

Chapter X

God Made Us All, But . . . Racism and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches

Since its meeting in Nairobi in 1970, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches has not really given much attention to the issue of racism. Granted, it may have taken a deliberately low profile on this matter because of its desire to support the World Council of Churches in its efforts to combat racism. Or it may have wanted to give its member churches ample opportunity to give such support. It may have argued that duplication of such efforts was not necessary. Be this as it may, I am convinced that the time has come for the World Alliance to take a firm stand on the issue of racism, a stand that is its own, based on its concern for and solidarity with those churches within its fellowship that suffer under racism, and based on its own understanding of the gospel and the Reformed tradition.

There are a number of reasons why I believe that the World Alliance of Reformed Churches should assume a more active role in the struggle against racism:

1) Black thinker and activist W.E.B. Dubois has been proven absolutely correct in his prediction that one of *the* problems of the twentieth century would be the race problem.

This address was delivered at the meeting of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, August 1982.

2) The admirable work of the World Council of Churches in this regard for the last ten years or more has shown beyond doubt the insidious and extremely dangerous nature of racism.

3) Moreover, instead of abating, racism has grown. Christians in western Europe have become increasingly aware of the problem there, and in the United States racism in numerous ways has once more taken on a cloak of respectability.

4) Racism has taken on new, subtler forms and has found powerful allies in such ideologies as militarism, nationalism, and the doctrine of national security.

5) In the political field, it seems that "liberal politics" has come to the end of its solutions and its energies. In the United States, for example, the impasse is painful, and the general reaction of many liberals is to "outconserve" the conservatives. The responsibility of the church in such a situation, is, now more than ever before, to challenge not only the myopic theologized patriotism of yet another brand of "evangelicalism," but to proclaim the vision of the kingdom of God that transcends the narrow boundaries of race and nationalism and brings justice to the poor and oppressed.

6) A last reason lies in the reality of the situation of the Republic of South Africa itself. Not only is South Africa the most blatantly racist country in the world, but it is also the country where the church is most openly identified with the racism and oppression that exist in that society.

In 1980, black South African Christians made a statement in which this painful realization was put on record:

The churches to which we belong have conformed to the patterns of a racist society. The persistent cries of the black people that the church is not consistent with the demands of the gospel of Jesus Christ have fallen on deaf ears.'

Although this was said of *all* churches in South Africa, it remains true that the white Dutch Reformed churches must assume special responsibility for the situation. At the same time, the work of the World Council of Churches has not directly influenced these churches and the only truly ecumenical family that remains