Spot impressions of the IRS Conference held on 4 and 5 November 1983

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It is often possible to render a very brief report about long, dragged-out conferences. On this lightning conference, which lasted only twenty-four hours, sleep included, it is impossible to render a brief report.

Time can drag by monotonously, seemingly senselessly. At other times, it can also be rich, meaningful, crammed with impressions. This is what happened from Friday morning 11h00 on 4 November to Saturday afternoon 5 November at 13h00 at the Institute for Reformational Studies at 29 Tom Street, Potchefstroom.

Because those who attended the meeting cannot speak enough about it, we would like to share, by way of this report, the events of the conference with those not fortunate enough to have participated in an event described by one of the conference as a "small miracle".

Although I have been commissioned to compile an informal report, I would like to have my play unfold in three acts: vision, reality, and vistas for the future. In the first act prominence will be given mainly to the background to the conference and the preparations; in the second act emphasis will be on that which happened at the conference itself; and in the third act I will deal with the perspectives which opened up at the meeting, the vistas for the future born from it.

Vision

The idea that the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education should not keep the wealth of the Reformational life vision entirely to itself and for the benefit of its own people is not a new concept. Before the advent of the last quarter of the twentieth century the PU has already realized that it has to share the treasure with others as well.

From the middle of the seventies onwards momentum was gained. In 1973 the PU became the first White Afrikaans university to open its doors (for practical reasons at this stage only at the post-graduate level) to those of other racial groups.

In September 1975 the First International Conference for Christian Higher Education was convened upon the commission of the Rector of the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education by the Institute for the Advancement of Calvinism (the name of the IRS up to 1980). This Conference, held at Potchefstroom, drew a hundred and twenty delegates from nineteen countries.

It did not, however, remain limited to the gathering of the reformationally minded. The conference was a powerful stimulus to give wings to the Biblical vision of life so that it can cross the earth. A regular newsletter (first the Circular and at present the journal Orientation) was born at the IRS. In only seven years it grew to the extent that at present it is being mailed to 79 countries around the world.

Unfortunately the politicizing at the subsequent two conferences (the International Conferences at Calvin College, USA (August 1978) and Dordt College, USA (August 1981) and at present the Fourth Conference for CHE which has to take place, DV, in Amsterdam in the Netherlands in 1984, has turned what should be an inspiring celebration into one great frustration, bedevilling our co-operation with our like-minded colleagues in the USA and the Netherlands. (A separate volume could be written about the events from 1975 to 1983, but this is something that could cheerfully be left to somebody else.)

This via dolorosa had one advantage, however: it gradually began to wean us away from the Western world, in which we were still living and thinking. We began to realize more and more clearly that our calling lay not far away, but right in front of us: South Africa, Africa, and the so-called Third World. These people need us - and we need them. Just one proof of this can be found in the following: From the East (Australia, New Zealand, Korea), Africa and South America come requests from students to be admitted to the PU for post-graduate studies.

It is not in the Western world where Christianity is showing growth. On the contrary: in Europe a staggering 7 000 people per day defect from the Christian faith.

In the Third World the gospel is spreading like wildfire. In South Korea, for example, the very first Christians were only baptized 160 years ago. Today there are nine million Christians, and it is projected that half of the Korean population will be
Christians by the year 2000 AD. The same is happening in Africa: 4,000 new converts every day. At present Christians in Africa make up about 200 million out of a total population of 450 million. If this growth should be continued for the next 17 years, then Africa should, by the year 2000, be the Christian continent (anything between 300 and 400 million Christians!).

This spectacular growth, however, represents only one side of the coin. One should also ask how many of them are truly Christians. Is it not only a matter of the Church becoming stouter and larger, but no stronger? Do young Christians realize what the implications of their faith are for the entirety of their lives? Have they not only accepted Christ as the Saviour of their souls while for the rest they live their lives as before?

It is here precisely that the PU as a reformational institution has a tremendously important calling. The confession of the PU for CHE, after all, is the absolute sovereignty of God in all spheres of life - even in the traditionally so-called neutral terrain of science and scholarship. This liberating vision of life can be offered in the place of the traditional vision of life of Africa - which was also totalitarian by nature.

This new way of looking at life, however, has to gain concrete shape in the midst of the burning issues confronting man in Africa today. (The threats posed by Marxism, Islam, secularism, return to the traditional religions, dictatorships, poverty, famine, tribalism and many others.) Put quite simply: the Word of God has to gain meaning for the African in the concrete situations of everyday life. African Christendom has to mature in faith.

There is no need for the PU for CHE and the IRS to do primary missionary work - this has already been done in the course of time by thousands of missionaries who sacrificed much. We do, however, have a "secondary missionary task" to help the Christians in Africa to improve, deepen and widen the quality of their belief.

This African vision has never been lost sight of entirely. The IRS (then still the IAC) Executive, for example, on 13 March 1980 gave the Director the instruction to present recommendations about an action for Africa at the subsequent meeting. He duly presented a memorandum in which it was suggested that the project should be completed within three years in three phases (1981 - 1983), which had to culminate in July 1983 in an Africa Conference in Potchefstroom. As a result of the enormous costs of such a project, and because of a shortage of staff the idea of a conference was relinquished and it was decided to concentrate on the necessity of instituting a correspondence course in reformational life vision. Unfortunately that, too, had to be kept in reserve for the time being.

