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Church intellectuals shake ruling party pillars

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Some highly respected academics in the Afrikaans reformed church, previously among the pillars of the ruling National Party, have turned devastatingly critical of South African Government policy.

At a meeting in the university town of Potchefstroom in the Transvaal Province, delegates to a conference called by the Afrikaans Calvinistic Movement declared that aspects of government policy amounted to a "caricature" and that there would be more justice in South Africa today for everybody if it were run by black Christians, rather than by the present white government.

Potchefstroom University is the seat of the important Afrikaans Gereformeerde Kerk, one of the three Afrikaans "reformed" churches that dominate the religious life of the Afrikaner, numerically the biggest white group, which overwhelmingly supports the National Party.

'Intellectual revolt'

Afrikaans newspapers have described the speeches at the Afrikaans Calvinistic Movement meeting there as "an Afrikaans intellectual revolt," and said they were the most open criticism of government policy that had ever come from Afrikaans intellectuals.

South Africa's whole system of apartheid or "separate development" of the races was questioned, and suggestions were made about searching for a new direction.

Various speakers told the meeting that the government had merely made "empty promises" about the implementation of the separate racial "homelands" policy, and they demanded that the government set about dismantling the "injustices in the present social structure." Others warned that the system of apartheid — could not continue in South Africa "as an everlasting system," and quoted from the Bible to support claims that justice demanded that political decisions should not be forced on people who have had no part in making them.

Giving blacks a share

They said that it was clear that sophisticated, educated black people had to have a

share in government. Among those present were many senior Afrikaans university professors, including the well-known chairman of the Afrikaans Calvinistic Movement, Prof. Tjaart van der Walt, and Prof. Hennie Coetzee, the editor of the extremely influential — and increasingly controversial to Afrikaners — journal *Woord en Daad*, the foremost publication of the reformed church.

One important guest speaker was Prof. Erika Theron, from the rival Afrikaans university town of Stellenbosch in the Cape Province. She had no more comfort for the government than had any of the other speakers.

She served as chairman of the government-appointed multiracial Theron Commission, which investigated the social, economic, and political condition of South Africa's more than 2 million Colored people (people of mixed race) only to have the government throw out important political and social recommendations within weeks of publication of the commission's report.

Riots laid to government

Breaking a long silence, Professor Theron told the Calvinist meeting that the way the government had "pulled the carpet" from under her commission was one of the reasons for the recent rioting by Coloreds in the streets of Cape Town.

She warned that by acting the way it did, the government had rejected proposals that would have brought the Colored people into a closer relationship with the whites.

She denied that anything positive for Colored people had come about through the National Party government's policies in the more than 25 years it had been in power. She said, in fact, that a dangerous polarization between white people and the Colored people had been developed systematically "in the name of apartheid."

The government's immediate response to this damning indictment was an appeal to Professor Theron from the Cape leader of the National Party, P. W. Botha, who is also Minister of Defense, for her please not to say "unfriendly things." He urged her to "stay calm" and promised that "everything will come right" in the end.

It was an unconvincing reply to the shattering indictment presented by the Potchefstroom Calvinists.