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SECTION I

NEW METHODIES PRESIDENT STRESSES HIS BELIEF IN CHANGE FOR S A

JOHANNESBURG - He would rather take the risk of applying his Christian certainties to a changing world than be among those who have espoused "the evangelical message because it offered an alternative to drastic social change".

This was said by Rev Abel Hendrickse, the new President of the Methodist Church at their Annual Conference here when he was inducted.

In his keynote address, Rev Hendrickse stressed his belief in change for South Africa. He said he was one of those who believed that change would eventually come.

His address follows in full.

"We meet at a time when mens hearts fail them for fear and where one who is called to be the Chief Pastor of a Church such as ours bears a heavy responsibility to speak plainly and clearly of the things of God.

"In this time of preparation, I have been burdened with the theme of Evangelism as a great priority for our Church. With Alan Walker I am so sure that 'no decision we ever make can have more far reaching consequences than to answer the Biblical question: "What then shall I do with Jesus called the Messiah?" ' (Mk. 27:22).

"But again, with Dr Walker, I have to admit that: 'Evangelism today bears a heavy burden because too often it has failed to fashion a Christian social conscience. There is a form of evangelism that has played a dread part in endorsing, by silence, and perpetuating, by timidity, oppression and evil'.

"Tonight I want to plead that we do not fall under that judgement, for if in our evangelistic endeavours we fail to take cognisance of God's will for our society, and nation, we will lose all right and all opportunity to proclaim any longer.

"When a preacher seekd to interpret and apply his Christian certainties to a changing and complex situation in the world around him, he takes certain risks but I would rather by far take those risks tonight than be among those who, in Walker's words 'have consciously or unconsciously espoused the evangelical message because it offered an alternative to drastic social change'.

FEARSOME

"To speak and to act in the name of the Lord is always a difficult and fearsome thing, but because salvation is personal and social, individual and corporate, I would be failing in my duty if I were to allow anyone to believe that Evangelism involves preaching to people, and ignoring their situation. It has been said of Dom Helder Camara, the Catholic Archbishop of Brazil: "'He is not prepared to proclaim a Gospel that leaves society unscourged!.He knows the risks. As he himself puts it: 'If I hand out food or teach children to read, I am a saint. If I concern myself with underlying problems of reform, I am a Communist'. But he goes on in spite of the labels and the hatred of the privileged, because he knows that in the end it is not to them that he is accountable. Fearful as their punishments may be, he knows as all Christians know, that it is a far more fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

/Therefore I see

"Therefore I see one of the crucial facets of Evangelism to be that of speaking to the tortured issues of today's South Africa. I see the Church freeing man and institutions from fear of change, from the misconceptions of our own proper and importance and from the paralysing hatreds of our time. I take heart in this task from John Wesley for whom Evangelism was pointless unless it issued in visible, social effects. If it didn't show these effects then its roots would fade and wither away. I remember that this same Wesley whose preaching touched hundreds of thousands of individuals' hearts, nevertheless found it necessary to write hundreds of pamphlets drawing attention to ills and wrongs and injustices in society, not merely in general terms but individually.

Brothers and sisters, the times in which we live no longer give me the right to speak only in generalities; the time is past when we can just listen to a theological treatise. Last time I addressed the Church I spoke of my interpretation of our situation. I pleaded that a new way be tried, in which Black and White in dependence upon one another worked in painful togetherness to outstrip the violent fate which looms over us. I shared my conviction that the right choice inevitably would involve repentance and I asked whether we were ready for this 'costly repentance'.

"How far have we progressed? What is the situation now? Here there is a strange paradox in my mind, for so much that I have experienced has brought me hope, and so much that I see around me counsels despair.

"In my travels as your President, I, as one of the outcast South Africans, found a great acceptance in the heart of Methodism. Whether it was in one of the prominent pulpits of our land, or perhaps amongst a congregation of Free State farmers, I was always sure that I belonged.

POWER

"There is within the Church a power to overcome our prejudices and I have seen it at work. Now this gives me ground for hope and it gives me the boldness to say that those things which we have declared: that we are 'one and undivided', that God's will is the breaking down of the walls, are not vague ideals to be groped for. These things are true.

"And that which works in the context of the Church must be able to work on the wider stage of our national and social life. This ample demonstration of Black and White goodwill must be the vision we see for our country. The Church is the prototype of God's new society. Let no man say that togetherness is impossible. In small but significant ways I have seen the impossible happen and therefore I have renewed hope in the New Testament message of reconciliation.

