To our brothers and sisters in the Pentecostal churches in South Africa:

We greet you in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

We thank God for the gift of his Spirit which he has freely given to the church, and which we, through faith, have fully received. We thank him that it is the same Spirit who has baptised us into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12.13). We are also grateful to God that we can be his witnesses here in South Africa, in spite of the disappointment, the pain and the sorrow this witness entails.

Our country is a land of beauty and splendour, yet within its confines there is immeasurable deprivation, suffering and death. We cannot understand how innocent people could have been subjected to so much humiliation and indignity for so long. We cannot understand how we could have insulated ourselves from the suffering of our own people within the body of Christ.

We are reminded of the time when God sent Moses to Egypt to tell Pharaoh to release his people (Ex. 5.1), for he had seen their affliction and had heard their cry (Ex. 3.7). We believe that our God is a God who “changes not” (Mal. 3.6), and that he has seen the affliction and has heard the cry of his people in South Africa. We believe that as God had called Moses to deliver his people from the yoke of slavery, in the same way he calls the church to proclaim prophetically the deliverance of his people from the yoke of apartheid.

We praise God for the churches who are obedient to this call, and who are working as his instruments to end apartheid.

What about us? Are we not also part of the body of Christ? (1 Cor. 12.27). Have we not been baptised into one body by one Spirit? (1 Cor. 12.13). Why then, have we never joined together with the rest of the body as one united witness against apartheid?

When we examine ourselves, we find that we have not borne a true testimony that apartheid is ungodly and unchristian. Rather, we have helped feed and nourish it to grow and be the monster it is today.

From within our ranks there has emerged right-wing Christian groups who try to discredit any of God’s people striving to bring about justice and equality in South Africa. They claim to be apolitical, yet by nature they are pro-
government and are, therefore, very much political. They claim to be anti­
communist, yet the enemy we face is not communism but apartheid. They
claim wealth and prosperity in the "name of the Lord", yet the laws of the land
are such that it is impossible for the majority of the people to share in the na­
tion's wealth.

We have been so closely aligned to these groups that we are in mortal danger of
selling our birthright and of becoming right-wing ourselves. Our history shows
us that this was not the way Pentecostalism began.

We trace our history back to the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, in 1906.
While slavery had already been abolished, black people still carried the scars of
this horrible system. They were still politically oppressed and discriminated
against. The white mainline churches felt that they held monopoly over God's
grace and revelation. If anything was to be done, it would be by them, and not
by the children of slaves. But God "lifted the meek" and "gave grace to the
humble" (Ps. 147.6; Jas. 4.6), for it was in a little black church, led by a hum­
bble black minister, where this revival took place. It was an astonishing fact that
white ministers from the South (prior to the Civil War this was a place where
slavery was religiously protected) went up to Los Angeles to receive the gift
and the blessings of the Spirit through the intercessions and prayers of their
fellow-black believers. It was a time, as an eye-witness stated, "The "colour
line" was washed away in the blood" (This quotation is taken from Walter
Hollenweger's book, Pentecost between Black and White, p.19.).

We also note that in our history there emerged a right-wing element that
brought about the unchristian separation between the white and the black
Pentecostal churches.

It was unfortunate that white Pentecostals succumbed to the pressure of the
conservative mainline churches, which tried to discredit them by pointing out
their "lowly" beginnings in a black church. It was unfortunate that white
Pentecostals gave in to the laws of the Southern states which prohibited racially
mixed meetings. It was unfortunate that we received this kind of com­
promised Pentecostalism, the kind that shaped our thinking and our theology.
Much of what we received as traditional Pentecostalism is in fact a subversion
of the true Pentecost of Acts 2 and of Azusa Street.

In the Azusa Street Revival we find the legitimacy to continue our witness as
Pentecostals. It was here that God called to himself a prophetic movement in
an oppressive society that belied the dignity of black people. It was here that
God called to himself humble people to be his witnesses in a hostile world. It
was here that powerless people were baptised in the Holy Spirit and endued with power to preach the good news of Jesus Christ, with “signs following”

It is in this tradition that we come bearing a Relevant Pentecostal Witness.
1. INTRODUCTION

From the outset we wish to make it known that we are not working at cross-purposes with, nor do we want to duplicate that which has already been stated in the Evangelical Witness. We have been challenged by this document and our attempt at a Relevant Pentecostal Witness must be seen as a witness built upon this challenge.