One does not, however, ever bury one's ideals completely...

On p. 4 of the active process of promoting the character of the PU for CHE (a document by the Rector's panel on the Christian character of the PU, dated 9/6/82) one finds the following:

"1.14 As a character university the services of the PU for CHE are not limited to the immediate vicinity (although, in the nature of things we do have a special responsibility here). This character has to pervade the entire country (and so has to be actively disseminated), and increasingly this has to be done worldwide too. One could thus here speak of concentric circles: local, national and international.

1.15 As a community university the PU for CHE is, in the first place, aimed at the Christian Afrikaner; but this is to be seen inclusively and not exclusively. In view of the fact that we are the only outspokenly Christian university in the country - and in some senses also in the world - we have, increasingly, to widen our scope of service to other communities, within as well as without this country, without in the least compromising our character, and without our being guilty of spiritual or cultural imperialism. Our objective still has to be to work towards the establishment of Christian universities of their own for all groups by means of the training of core personnel".

In the course of January to March 1983 the IRS granted the Director study leave to immerse himself once more in the intellectual climate of Africa. In the second place he also had to reflect seriously about what could be done actively.

An intellectual think-tank (involving, amongst other, the Rev. Stuart Fowler of Australia and the Rev. Christopher Raball) met in March. A decision was then taken to have a conference on 4 and 5 November. It had to be limited in numbers (25 - 30 participants), and had to be representative, as far as possible, of Christians from all population groups, professions and denominations in this country. It was decided that one African from outside South Africa would be invited as a guest. On the way back to Australia the Rev. Fowler stopped over in Kenya and the idea was that he would do preparatory work then and try to establish contacts.
At the last the wheels were set rolling...

Reality

As is usually the case in this world, the reality turns out to be so very different from the inspired dreams and visions: obstacles, traps, disappointments...

Of course the very first problem is a financial one. Such a conference could easily cost R5 000! Where would this come from? The Lord provided: R800 from the University's Fund for Foreign Relations, R500 from the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, and the rest could be drawn on the IRS fund (which has existed since 1978) called Action CHE International.

We had to tell the people of Africa in English what was meant by a Biblically-reformational life vision. The Rev. Rabali was given this commission, and he made a remarkable success of it.

Seeing that the IRS limits with many White but only a few Black, Indian and Coloured Christians in South Africa, it posed no problem to select a number of participants from among their ranks. But what to do about our Black, Coloured and Indian brothers and sisters? Urgent letters went out to a few key figures who had to supply us with a number of names and addresses. From among these the members of the think-tank selected about thirty, with a reserve list as a backup.

The Rev. Fowler also provided the names and addresses of three possible participants from Kenya.

The invitations were mailed in June. A brief résumé of what was envisaged with the conference went with the invitations, together with a prospectus programme, a list of the invited participants and the text of the lecture by the Rev. Rabali on the nature and the meaning of the Reformational life vision.

What would the response be? This was a real cause for anxiety. We are only too conscious of the fact that many Black people, Coloureds and Indians are not willing any more to talk to White people even about politics. What then would the response be to an invitation from a White institution to come and talk in depth about something like a Reformational vision of life in Potchefstroom?

Outside the ranks of the initiated the word Calvinism leaves a bad taste in the mouth for many people in South Africa. This is perhaps because the word has, for most people, a political connotation, because it has at times been seen as being practically synonymous with apartheid. In the field of the church it is often used in a way which causes it to be identified with rigid dogmatism and an attitude of "I am always right and you are always wrong..." It is thus unfortunately true that something substantial will have to happen for people to consent to arrive in Potchefstroom - the bastion of Calvinism in South Africa...

The Lord listens to prayer, however. Although the responses did not come immediately, they did come - although the invitations had to be repeated four times so that the available places could be filled and the necessary names drawn from the reserve list so that the number of participants could be complete.

It was only later that we would hear from participants what had made them decide to come at all.

Mr. G. Pillay (an Indian church historian from Durban) came because he was intrigued by the Christian approach. He believed that the reformational life vision was the only valid, viable vision of life for man. He came not out of political but out of Christian considerations. He came especially because the church is so slow to awaken out of its somnolence - and to take the lead at this critical point in the history of South Africa.

Mr. Benjamin Seobi (a Black teacher who has already attained the wisdom of age) gave as his motive that he would like to give himself as an instrument to effect the necessary changes in this country. He did not simply come by coincidence to study for an Honours in Philosophy at the PU, but he did this because the PU is the only university in the RSA which accorded with his own Christian beliefs. Here he felt himself to be at home - never mind the distance that he had to travel to get here! According to him the heart of man is much more important than his politics. The Bible, to his mind, is so good and so forcefully true that the church is afraid really to apply it in South Africa!

