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ANC/CDA MIRROR FUNCTION ON FAITH AND POLITICS

Suggestions for a follow-up

The members of the CDA delegation to the seminar on Faith and Civil Society met on Friday 30 January to evaluate the seminar and discuss further steps to be taken in the dialogue between the CDA and the ANC.¹ They noticed that the CDA and the ANC share the opinion that faith has public relevance.

There are of course differences between South Africa and the Netherlands concerning the role of faith in society. The CDA delegation was impressed by the way South Africans openly and in a self-evident way express their faith. The ANC is not an explicitly christian party, although it obviously shares in this typical South African characteristic. Also, the ANC recognizes the public relevance of religion. The Commission for Religious Affairs is proof of that.

Churches are crucial to furthering the public role of religion. The CDA delegation noticed the disappointment of the ANC delegates to the seminar about the current lack of interest of the South African churches in public affairs. The churches seem to have given up the high profile they had during the struggle against the apartheid system. This is an important reason for continuing the dialogue on faith and politics.

The Netherlands on the other hand is becoming a highly secularized society. Increasingly, faith is reduced to the private sphere. Most political parties deny or neglect the public relevance of religion. Nevertheless, churches continue to play a role in the public debate. For instance on the combatment of poverty or on traditional ethical issues. Also, many organisations in the field of civil society are based on religious principles, for instance in the broadcasting sector, among the trade unions, in education and among political parties, such as the CDA.

The CDA delegation discussed the draft report of the meeting in August made by the Commission for Religious Affairs and made some suggestions for the final editing of this paper. It took note of the letter of the former secretary-general of the ANC, ms. Cheryl Carolus, in which she urged for a follow-up of the seminar. The delegation also discussed the proposals for continuing the mirror-function on political transformation and spiritual revolution. With these in mind, the delegation formulated some suggestions for the follow-up.

In general, the delegation thought that a next seminar should concentrate on fewer subjects and deal with them in-depth. It agreed with the proposal of the ANC to deal with two dimensions of faith and transformation, e.g. in politics and society. These two themes

¹ The delegates were: prof.dr. Ernst Hirsch Ballin, mr. Coskun Cörüz, prof.dr. Pieter Anton van Gennip, ms. Ruth Peetoom, drs. Dowlatram Ramlal, ms. Gerda Verburg. Contactperson for the CDA mirror function is Theo Brinkel.

are dealt with below, followed by proposals for further steps.

* *Faith and political transformation*

On the issue of faith and political transformation, the ANC and the CDA follow two different models, that both have their strengths and weaknesses. The ANC operates in a country where religion is self-evident for most persons. Apart from the marginal ACDP, there are no explicitly christian political parties in South Africa. In the dialogue between faith and politics, the Commission for Religious Affairs appears to play a crucial role for the ANC.

Within the CDA, every representative is supposed to share in its political principles, which are explicitly inspired by Biblical values. This means that its religious inspiration is not questioned. In a highly secularized country such as the Netherlands, this makes the CDA differ from most other parties. However, there is always the risk that this Christian inspiration serves as a "cream topping over an otherwise pragmatic cake".

The CDA delegation would be very interested in further discussion about the way religious inspiration is implemented in both ANC and CDA. The following questions could be debated: What is the impact of the input of faith on practical policies? Is religion an autonomous source of inspiration for policy development? Or do political expediency or ideology take precedence and is faith serving as a criticism in the margin? What is the relation between a political party and the churches, both on official and on a personal levels?

* *Faith and the transformation of society*

The question as to how the moral fibre of society can be renewed is of great importance, not only to South Africa, but to the Netherlands as well. The presence of well rooted and diverse organizations in society during the era of the struggle against the apartheid system was one of the strong characteristics of South Africa. In this, South Africa was fundamentally different from the countries of Central and Eastern Europe for instance. The presence or absence of such a civil society has a profound influence on the future chances of a sustainable democracy.

Since the end of the nineteenth century, the growth of democracy and social justice in the Netherlands would not have been possible without strong and firmly rooted organizations in society. However, in many cases, they have grown over their top, which has led to too great expectations among the population from the possibilities of government. The CDA is convinced that civil society in the Netherlands needs to be reinvigorated, not only in order to promote social justice, but also to strengthen democracy.

A follow-up seminar could deal with the role of faith or moral conviction in organizations in the field of civil society. Questions could be debated concerning the meaning of pluralism. Pluralism can have two dimensions: the differentiation

of responsibilities between different sectors of society, such as the environment, trade unions, neighbourhood-organizations, women's organizations, etc.; and the differentiation between religious or moral backgrounds of such organizations within a given sector of society. What is the value of Christian, muslim or other institutions besides other general organizations? How much room can be granted to pluralism in a country that is in a process of nation-building? Can a religiously inspired renewal of society come about without pluralism? Or do we run the risk of fragmentation and ineffectiveness? How much steering from politics can be justified?

Concrete steps

Publications

It is hoped that the draft report of the seminar will be published in the first half of 1998. The English edition will be translated in Dutch and published. Together with the video, it will be made available to groups in the party. The video will be offered to the Catholic Broadcasting Company in the Netherlands.

The CDA delegation has also decided to publish an article for the academic monthly magazine of the research institute for the CDA, called "Christen Democratische Verkenningen". The subject of the article will be political transformation and religious commitment. It will be written by Ruth Peetoom. Cedric Mayson will be invited to write a reaction. Both articles will be published simultaneously, hopefully in the April edition of this year.

Visit to the Netherlands

In order to work towards a follow-up seminar it is deemed advisable that a visit is organized for one or two representatives of the Commission for Religious Affairs to the Netherlands. Such a visit would enable the South African visitors to get a first-hand impression of the situation concerning faith, politics and society in the Netherlands. The visit would also be used to prepare the follow-up seminar which is to be held later in the year.

The programme of the visit should be oriented towards these two purposes.

One could think of a programme of about a week, including:

- * conversations with the relevant institutions of the CDA, such as
 - the Steenkamp Instituut (training in political principles)
 - the Research Institute (religious principles and policy formulation)
 - representatives of the national board (the implementation of religious principles in party policy)
 - representatives of the national parliament (the implementation of religious principles in national policy)

- * conversations with other parties, such as the PvdA, Groen Links or the smaller christian parties
- * conversations with church leaders
- * conversations with representatives of social organizations

The Centre for Science and Religion of the Catholic University of Brabant is prepared to organize a small symposium for about 20 people on the issues dealt with in this paper in which the representatives of the Commission for Religious Affairs participate.

The CDA delegation thought that a delegation of two ANC members would be preferable to one, because if you are with two, you can compare experiences and prepare more input during the visit itself. As we have general elections in the Netherlands on 6 May, it would be better to have this visit at the end of May or early June. The members of the CDA delegation could act as hosts.

Follow-up seminar on Faith and Politics

During this process, the themes for a follow-up seminar could be developed. The CDA delegation was enthousiastic about the proposal by the ANC to prepare papers in advance as a starter for the debate. Maybe the articles mentioned above for Christen Democratische Verkenningen could serve as a first step. We would like to stress that the seminar should not only try to say something to Africa only. The delegation is convinced that the results of the ongoing dialogue on faith and politics is important to the Netherlands as well. A maximum of 20 to 30 participants would be advisable. Just like last year, a meeting at the end of August would suit Dutch participants very well.

Theo Brinkel