

## RESPONSES TO PROF. WILLIE JONKER'S CONFESSION

by Moderator of the DRC, Dr Pieter Potgieter and  
Archbishop Desmond Tutu

### Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Professor Jonker made a statement that certainly touched me and I think touched others of us when in public he made a confession and asked to be forgiven. And I believe that I certainly stand under pressure of God's Holy Spirit to say that as I have said in my sermon, when that confession is made, then those of us who have been wronged must say "We forgive you." And that together we may move to the reconstruction of our land. It is not cheaply made and the response is not cheaply made.

### Dr Frank Chikane - Co-chairman of Conference

Yesterday Prof Willie Jonker made a confession to the plenary and you remember the way in which the Archbishop responded to that confession. It has made headlines and it is an important thing that has happened in this conference. We had a statement from the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa which we discussed this morning, but in the course of the discussion, the DRC indicated to us that they would want to make a statement about that confession yesterday. It is quite clear that although we call this conference theme "Towards a United Christian Witness in a Changing South Africa", yesterday it became a period of confession. And I think we need to thank God for that. Because if we start from there, we will be able to move ahead to do what God would like us to do. And at this stage, I would like to give Prof. Potgieter the opportunity to respond to us in the way he is lead, as the head of the Dutch Reformed Church at the present moment.

### Dr Pieter Potgieter, Moderator of DRC

Mr Chairman, thank you for granting our request that we may have the opportunity of making a short statement this morning.

It became clear to us that there was at least some doubt in conference on the official position of the NGK regarding the confession of guilt by Prof. Jonker in his paper yesterday morning.

The delegates of the NG Kerk want to state unambiguously that we fully identify ourselves with the statement of Prof. Jonker on the position of this church. He has in fact precisely reiterated the decision of our General Synod in Bloemfontein two weeks ago.

We would like to see this decision of Synod as the basis of reconciliation with all people and all churches.

The issue of restitution after confession has also been raised. From the Minutes of our Synod it will be clear that we did embark on a process of restitution, both in our relationship to our own

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### Archbishop Desmond Tutu

I heard people say that I had no mandate in a sense to have accepted a confession on behalf of anybody except as it were myself and I believe that it is right for people to say so. It is the height of presumption for me to have suggested that I was speaking on behalf of anybody in a sense, though I need also to say that I have been ministered to by very many people in my life and I want to give thanks to God for that.

Malusi Mpumlwana stood up here to tell you about his experiences of detention and torture. When I was General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches, Malusi Mpumlwana came to Johannesburg on one occasion. He has said here that he had difficulty forgiving, but I want to tell you that on that occasion he said "You know Father, when they torture you, you look on them and you say 'By the way, these are God's children'", and he said "and you know they need you", meaning himself, to help them recover the humanity they are losing. And he spoke out of that kind of pain, and I listened to him as a young person, ministering to me of the meaning of forgiveness.

Malusi was at a funeral in King William's Town and they found someone they suspected to be a police informer. Maluse called on a number of us to please come, because they were going to kill that man. Maluse and others held hands to ward off people who were angry. The man who was going to be killed had not even confessed, but Maluse took his life in his hands as he stood against that crowd.

I was part of a South African Council of Churches delegation when we went to Mahumba a village which was being demolished and the people were going to be uprooted. The church leaders went to Mahumba to pray with the people before their removal. And as we prayed in the rain at about midnight, one of the old men in the village whose home was about to be demolished, whose schools had already been demolished, whose churches and clinics had been demolished, stood up and prayed a prayer that I will never understand. The man said "Thank you God for loving us." I have never understood that prayer.

And then I have been with men like Walter Sisulu and others who have been in jail for 25-27 years for having the audacity to say they are human and they come out of that experience and they have an incredible capacity to love. They have no bitterness, no longing for revenge, but a deep commitment to renew South Africa. And I am humbled as I stand in front of such people and so dear friends, I think I am convicted by the Holy Spirit of God and by the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

There are no guarantees of grace. When Jesus Christ looked at Zaccheus, he had not guaranteed that Zaccheus would respond to the grace of His forgiveness and love. We are people of grace who have to have the vulnerability of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ on the Cross. Jesus Christ in accepting Zaccheus, released Zaccheus so that Zaccheus could then say "I will make restitution".

God has brought us to this moment, and I just want to say to you, I am deeply humbled, and I speak only for myself. I cannot, when someone says "Forgive me", say "I do not". For I cannot pray the prayer that we prayed "Forgive as we forgive". Our brothers in the NG Church came to me and said "It is going to be up to us to show the genuineness of what we have said, in actions."

But my church has to confess too. My church has to confess its racism. I have to confess as a black person. How many times have I treated others in my own community as if they were less than the children of God? What is my share in our common sin? And I just pray that all of us will know that we are being led by a gracious God, the God of grace and that we will see God putting us at the start of wonderful things for this land. Pray God that we will respond to Your grace graciously.

#### Dr Frank Chikane

The Steering Committee considered seriously the representation by the DR Mission Church and the DRC in Africa and because there was the notification that the DRC was going to make a statement, we felt it was important to give them the opportunity which will clarify some of the issues raised here. And the Committee felt that because the DRC happens to be the leading church in the whole development of the apartheid issue, not the only one, but leading it, in the emphasis that the conference has made here, it became clear that the areas (?) pointed in the direction of the DRC, and that the responses that had been made are because of that fellowship of interaction and that it is hoped that this is not used as a basis to advance the interest of one church against another and that the Steering Committee understands the problems that the sister-churches have been having amongst themselves and hopes that they could find a way, and will pray that they will find a way of resolving those problems and having said this with that clarity, I would ask that we have a moment of silence.