He is deeply worried about his own people who basically think very pragmatically. They do not care any more what the Christians say but want to know what they do. Christendom for them is useless because the same people who belong to the church in
everyday life suppress, curse and even hit them in the streets – something which Mr Seobi had to experience himself as an old man. He does not believe that it is wrong if the youth of today want to see deeds of love from Christians before they attach any value at all to this faith. Was this not what the Samaritan did? Is it not said of Christ Himself that He visited, preached and did good deeds towards all people? He did not only go around making (pleasant) talk. In the same way we all have to do God’s will – and not our own. If we do justice, then all other things will be added for us in grace. Love – for all people, of all creeds and races – is the greatest commandment of God. If we only try to be obedient, then the vision of the end of time, where no nation will rise against another any more, will be nearer to attainment for us.

Mr Aldyn Noble (a Coloured teacher/minister from Johannesburg) had to choose he could either act as the limelight speaker at some important conference about open sport in Bloemfontein or he could accept our invitation. Because he regarded his calling as a Christian as his highest priority, he decided to come to Potchefstroom even though he still had to write an examination on the Friday afternoon. He came to the PU (according to him the “holiest of the holy in Afrikaanseorden”) as the representative of the Coloured community, in his view the Cinderellas of the communities of South Africa. He opened his heart – without hatred, qualms of conscience or reproach – and told of the misery, the frustrations and the dreams of his community.

Mr Ray Durheim (a geophysicist of Wit) told the story of how he came here in spite of the fact that out of protest he had broken off all contact with Whites. And he left here as an altered man, someone with new hope. As an English speaker he discovered a hitherto unknown “race” (Afrikaans-speaking!) here at Potch.

I could continue in this vein to mention the reasons why Black, Coloured, White and Indian decided to co-operate. This would not be necessary, however, because the basic reason underlying the decisions of all had been the same: a shared belief in Christ. This is the bond binding more closely than all the differences in colour, language and diverse ecclesiastical backgrounds. This bond was – as emerged clearly later on – the one single reason for the success of the conference.

Dr Tokunbo Adeyemo, the man whom we had invited from Nairobi, Kenya, did not reply. Had he already written off South Africa? Or did he perhaps not receive our invitation? (Although only Algeria, Angola, Libya and Somalia have official postal boycotts against South Africa, there are many countries in Africa, such as Nigeria, which refuse, quite unofficially, to deliver post coming from South Africa).

A letter in which we approach his secundus was then posted. To our great joy Dr Adeyemo’s letter then turned up in which he accepted our invitation. He had been away on one of his numerous overseas journeys, and could not reply earlier. Fortunately we were still able to retrieve the letter to the secundus from the post office!

Dr Adeyemo did not, however, land at Jan Smuts devoid of problems. Just two months previously Kenya had instituted stricter measures against people visiting South Africa. If they came to South Africa, they had to be willing to take the risk that they would not be admitted to Kenya again. And, even if they should be admitted again, they would possibly face the prospect of a stiff fine.

Dr Adeyemo himself suggested a solution, even though this increased the travel expenses.

Following the solution of this one problem, another reared its head: we waited and waited, but the Department of the Interior did not let us know whether Dr Adeyemo would be granted a visa to enter South Africa. A week before his arrival it was in the post – too late to be sent on to him. (This entailed a phone call to Nairobi, which only cost R16,00!) On the day when we went to meet him at the airport, we had to hand in the visa to Passport Control to allow him to set foot on South African soil!

That day was 2 November 1983. This was a day of enormous political significance for the people at the southernmost tip of Africa. The day of the Referendum! The day on which the Whites had to decide whether they would grant the Coloureds and the Indians co-partnership in the new constitutional dispensation.

Seeing that Tokunbo Adeyemo arrived a full two days before the other conference delegates, and because he was the guest of honour, he stayed with me. (One is seriously impoverished if one does not know a person like him). On Thursday we went into town to find a baby chair for his first son (he has only been married for two years), and a gift for his wife. Whenever we got back into the Combi, the radio had to be switched on to keep us informed about the latest results of the Referendum.

That afternoon Dr Adeyemo read a paper to a public audience at the IRS about The social responsibility of the church. Everybody was struck by his commitment
to Scripture and his reformational approach. This he could not derive from his tradi-
tion heritage, but had to attain himself slowly and laboriously from the Scriptures
themselves.

New marks of the Church (which are not even mentioned in confessional creeds like
the Belgic Confession) came to the fore from his reading of the Scriptures. His
basic thesis is the following: The church and its social responsibility are not two
separate, independent entities. If the church should again strive to be the church
according to the Word of God - in word and in deed - then its social commitment
and involvement would once again have to be something automatic.

To have family prayers together with this Christian was something of a unique ex-
perience. He does know his Bible. On practically every page his Bible has been marked
in red, blue and yellow. Upon inquiry by our insatiable offspring, it emerged that
every few years he worked through another English translation of the Bible. The most
important Scriptural passages are marked in red, and the second most important in
blue. The many sections marked in yellow represent all those passages which he had
memorized - including, for example, the entire epistle of James!

The evening following the publication of the positive referendum results, he read the
striking chapter 37 from the book of Ezekiel. The prophet sees a horrible vision of a
valley filled with the bleached bones of many men. Such had been the condition of
Israel. God, however, can blow new life into skeletons. He can make a nation re-
cover and render peace unto them again...