We have come together for the following reasons:

1.1. The Call of the Gospel

We believe that we are to preach the good news of our Lord to the whole world. We believe that we are to be obedient to the Great Commission which the Lord gave us — to make disciples of all nations (Mt. 28.19). However, we are aware that neither our Lord nor his disciple preached in a vacuum, but in a concrete situation. Holy Scripture affirms that the Good News was not divorced from the people and their reality. Our Lord did not make claims which people could not understand or relate to. Before he claimed to be the Bread of Life, he fed the hungry (Jn. 6.11, 35). His claim to be the Light of the World was made intelligible after he had healed a man born blind (Jn. 8.12; 9.1,2).

1.2. The South African Situation

The concrete situation in which we are called to preach is one where a minority ruling class has occupied the major part of the land. They have benefitted from all its economic wealth, while the disenfranchised majority have faced the brunt of political oppression and economic exploitation. Furthermore, the ideology of apartheid had received its support and justification from a particular nationalist theology within the Reformed Church. The English-speaking churches also lent their support to this heresy.

Apartheid works on the premise that the different race groups in this country should be separated. This was put into operation by the Group Areas Act, the Bantustan System, and recently, the Tri-Cameral Parliament. With the present "Reform" policy of the government there is the anticipation of a fourth "Black Chamber" added to the present Tri-Cameral System. All this legislation has further increased the frustration for millions of people. One of the prime implementors of apartheid ideology, H. Verwoerd, stated that apartheid was an act of "good neighbourliness", a very different view of neighbourliness to that presented in the Scriptures (Lk. 10.29-37): the story of the Good Samaritan.
This false and distorted view of “good neighbourliness” is still being put forward today by the proponents of apartheid. One doesn’t have to look far to know that apartheid is designed to keep political and economic power in the hands of the white minority at the expense of the black majority. Even today with the so-called Reform programme by the South African government, it is not uncommon for blacks to remain victims of re-settlement programmes and forced removals, with the consequent break-down of family life. This is a direct contradiction of what the church believes concerning family life. Scripture teaches that “what God has joined together let no man put asunder” (Mt 19.6). Apartheid retribalises black people, separating them residentially on this basis. As a result of this policy most black people are to be re-settled in Bantustans, visiting “white South Africa” only as migrant workers.

In recent years there has been an upsurge in resistance to apartheid. The government has responded by declaring a state of emergency, banning extra-parliamentary organisations to the left of the government, banning individuals, detentions without trial, and an attempt to silence the media in this country, more especially the alternate press.

Churches and church organisations working to end apartheid have been the targets of severe criticism from the government. The situation is such that the government wants to decide what should and what should not be preached from the pulpits. Church leaders, notably Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Rev. Frank Chikane, Dr Alan Boesak and Dr Beyers Naude have been presented by the government media as instigators of violence and are accused of being Marxists in Christian clothing. As Christians we pledge our support for these leaders in their prophetic witness, for in choosing between Caesar and God, we choose God.

1.3 The Silence of Pentecostals

Our attempt in the above analysis of the South African situation is admittedly superficial, yet by all accounts we have been conspicuously silent. It would seem as if we are preaching the gospel in a totally different situation. Here we must admit that a make-believe situation has been created by the defenders of apartheid. It is a situation where there is no human suffering, no politically inspired unrest, and no dissatisfaction with the present ruling class. It is a situation where there is law and order, stability, justice and peace. Our silence lends support to this make-believe situation and betrays our blindness to the true context. Our silence is a wilful support of an ideology that is irreconcilable with the Holy Scriptures and with our Christian Faith.

