypocrisy. Dr. Cloete spoke to his compatriots, but they steadfastly refused, and left the conference that same

afternoon.

When the conference had to make a resolution on the final day (Wednesday) about apartheid, the eventual resolution (Resolution no. 1) was far more nuanced. The future will learn, however, whether this resolution is not going to be used as a sharpened Statement of Clarification. One does not "discover" a heresy not to use it - in order to retain one's credibility, one has to persecute the heretics, even though this is the twentieth century. For many reformation from the inside out is apparently not enough. One should, apparently, desert one's group and fight the evil from the outside. People seem not to realize, however, that as soon as you withdraw from your own community, your voice is not listened to anymore. If I read my Bible correctly, this was not the way followed by Christ and the prophets - they also went for the reformation from the inside out.

Pressure from foreign countries on South Africa in the course of the past decade must have contributed a great deal to our domestic reforms. But if your own country's problems appear, officially and unofficially, on the agenda of four succeeding conferences, and threaten to upset the real work of the conference and to frustrate those who are not interested in the internal problems of another country, then it is no pleasure anymore. Then sneaking thoughts enter your mind that, just for the sake of change, it would be a good idea to grab hold of another heresy.

Evaluation

On the positive side I would like to stress once again that it is a privilege to have met so many Christians from so many parts of the world - those who are critical of South Africa included. The PU would definitely have been poorer without the contacts of the past ten years.

The guidance from the chairman, Prof. John Hulst, was firm and just and the accommodation was satisfactory.

There is a fair amount of the debit side, however, which should not be kept silent if one wishes to give a balanced view.

1. The conference was, like all the others, still too general. The first danger attached to this is that the level has to go down. In order to satisfy all the conference-goers from the various subject disciplines, the papers cannot be

too searching. The second problem is that many conference-goers from parts of the world with completely different problems remain dissatisfied: their specific problems could not be dealt with.

The solution of course is to have subject conferences (each conference invites another group of Christian scholars, or at each conference parallel sessions are offered for specialists from the various subjects), and regional conferences (where the unique problems of, for example, Africa, Latin America, etc. can be discussed in depth). This conference fortunately, once again, underlined the need for this type of arrangement.

2. Seeing that this had been a conference by and especially for the Third World, it is important to determine to what extent it had been successful.

As already stated, it was pleasant once again to meet new people from the Third World at this third meeting, who, although critical of South Africa, were not simply condemnatory of us, perhaps because the perfection of the new earth has also not dawned in the countries of their origin.

In the papers, especially by the speakers from the developing countries, a fairly uncritical philosophy of liberation, or a theology of liberation, determined the tone. The typical traits of all stress on the practice, contextualisation and (socio-political) liberation were so clear that one of the Westerners - of course with strong opposition from the Third World - spoke in one instance of a kind of "soft Marxism"!

One can understand that Christians from the developing countries should let the stress fall so heavily on *praxis* (rather *orthopraxis* than *orthodoxy*) because they are confronted by immense problems which call for concrete, practical solutions. It emerged clearly, however, that they have not yet reflected fundamentally about the precise relationship between theory and practice, and that there is the tendency to regard fundamental reflection on theoretical grounds as being of less importance. In this way, of course, it is not possible to attain depth at an academic conference. (One of the participants made the remark, during one of the discussions, that instead of meeting with Christian **higher** education, he had in fact encountered **elementary** Christian education!)

It was confirmed once again that Christianity in the Third World is growing at a terrific pace, but that it does not have a very strong base in principle. The wealth of reflection which had always been found at the Free University, and which is at present still being found at places like the I.C.S., Calvin College, Dordt College and at the PU for CHE, has not yeasted through to the specific circumstances of the developing countries to bear their fruit there. (A simple example to illustrate this: Liberation from sin, to the service of God in all fields according to his laws offers another perspective already on what precisely should be understood under Christian freedom - in contradistinction to the reigning theology of liberation.)

In conclusion, therefore, I have to state that I did not get the impression that the Western World and the Third World really found each other this time round, so that in future, at least in the field of Christian Higher Education, they will be able to reach out to each other. The former is still too theoretically reflective, and the latter too practical and utilitarian.

3. The third point of commentary is that the conference wasted its time with all-encompassing ideals of changing the world, while it forgets to do small, obvious things. An example: The West should share its wealth with the poorer countries they cry - BUT the conference neglects to offer the proceedings of the previous conferences free of charge or even at a reduced rate to individuals and libraries from these countries. (The usual price of the three volumes is so high that it might eat up a large portion or even the whole of the weekly salary of someone from one of these countries, so that the books are utterly out of his reach.)

These international meetings will therefore have to be far more modest on the one hand about what they can achieve - and on the other hand, even on a small scale, they will have to tackle and execute things on a very concrete and practical level.

I am seriously worried about the fact that meetings of the Council and the travelling costs to conferences absorb many thousands of dollars, which, if we are really serious about the condition in the so-called poorer countries, could be spent so much more fruitfully, if given a little creative attention.

4. As regards the question of membership (an organization of members from which

a Council may be elected), no progress at all has been made since the last conference. Seen in the light of the financial implications, I doubt whether this will have been achieved in four years' time.

5. A final remark about the organization of the present conference. Most of the participants did not receive the programme prior to their departure from their own countries, and nobody had any of the papers to study leisurely in advance. During the conference one had to spend precious time looking for the venues of the three group discussions. I asked in vain quite a few times for an address list (not merely a name list) of the participants, and could not obtain one. A conference photograph is not, perhaps, a necessity, but it would have been a nice souvenir. On the Wednesday afternoon following the conclusion of the conference all the participants, also those who still had to stay over in the Netherlands before their flights left, had to see about transport to Amsterdam and lodging there themselves.

3. NEWS FROM THE POTCHEFSTROOM UNIVERSITY FOR CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION (POTCHEFSTROOM, 2520 RSA)

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