On the same evening he also told the story of his own life to enthralled listeners.
He was born of a noble and wealthy Moslem family in Ibadan in Nigeria in 1944.
After he had completed his education in 1963, he decided to enter politics and to be-
come, within ten years (by 1973) the president of his country! This would seem not
to have been such a wild dream given his abilities, descent, status, and the involvement
of his family in the hierarchy of the national government.

Great disappointments in his political aspirations (amongst others the overthrow of
the government, one of the 33 coups d'état in the more or less 20 years of indepen-
dence in Africa) and his own materialistic vision of life caused him to look more
deeply into things, and to ask more profound questions: What is the meaning of Life?
What happens after death? Islam could not provide satisfactory answers to these
questions.

Upon the invitation of a friend he started reading the Bible, at first without hearing
it speak to him. Later he started attending religious services in a Christian church.
Under the influence of a Coloured missionary (the Rev. F. White) from South Africa
he gradually came to be converted (1968). (This is one of the reasons why Dr Adeyemo
still today has a soft spot for South Africa. He has visited the country four times).

From then onwards his life changed completely. The fear disappeared, he found ans-
ters to his questions in a completely new perspective on life. And he persisted in
this in spite of the fact that his Moslem parents and relatives rejected him utterly and
wrote him off as if he did not exist any more.

He passed so well in a Bible correspondence course that he was invited to come and study
at a theological school. Then followed studies and work in the USA. In 1977 he became
the general secretary of the AEAM (Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Madagas-
car). At present he is perhaps one of the men most informed about the position of
Christendom in Africa. (From a total of 51 countries he has already visited 35 south
of the Sahara).

He has already been offered high ambassadorial posts, but has rejected them all. He
has discovered such a precious treasure that he feels he has to share it with all. He
believes that it is not important how long one lives, but it is more important to do what
is worthwhile with one's life.

In spite of the fact that he has two Masters' and two Doctoral degrees in Theology,
he has remained an utterly humble person, as befits a true Christian. Although this
seems to be turning into a novel, I have to resist telling how he eventually met his wife,
Ireti Ayelaagbe. For Adeyemo God is not a far-off, impersonal being. No, He is near
us always. For that reason one should also consult Him about everyday problems, such
as looking for a wife!

The Rev. Nico Botha (a missionary among the Coloureds, among whom Islam is gaining
ground tremendously) came from Randburg on the Thursday evening to talk to Dr Adeyemo,
who had been Moslem himself and had experience of missionary work.

According to Dr Adeyemo the most ineffectual method of bringing the gospel to these
people is by direct confrontation. The following methods are much more effective: a
convincing Christian life and example; true discipleship; a friendly relationship, in which
you care for the whole person; few personal words, but rather many words from the
Bible; persuasion to read the Bible for themselves, and, finally, knowing for oneself
what Islam means.

I had to sit still and wonder whether these are not basic guidelines and tenets for all
missionary work. We talk so much and do so little to win others for Christ ...

The same evening (Thursday 3 November) the first conference arrived at Jan Smuts
from Durban, Port Elizabeth, East London. The following day our numbers grew to
32 (10 Blacks, 2 Coloureds, one Indian, 2 Koreans and 17 Whites).

Thus the long-awaited day dawned. While the ubiquitous friendly cuckoo called a
greeting from the garden of the IRS the conference one after the other stopped in the
most beautiful oak lane in the entire country and entered the IRS building.

Following the welcoming tea-drinking at 11h00, the opening followed, taken by the
Director of the IRS. The Scriptural passage read upon this occasion was the well-
known section from Mark 4: 26-32, where Christ compared the Kingdom of Heaven
with a mustard seed. Like a mustard seed all our efforts for Christ are humble and
negligible. All things begin modestly - like the giant oak trees in Tom Street. It
is difficult to believe that each of these giants also originated from a single corn.

Mustard, even though being proverbially tiny in seed form, yet has a tremendous
growth. It is not an ordinary vegetable - just as God's Kingdom cannot be compared
to ordinary earthly domains. Mustard cannot be accommodated in an ordinary vege-
table garden - just as the Kingdom of God cannot be limited by any considerations
of race and colour and language. Just like the birds of the sky all the nations can
come to roost in this domain.

Christ purposefully does not compare his Kingdom here (as is often the case elsewhere
in the Scriptures) with the mighty cedars of the Lebanon. He wishes to keep us humble,
small and dependent in his sight. If we just have faith - even if it is as tiny as a
mustard seed (Luke 17:5) - it is sufficient. Not the size, but the growth potential, the
vitality of the faith, is important.

In this spirit we have to see this mini-conference. We are smaller than a Gideon's
band, but we may never be contemptuous of the small things. Our strength does not
lie in our isolation, but in our smallness lies our strength. A well-known proverb in

Afrikaans says that "Man is man through his neighbour". We have to become better
people for other people – and so be better for ourselves too.

From a hymn compiled especially for the occasion we sang "Sing, sing a new song
to Jehovah" (Psalm 98). The strong male voices reverberated in the conference hall.
In spite of quite a few efforts to the contrary Prof. M. Elaine Botha was the only woman
to attend the conference.

Following the prayer imploring the blessing of God, which was confirmed by a hearty
"Amen" on all sides, the introduction followed. We had to get to know each other.
Each participant thus got up in turn, saying his name, what his profession was and also
to what church he belonged. Dr Adeyemo in typically simple fashion merely stated that
"I belong to the church of Christ".

