

URCSA MODERATOR'S OPENING ADDRESS TO 4 GENERAL MODERAMENS AND THE MODERATURES OF THE REGIONAL SYNODS OF THE FAMILY OF DR CHURCHES - ACHTERBERG 6 NOV 2006

Greetings Sisters and Brothers

Today history is being made. For the first time after 150 years General Synodical Commissions of the DRC, DRCA, RCA and URCSA are meeting to continue the process of Church reunification began by Moderamina of the four Churches in Bloemfontein on 16 August 2006. I, as a person, am full of excitement and at the same time nervous. I am excited that a miracle has happened that we could meet and talk unity, peace, reconciliation and justice. But I am also nervous about the fact that this golden opportunity may slip out of our hands and fail to achieve what we have come here for. If that happens and we fail to make meaningful progress on the road to unity, the world is going to judge us harshly. We may not have another chance to save our faces.

We as the DRC family have taken a lead in the talks against crime and violence in the country. Recently we managed to bring together major denominations as well as the organized business in the country to talk on the scourge of violence. The response was enormous. The Catholic Churches, Reformed Churches including the Afrikaans Protestante Kerk (APK), the Zion Christian Church and Charismatic Churches were present. One can imagine how the impact of our failure to agree on Church unity will be like on the fragile cooperation we have secured with other Churches. The government will also not take us seriously. If one takes the battle of morality to other people one should have one's house in order.

Today we have gathered at Achterberg in God's business and we should never let this opportunity pass by. To me church reunification is a call, it is God's call to costly discipleship and it should not be taken lightly. Jesus suffered and was rejected so that we may be one. We are challenged by the manner in which He suffered and was rejected for our salvation so that we may be one for the sake of the world. The world must see in us that which may help it to understand Godly life. Discipleship means adherence to the person of Jesus, and thus submission to His call to unity and reconciliation.

We acknowledge the hurt and pain we have inflicted on one another in the past and we have unconditionally apologized to one another. Although we have accepted one another's apologies there are still open wounds which need our attention. But we should never make these wounds a scapegoat for our failures to Church unity. Jesus suffered and was rejected for our sake but He forgave our sins and reconciled us with God. God accepted His death as an atonement for our sins and set a good example for us.

In church unification we are called upon to deny ourselves in order to be aware only of Christ and no more of ourselves, to see only Him who goes before us and no more the road which is too hard for us. Self-denial on this road means: 'He leads the way, we keep close to Him'. As we embark on this process He says to us: 'If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.'

The call to unity can only be followed by the response of obedience or it is refused outright. It displays not the slightest interest in the psychological reason for a person's material interest. The initiator behind the call is Jesus Christ Himself. 'Christianity without this kind of commitment is a Christianity without Christ. It remains an abstract idea, a myth which has a place for the Fatherhood of God, but omits Christ as the living Son' (Bonhoeffer 2006:1).

Engaged, Motivated by Love and Obedience

In fact, unlike other engagements, this one has no innocent bystanders. All are combatants who declare their side from the onset. No gray area exists: you are either aligned with God, the Head of the Church, or you are not. In this warfare we surrender our lives to serve Him out of love and obedience. He is the only One who matters in life. His incredible sacrifice for us causes us to do no less than give everything we have back to Him as our own sacrifice of praise and appreciation.

In this engagement every leader, and in fact every true follower, fulfills a vital role of by virtue of affecting the lives of others who are ignoring and resisting the Biblical truth of unity. Whatever we do we do it basing our choices on what is right. Jesus criticized the leaders of His day for misleading people by making choices that were popular, easy, expected, personally profitable but wrong. A godly leader always does what is right, according to the word of God. Even if the inevitable result will be

resistance or rejection, godly leaders bear any burden so long as their choices and actions honour God.

Inherent Setbacks for Merging Processes

One of inherent setbacks of any merging process is jockeying for position. All the perks are up for grabs—positions, titles, physical location, compensation, recognition and so on. I have seen it during merging of higher institutions in our country. All tensions revolved around positions. Merger could on as long as it was not threatening once position. Will this be an issue in our situation? How far have we transcended the grabbing mentality?

Leading the DRC family to authentic unity may be shrouded in paradox. Offering love and energy to unity may inspire distrust and rejection. Leading people to Church unity may trigger persecution by those being led. Humility may generate contempt from those served. But the choice we have as leaders is to be strong and courageous and do what God has called us to do.

Conclusion

Sisters and brothers, let us then join the host of heaven and petition God to hallowed His, let His Kingdom come and His will be done as we fulfill what He commanded us to do. Our members are waiting for our bold Christian leadership. They have waited long to become one, let us help them to become one.