"Let me go further: I believe that there are signs beyond the Church that change is not impossible. I have been fascinated to watch the unfolding developments in South West Africa. Whatever the pressures that have brought them about, and however some may criticise aspects of that scene, it has hope for me because suddenly in a relatively short space of time men have changed their ways. People who have lived by the religion of separation and supremacy have seen the writing on the wall and almost overnight have chosen a better way. In this moment of reckoning, there has been a willingness, by the stroke of a pen, to wipe away some of the laws which have brought great hurts to people of colour.

/Now I

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"Now I don't know what tomorrow will bring there. The future still hangs in the balance. Heaven has not come to earth yet, but these people are now sure of what we have been sure of all along; that however precarious the future, there is no future at all in racism. This is a form of repentance and I pray that God will grant peace and harmony as a result!"

BLACK METHODIST WOMEN SHOW THEIR CONCERN FOR DETAINEES

JOHANNESBURG - Mrs W K Sefotlhelo, President of the Women's Manyano, spoke of the unrest in the black community and said that the Manyano had been prepared to be involved where there was need.

"Our husbands and brothers and sons are involved and we have made a donation of R500 to those who are in need because of detention". In addition to this food and clothing had been provided on a large scale by many Manyano branches.

Referring to the education crisis, Mrs Sefotlhelo said that without education the future was doomed and she led the Conference in a prayer based on Psalm 123.

After Mrs Claire Mc Kernan had presented the report of the Women's Auxiliary, the Conference received the incoming General President. Mrs Anne Kluge who was accompanied by Mrs J Bailed, the new General Secretary, Among other things Mrs McKernan announced that as of next year the Deaconess Order had been added to the W A 's 'Sponsor Fund' and that an immediate gift of R1 000 would be forthcoming. A similar amount of R1 000 was donated to the Christian Citizenship Department. There were now 428 branches of the Women's Auxiliary in the Connexion.

After Mrs F van Heerden had presented the report of the Women's Association, the President of the Conference expressed his thanks but also added: "I pray for the day when you will not do what you have done today but go and represent one Methodist Church - finished and klaar!" He was referring to the continued existence of three women's organisations in Methodism.

In the debate on the Christian Education and Youth Department, a new general policy was laid down to guide its affairs in the future.

It was resolved that it would continue to cater for Christian education in its wider conception, and not be simply a youth Department and that it would do so in consultation with the Department for Education for Ministry.

Priority would nevertheless be given to youth ministry at all levels, with particular emphasis on evangelism and leadership training. All Societies, Circuits and Districts were urged to give greater priority to these areas by raising and allocating additional funds for CEYD work.

Mr Derek Kotze was appointed Assistant General Secretary in a part-time capacity.

The Conference paid warm tribute to the commitment which Mr Kotze had given in the Department and expressed its regret that he would have to step down.

/NO MORE GREETINGS

NO MORE GREETINGS TO PRESIDENT FROM METHODISTS

JOHANNESBURG - The practice of sending letters of greeting to the State President and other Heads of State in Southern Africa has been discontinued. Because of difficulties arising out of the complex political situation in Southern Africa, it was decided on the last day of Conference to rescind the decision to send some of these letters of greeting.

The letter to the State President went through no less than 4 drafts because of questions raised by delegates as to the tone or detail of the letter. The final draft received general approval on the grounds that it now reflected the concerns of the Conference on issues such as violence in the Republic in the past year.

It was at this point that the Chairman of the Natal West District, the Rev T David Sadler questioned whether such a letter was not more appropriately sent to the Prime Minister. He also expressed his unhappiness with the fact that letters to other Heads of State in Southern Africa consisted of no more than a formal greeting and good wishes. "Are we to gather that there is nothing to criticise in these other States?" he asked.

Another issue which had been raised earlier was that of the recognition of the Transkei. Some black delegates were unhappy that any letter might indicate a recognition by the Methodist Church of the new 'homeland state'.

The Rev Cyril Wilkins moved that the practice of sending letters of greeting be discontinued. This was carried overwhelmingly and by rescinding a previous resolution, the decision took immediate effect.

METHODISTS SPELL IT OUT ON SOCIAL ISSUES

JOHANNESBURG - The Methodist Church of South Africa's Christian Citizenship Department (CCD) in a wide-ranging series of resolutions, passed 20, which touch upon the social conscience of South Africa.

Lack of time prevented more formal debate on many, but the delegates attending the 95th Annual Conference of the Methodist Church here virtually agreed on every one.