After some essential organizational arrangements had been made - and at such a con-
ference one has to think of hundred tiny details - we had our first midday meal together
in the cafeteria of the Henkie Bingle Students' Centre.

(On the way to the Centre I had occasion once again to think of Henkie Bingle, our former
Rector. The Lord has indeed blessed the University with very able men as rectors. It
was Prof. Bingle who, in 1974, came to my office one afternoon and stunned me with the
words: "We have to have an International Conference on Christian Education here in a
year's time". That day I nearly fell over backwards out of my chair: I had been working
as Director for exactly one month at the time and had to arrange a World Conference!)

In spite of the fact that we all had to use a language to which we were unacquainted
(English) we started loosening up after lunch. What would the Conference bring about?
Would the various racial groups simply start piling abuses upon each other, so that at
the end of the conference we could perhaps say that we had really talked it out - and
thus perhaps lay the foundations for really achieving something at the next conference?
To sit and moan in the garden for a whole day might be essential at times, but that does
not yet mean that something worthwhile has been sown or planted.

The Rev. Rabali received his theological training at the Hammanskraal Theological
School of the Reformed Church in South Africa. Following that he obtained his
Th.M. (with a distinction) from the Potchefstroom University for Christian Education.
Since 1981 he has been missionary of the Reformed Church of Ikgeng among the
Black people in the area around Bloemfontein, in the District of Potchefstroom, and he has also been working on his doctorate.

He spoke about a reformational life-view for Africa and approached this especially via the well-known four solae of the sixteenth-century Reformation. The core of this vision of life is soli Deo gloria, to God alone the glory. The rule or the guideline is sola Scriptura, the Bible only. The Scriptures are the only guide which can lead us to a life of glory in Christ. This is true for the entirety of our lives, not only in the isolation of prayer or in the field of the church or of theology. In the third place the motive, the driving force of the reformational life-view may be seen as consisting in two solae: sola fide (only through faith) and sola gratia (only through grace). These two key concepts show the way along which man may be saved: the first the way in which salvation may take place, and the second the fact that this salvation can only be seen to be utterly merciful and unrelated to personal merit. For that reason gratitude has to play such a large part in the life of a Christian.

The Reformational life vision is the only consistent, Biblical and all-encompassing philosophy of life. Man's entire life is divine service, religion, worship of God - in all that he does.

If one looks at Africa today, there might well be millions and millions of Christians, but most of them do not adhere to a radically Christian view of life. They live half-way between two worlds: that of being a Christian in the church and perhaps at home also, and that of working in the harsh outside world. This is to a large extent the fault of the missionaries from the West who grafted a pietistic Western Christendom onto Africa. One can thus assume without contradiction that in Africa - as in so many other places in the world - there is an enormous need for a radical, total, and integral Christian vision of life.

It is not without symbolic significance that the initiative for this should have emanated from Potchefstroom. But even that which has been done from the side of the PU has to be submitted continually to the Reformational credo of semper reformanda (ongoing reformation).

The ensuing discussion then provided some more enriching and farreaching perspectives. A few impressions will be recorded.

For the African, who is by nature steeped in religion, a religion which is involved only with their soul and the hereafter is of no value whatsoever.

Nobody doubts - remarkably enough! - the value of the Reformational life vision. (Simply by acknowledging that God is the Lord and Master over all things one already acknowledges that one's confession holds significance for the whole of life!) What one does have to submit to further scrutiny, however, is how all this may be concretized within the African situation. In what way could the interaction between the traditional African life vision and the Reformational life vision - both totalitarian in nature - best be effected?

We should not only re-interpret the sixteenth-century Reformation but also the spirit which moved Luther, Calvin and others and try to apply these to our own times - otherwise these would remain dead letters for the people of today.

The four solae were the answers for the Reformers which they found in Scripture to apply to their own times. What are our urgent problems of today? If we think about this well, we may well discover that there are other Scriptural truths today which might be more relevant in the context of Africa. Perhaps we might even discover different solae which could indicate our direction by shining brightly on our path. And perhaps it might be that this truth has to be formulated not only in the form of a sola but also in the form of an et!

In close conjunction to this followed a discussion of the need for a truly indigenous African theology, which would not concern itself with the problems of the Western church of the past but which would really "scratch where it itches".

Then the youth of Africa came under scrutiny. For them Christianity in many cases would seem to be losing its validity - and their empty hearts are being conquered space by Islam or the ideology of secularism. "I will use my stick on God if I should find Him, for He makes the White man rich and the Black man poorer and more and more unhappy. All the praying and singing are useless. The church is merely a cosmetic luxury intended to keep people occupied - it means no more than just that", one young man has said. Another has asked Dr. Adeyemo: "How is it possible that you can be Black and still be a Christian?" A third has said: "I left Christ at the theological seminary because He would not help me. I am now a freedom fighter".
Upon closer examination it appears that in most cases the young people are not opposed so much to the Christian faith as to the miserable image which we disseminate in our own lives. The church will, however, have to keep account of this increasingly utilitarian and humanitarian attitude.

The church of Christ will have to distinguish itself clearly - and then mostly by the fruit it bears. In Africa of all places the church may not neglect its prophetic-critical calling. It is the voice of the voiceless, the only institution which can speak to the government in a one-party state. Black martyrs for Christ are not at all unusual in the Africa of today.

Finally: the dynamically reformational (not statical reformed) life vision is neither reactionary nor revolutionary. It does not, however, canonize the status quo either. If we do not keep on reforming, we stagnate.

The Director had compiled, from the literature covering the contemporary situation in Africa and from the lectures held at the conference, a list of about a hundred key words which indicate problem areas. The challenge now would be to check whether the reformational life vision can shed any light and provide any guidance in these burning issues (such as poverty, tribalism, nationalism, etc.). The list was then studied, crucial concepts grouped together, and eight discussion groups had to tackle one complex of problems each.

On the evening of the Friday and the following morning our perspective on Africa and on the Third World still had to be extended somewhat more by way of the papers of Dr. Adeyemo (on Africa), Mr. Kim (on Korea), the Rev. Anglada (in absentia on Brazil) and Dr. Echeverria (on North America and the Netherlands). Following that each of the discussion groups (3 to 4 members each) would tackle the problems seriously.

But a little relaxation was called for first. The Rector, Prof. Tjaart van der Walt welcomed the guests in typically witty fashion and received the guests for a buffet dinner. Our guest of honour, Dr. Adeyemo, also received a momento from the university for his desk in Nairobi (the University emblem mounted, with gold lettering and with his name added).

The conference was then continued with inspiring communal singing, and then Dr. Adeyemo was introduced to read his paper on *The Church in Africa today*. This covered the following points: (i) the strong points of the church in Africa; (ii) the weak points; (iii) the most important problems facing Africa; (iv) contending powers threatening Christendom; and (v) a Biblical vision of life (or the gospel in context).

One thing emerges very clearly: Today Africa is a continent both bleeding because of shattering needs of all sorts, and yet blooming because of the growth of Christianity. There can be no doubt that Africa has a real need of hope and perspective - the liberating perspective of a Biblical vision of life. "This is gospel in context! Not just a set of facts to know, a set of verses to memorize or a collection of rules to obey, but a dynamic encounter with the risen living Saviour woven together with my circumstances over which He exercises his absolute Lordship ... to proclaim the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ never goes without a price being paid. Is the church ready for that?"

Adeyemo related wonderful things about Africa. To a question as to the danger of Marxism for Africa he provided the remarkable answer that this precisely is where the church is flourishing (as for example in Angola and in Mozambique, both of which he had recently visited). Communism cannot destroy the church. But the Islam aggression and ordinary nonchalance, materialism and secularism can destroy the church.

The Rev. Bruce Taho from Xukwane in the Ciskei closed the day's work with a reading from Thessalonians 2:13 ff and a prayer to God not to forget this bleeding continent. Our last hymn for the day then echoed through the building.

Then the real talking started in the De Klerk Guest House, a former ladies' residence of the University which has since been converted into a residence for visitors. Some of us only fell into bed exhausted by 02h00! It is no wonder then that one of our speakers (Dr. Echeverria) should have been ill the following morning, and then could not read his paper.

On Saturday 4 November at 09h00 the Rev. Kippie Jaftha of Bloemfontein opened the proceedings for the day by reading from Colossians 3:8-17 and by letting us sing our hearts out to prepare for the new day.

Mr. Sung-Soo Kim, a Korean who is at present completing his doctorate in Theoretical Education at the PU, then spoke. He was born in 1949 in Taegu in South Korea, and
has been an assistant professor at the Korea Theological College and Seminary since 1977. (He is one of four Korean families at present living and studying in Petcho-stroom.) He spoke on The status of Christendom in Korea and the possibilities for the promotion of a biblical vision of life.

First he related something about the history and the tremendous growth of the church in Korea. Then he treated factors which could inhibit the growth of a Biblical vision of life. Subsequently he looked at the past, the present and the future of Christian Higher Education in Korea. In conclusion he mentioned about ten ways in which the reformational vision of life could be promoted in his country. At the top of the list was prayer without end. At number 3 he said that “A biblical vision of life ... should not be a cold dogma or merely a theoretical system of thought. It should always be the natural enactment or result of our Christian commitment.” Many of the other suggestions that he made will be of use to the PU in the future – also in the realization of its international calling in other parts of the world.

The discussion of his lecture centered especially on the importance of education in the broadening of a Christian vision of life. This begins with the immediate family: “The home must be the centre of God’s work”. We should not – as is so often the case - fasten our hope only to the schools and the universities.

The brothers in Christ began to open their hearts. “Did you know that only 4% of the Coloureds in South Africa at present reach Standard 10? Did you know that the first school for Coloureds was only established in the Cape in 1913? The first high school for Coloureds only in 1956 in the Transvaal, and that the Free State only has one high school for my people? Did you know how the University of the Western Cape – to which we are compelled to send our children – destroys our children? When they return from that university, they are leftist terrorists: anti-White, anti-Africans, against their traditions, against the church and probably Moslems by conversion. The bitterness among our young people is indescribable.”