This is a summary of the resolutions:

The Methodist Church:

- * Deplored the death in detention of Mr Steve Biko and some 42 detainees and the manner in which these matters had been handled by the Minister of Justice and his Department. Conference has called upon the Minister to resign his post;
- * Expressed concern about post-mortems held on dead detainees before next of kin could exercise their full elgal rights;
- * Called upon the Minister of Justice to establish a judicial commission of Enquiry to fully investigate detention deaths;

/* Called upon the Department

- * Called upon the Department of Community Development and Bantu Administration to exercise restraint and compassion in resettlement programmes and to refrain from removing people from their homes until alternative accommodation was found, and from the deplorable practice of separating husbands and wives.
- * Declared its support for the statement on conscientious objection made by the Catholic Bishops' Conference and requested that the full statement be conveyed to every Church member.
- * Expressed regret that in some quarters the civil defence programme placed more emphasis upon defence than the handling of natural disasters and civil emergencies and that the black community was often excluded from the programme offered.
- * Re-affirmed Methodism's objection to the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act in the strongest possible terms and urged positive steps to campaign for its repeal.
- * Expressed its understanding of and respect for such ministers as were compelled by their own conscience to relinquish their appointment as marriage officers in protest against the implementation of the act.
- * Deplored the contemplated legislation of shebeens and urged that beer halls and depots be not established near township entrances or in close proximity to schools, sports grounds, communities centres and comilar institutions.
- * Resolved to approach the authorities with a view to halting or curbing the sale of liquor on Sundays in African townships.
- * Expressed increasing concern about the lack of spiritual care for persons detained by the Security Police under various acts.
- * Called upon the Minister of Police to reconsider present legislation and to make amendments so as to enable such detainees to receive spiritual ministrations.
- * Requested the Government to immediately initiate a national relief scheme for the unemployed whereby financial assistance might be given, public works schemes instituted and or part-time employment opportunities be made known.
- * Urged the Churches to equip themselves to give material and other forms of aid to those most seriously affected by unemployment.
- * Approved the work of the Dependents' Conference division of the South African Council of Churches, which assists the families of political detainees and urged that Methodist ministers and people give material and spiritual assistance to such dependents;
- * Viewed with dismay the action of the Government in banning certain organisations, publications and individuals, notably the Christian Institute of South Africa and its officials, Dr Beyers Naude, the Rev Brian Brow, the Rev Theo Kotze and Mr Cedric Mayson.
- * Expressed the firm opinion that this policy was divisive and disrupting to the mission and unity of the Church.
- * Re-affirmed its rejection of the Homeland policy of the South African Government.
- /* Called upon the Prime

* Called upon the Prime Minister to reconsider the Homeland Policy before the consequences of it resulted in devastating effects on the nation as a whole.

* Noted with abhorrence that the Government acting through the Police had now openly cast aside all pretence at freedom of religious activity as evidenced by the arrests of the Rev Wesley Mabuza and Fr D O'Riordan at a memorial service held in a cemetery on August 14, 1977, as well as occasionally interfering with the rights of friends attending funeral services in black townships.

WORLD METHODIST LEADER SPEAKS TO CONFERENCE

JOHANNESBURG - World Methodist Council Secretary, the Rev Joe Hale, opened the Ecumenical Affairs Debate by addressing the Conference. Mr Hale had been a guest of the Conference since earlier on in its sessions.

He said that in the Ecumenical Movement at present there were two parts of a grid constituting the Christian family; the World Council of Churches with its 292 member Churches, and the different families of Christian Churches of which 21 million Methodists made up a significant part.

The World Methodist Council had 62 member Churches in 90 countries of the world and it represented the only forum where Methodists could meet and witness together. Although the Council had no legislative power it was a place for fellowship.

Mr Hale expressed the hope that he would be able to interpret to the whole Methodist family "the heroic witness of this Church in South Africa". He said that the World Methodist Council stood with the Methodist Church of South Africa and wanted to draw from its particular strengths.

The President then reported on his visit to the World Methodist Executive in Switzerland recently and remarked upon the totally different approach experienced there as compared with the hostility in Dublin the year before.

NYEMBEZI WANTS BLACK AND WHITE CHURCH TEAM

JOHANNESBURG - Dr Maurice Nyembezi, a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC) endorsed a remark made earlier by the Rev Vivian Harris that it was most important for there to be representation on bodies such as the WCC. He qualified this by saying that it was no longer possible for a White man alone to adequately represent the Church overseas - it was difficult enough for a Black man because the question asked most frequently was: "if you are really concerned for the struggle in South Africa, why is it that you are not in jail?".

People were concerned to know whether the Church was identifying itself with the struggle of the Black man and Dr Nyembezi suggested to them that a team of Black and White Christians from South Africa should meet a group representing combined churches from overseas. "We have a tremendous duty to correct wrong impressions" he said.

/PASTORAL CARE FOR

PASTORAL CARE FOR REFUGEES

JOHANNESBURG - During the Ministerial Session it was resolved that Superintendent Ministers be instructed to make provision for the pastoral care of refugees who may be within their circuits.

The situation has arisen through the flow of refugees across a number of borders in Southern Africa and the need of the Church to exercise pastoral care over this new constituency.

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