Somebody else mentioned the fact (so many of us do not know these things) that the education of a Black child is only subsidized to the extent of one-fifth of the education of a White child. Separate education is not necessarily equal education.

Dr Paulo Anglado, who intends to come and study at the PU for CHE in 1984, sent a written contribution. It is remarkable that, even though he comes from a completely different part of the world, the Christians in Brazil seem to have exactly the same problems as their brothers in the faith in other countries in the East and in Africa. He first dealt with the descent and the character of Christendom in his country and then with the possibilities for the promotion of a Biblical vision of life there. He also stressed the value of conferences, good books and correspondence courses in the development of a comprehensive, consistent Biblical vision of life – which still does not exist in Brazil.

As has already been stated, Dr Echeverria unfortunately became ill. Seeing that this paper had already been circulated to all the participants before the conference, this was not an irreparable disaster. With a few sweeping lines about the USA and the Netherlands he attempted to give an impression of the position of Christendom in the secularized Western world. Although these problems are different and more complex, the basic questions in the so-called post-Christian West are very much those that we have heard of in other countries represented: How should the Christian live recognizably in the world? What does Reformation mean in the Western context?

From 09h30 to 11h00 there was uninterrupted discussion as the eight groups got stuck into their topics. The commission to each group had been not only to talk but also, at the end of the session, to formulate some resolutions and recommendations which could be discussed by the entire conference.

A rich diversity of resolutions and recommendations were handed in to the committee. These were processed and systematized, quickly typed and photocopied so that each member of the conference very soon had a copy in front of him.

Something remarkable happened. With only minor alterations all the resolutions and recommendations were accepted unanimously by the conference. The last recommendation read that the document had to be handed as soon as possible to the Rector of the University, Prof. Tjaart van der Walt, by a four-man commission (Messrs Pitley, Noble, Seobi and the Rev. Botha).

By 13h30 only we could walk across to the cafeteria to have our last meal together. Prof. M. Elaine Botha did some acknowledgements and presented each speaker with a small souvenir of the occasion. Before the lunch started, Dr Adeyemo closed the proceedings with a powerful prayer and Scripture reading (Zachariah 5 and 4). If we
If we wish to work for the Lord, we have to keep three things in mind: (i) cleansing in the blood of Christ; (ii) being filled with the Holy Spirit; (iii) continual obedience to God the Father.

It was with sadness that one took leave of the others. It was one of the shortest conferences, yet at the same time one of the conferences which left the most lasting impression on one — according to Prof. M. Elsine Botha the best conference that she had ever attended in Potchefstroom.

Dr Adeyemo would only leave on the Sunday afternoon. He thus went along to visit the area covered by the missionary work of the Rev. Rabali, and on the Sunday morning he preached in the Reformed Church in Ikageng. The Kmerees and many Whites also attended the service. Adeyemo spoke in English and the Rev. O.T. Serobetse translated into Tswana. It is a marvellous experience to hear such a man speaking from the pulpit.

The passage from Scripture is Acts 12, and his main points were (i) Peter in prison; (ii) the congregation prays for him; (iii) God intercedes, and (iv) the congregation expresses joy.

The story is told so realistically that one could almost see the events taking place. The children were spellbound.

Finally, special stress is laid on prayer. A praying congregation is a growing congregation, but also a strong congregation and finally a joyous one.

The divine service, together with the introduction, the interpreting, the presentation of a gift and the acknowledgements got to be a little long, so that the time available for the delicious meal prepared by Mrs Serobetse was whittled down finally to about 20 minutes. Dr Tokunboh, however, is not easily daunted. He does not disappoint his hostess: "If we have to, we can eat in 15 minutes — in the army I have had to do it even faster!"

At 12h30 we dropped Dr Adeyemo at Mr Gert Kruger’s house, who then took him to Jan Smuts Airport. We greet each other with a lump in the throat. For the past three and a half days I have been privileged to get to know a Black brother, a sensitive Christian, absolutely devoted to the service of the Lord, and one who often made me ashamed of myself. (For example, he rises every morning at five o’clock so that he can study the Word and pray before starting the day’s work. Then he goes for a five kilomere jog in order to stay physically fit too. By seven he is ready for breakfast, and he is at the office half an hour before the other staff members!)

On Tuesday morning 15 November the deputation (Messrs Pillay, Seobi, Noble and the Rev. Botha) presented the resolutions and the recommendations of the conference to the Rector, Prof. Tjaart van der Walt, in his office at the university.

Each of the members stated briefly why they participated in the conference and what they gained from it. They were eminently successful in conveying to the Rector the “spirit” of the conference.

The various resolutions were then further elucidated and the Rector set questions to elicit more information. The discussion centred especially on Recommendation 10: “Since we as a conference have noted that Coloured, Indian and Black members of the Reformed family are excluded from studying at some White universities, particularly from the PU for CHE with its commitment to the Reformational view of life; and since we have furthermore — with utmost concern — taken cognisance of the fact that in these circumstances they are compelled to study at institutions which are by no means conducive to their development as Reformational Christians, we most urgently appeal to the Council of the PU for CHE to open the doors of this university on all levels to these Christian brethren in need.”

(About the urgent and compelling need for Christian Higher Education for Black and Coloured people, you are referred to the IIRS Study Guide no. 195, March 1984, by Dr J.J. Venter: The need for and urgency underlying the concept of Christian university training for Black and Coloured Southern Africans).

In the discussion of this topic it appeared that Potchefstroom had a vital role to play, and it also appeared that these people had a very high regard for the person and viewpoint of Prof. Tjaart van der Walt. If the PU, not out of opportunistic considerations but on the basis of Christian principles, should open its doors, other universities would have to think carefully and then do the same.

They are fully aware of the many practical problems (such as, for example, the necessity of bridging courses, proper living quarters and bursaries). Solutions to these problems
could be found in time, however, and the PU could initially, as a transitional phase, help people with extramural classes only. A resolution in principle, however, that Indian, Coloured and Black students who would want to study at the University because of its special character would be welcome could be announced by the University, and would be most welcome.

Would the PU then have to bow before the numbers of the Black students? This is not really in the realm of probability: since the PU has been opened to Black students (for ten years now, since 1973) at the postgraduate level, there have been on 24 "other races" from a total student body of almost 7 500. Does a fear such as this not rather testify to an irrational fear born of an inferiority complex? Mr Noble: "The drop of water that we will take out of the PU bucket will barely be noticeable". And somebody else added that this need not necessarily impoverish the University but that it might become richer - in the case of the Coloureds, for example, through their contribution to the Afrikaans language.

While I sat listening to the discussion, something struck me. The IRS is not merely, anymore (as the Rector stated earlier) the PU's "window to the outside world". It is not any more a one-way window through which one has to look at the outside world without being seen in one's own turn. No, the IRS - and every other department at the University - has a two-way goal: the needs of the world also have to be laid at our door.

And then one sends a prayer upwards: "Good Lord, do grant that the PU will always be worthy of its surname (for Christian Higher Education) so that these people are not disappointed. You know how the secularising process also demands victims among our own people. What does it help if we are the leaders in one field or another, but we have relinquished our character, the reason for our existence and our birth? Do grant that the window to heaven of the PU will never become obscured or be closed!"

It was a stirring occasion to have, first, Mr Pillay extending a word of gratitude to the Rector and then to have Mr Noble close the meeting with prayer.

From the antique wisdom of India, the birth-place of his forefathers, Mr Pillay quoted two very suitable proverbs: "A person who is locked into himself makes a very small and unobtrusive little bundle, which will go unnoticed by history", and especially this one: "The problem with the building of fences is that one always keeps out more than one lets in".

Equally stirring was the prayers with which the white-haired old father Seobi closed the proceedings at lunch: "God, we have found a few small coals with which we can warm ourselves. Grant that these may spread and flare up and give light and warmth to the many outside there. Amen!"

Perhaps Gerald Pillay did not exaggerate when he judged the conference in the following terms: "I do believe that another such meeting did not take place in the country today ...." Perhaps this will be confirmed by history.

Vistas for the future ...

When, after all this has been said and done, one sits back and looks over the past events, a new vista is born of the initial vision and the ensuing reality. At first this is vague, as when the morning mist hangs over the Mooi River. Then the outlines begin to emerge ...

In great excitement one jumps up: This is tremendous, what God has granted we may now do - with God working through us. We cannot keep quiet any longer if we have so much to share with others who are less privileged! We are living in a time when one cannot sit still and look on.

What a blessing it is - and this has been amply proved by the conference - that God does not pay any attention to man-made fences. Our shared faith is the bridge over all abysses. For that reason we did not doubt each other's bona fides at the conference but fell to the job at hand immediately.

Let us forget the failures of the past, such as the international conferences subsequent to 1975 - even though these have put us back ten years in our efforts to do some constructive work. What does it help one anyway if one impresses the whole world over there, and one has not even done one's duty in one's own country?

Simply all the resolutions and the recommendations of this tiny conference have placed enough issues on the agenda to keep us occupied day and night for the next ten years and more. (The strategy for the future was mapped out at a meeting of the working committee following the conference. This took place on 6 and 7 January).

We will not, however, only look at the next five or ten years, but also at the next fifty, one hundred, two hundred. As with all sowing, we will perhaps not see the fruit or gather the harvest. But then the focus is not on us, but on Him - from Who, by Who and to Who all things exist. Before we ourselves may become seed, and are buried by the
roadside, we have to disseminate the good seed of the Kingdom as far and as wide as is possible over this and other continents.

This conference has also opened up vistas that stretch even further. The door of eternity opened - if only for a moment - to accord a glimpse. We were given a quick glimpse of the new earth: A reborn world, where no more mistrust, bitterness, hatred, oppression and lovelessness will reign - because all the saved souls will be singing the praises of the Lord. This we tend to forget: if only we were to obey God, then we can, even now, discover something of eternal joy in this broken world.

May this conference be entered into the annals of the IRS and the PU as the "mustard seed conference": a tiny point of light which has come into being in the dark and stormy night of Africa, a grain of salt, a little yeast - which will all quietly and unobtrusively do what has to be done.

Thirty-two people could not do 'all this in the course of a working-day of only eighteen hours. This was clearly the work of God alone. Therefore, to Him, the Source, the Holder and the Purpose of all things - to Him belongs all the glory, in all eternity! (Romans 11:36).