In repenting of this sin we are forced to re-examine our theology.
2. PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGY AS A CONSERVATIVE STATUS QUO THEOLOGY

2.1 Salvation and Repentance

In order to enter the body of Christ, one must be “born again” (Jhn. 3.3). There is a turning away from the old order. A new act of creation takes place (2Cor. 5.17). The person who is now a believer has found salvation and is spoken of as “being saved”. Salvation is seen as a personal affair between the individual and God. It is highly internalised and the conditions within society that make people act in a certain way are not taken into account. People are called to repent from drunkenness, fornication, adultery, drug addiction, stealing, lying and other “sins of the flesh”. We do not deny that these are sins and that we need to address them, however, we have become as hypocritical as the Scribes and the Pharisees who “straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel” (Mtt. 23.24), by omitting “the weightier matters of the law...” (Mtt. 23.23). We have neglected to point out sins such as racial prejudice, bigotry, economic exploitation and oppression. All these sins have produced the structural sin of apartheid. We tend to address the problems and not the cause. Therefore, we have not challenged the perpetrators and the adherents of apartheid. Neither have we challenged people to repent of the racism of white supremacy, nor have we challenged those who accumulate wealth at the expense of the poor to find salvation in the Zacchaeus tradition (Lk. 19.8,9).

South Africa is a land of unequal opportunity. It is a land of two worlds — a world of the rich minority and a world of the poor majority. Yet under such divisive conditions we preach a single message of repentance. We see sin mainly as an inherited human condition. We do not regard its presence in our society through the evil actions of people or in the implementation of evil structures. We therefore call master and slave, rich and poor, oppressor and oppressed, irrespective of the degree of crime or the degree of injury, to one repentance. We do not follow the tradition of John the Baptist who called on people to repent of specific sins within their specific social context. For example, he said to the tax-collectors, “Exact no more than that which is appointed you”, and to the soldiers, “Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely.” (Lk. 8.13,14).

We have also not followed the way in which our Lord preached repentance. The challenges he issued to the Scribes and the Pharisees (people who abused their privileged positions of power), were not the same challenges he issued to the poor and the oppressed. He called on the poor and the oppressed to “take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly at heart” (Mtt. 11.29). He called the Scribes and the Pharisees “hypocrites” (Lk. 11.44), and a
"generation of vipers" (Mtt. 12.34). He accused them of heaping unnecessary burdens on the poor and the oppressed, yet they were not willing to relieve the people of their burdens "with one of their fingers" (Mtt. 23.4; Lk. 11.46). To the victims of oppression he said, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mtt. 11.28).

It is ironic that severe discipline is placed upon those who falter and commit sins which we as Pentecostals emphasise, yet those who are guilty of many of the apartheid sins can even find sanctuary behind our pulpits.

2.2. Baptism in the Spirit

It is the sincere desire of all Pentecostals to be baptised in the Spirit. In order to covet this experience one has to live a holy life. To live a holy life one must no longer be beset by the lifestyle of the old order. Clearly visible must be a life of morality, goodwill, honesty, sober habits, meekness, obedience to the Word of God and respect for law and order. What is not understood, however, is that these virtues are normally more easily attainable in an affluent middle class society. Those who have to struggle with inferior housing, and inferior jobs, have neither the luxury nor the inclination to indulge in feelings of goodwill, meekness and obedience to their white "masters". Consequently, we are faced with the situation where a believer from an oppressed community, in order to receive the Spirit baptism, has to make a greater stride towards holiness than a believer from an affluent white community.

As Pentecostals we have failed to see that the maintenance of white affluence is done at the expense of black poverty and oppression. We have failed to acknowledge that the social conditions in the oppressed communities are a direct result of the social conditions in the affluent white communities. We do not deny that those aspects of morality and holiness which Pentecostals point out are important. However, in our situation they are not seen as being intrinsically linked with the corruptness of white affluence.

2.3 The Gifts of the Spirit

Concerning spiritual gifts, Pentecostals use 1Cor. 12.4-11 as an important source of information. There is no Pentecostal church that does not encourage its believers to seek for the gifts of the Spirit. While Paul lists nine gifts in 1Cor. 12, the more sought after gifts are: the gift of tongues, the gift of prophecy, the gift of discerning between spirits, and the gifts of healing. Pentecostals find in these gifts a great blessing and power when witnessing to the gospel of our Lord. No doubt, a church that has all the gifts in operation can be a powerful instrument for witness. However, when there is separation and division then
we can say that these gifts have been subverted and made of no effect. In 1Cor. 12, these gifts are given for the common good of the whole church. The use of these gifts testifies to the unity of the body of Christ (1Cor. 12.12, 13).

In South Africa the body of Christ is not united but politically and economically divided. While Scripture teaches that the dividing wall of hostility has been broken whereby we are no longer foreigners and aliens (Eph. 2. 14, 19), apartheid has reconstructed this wall separating us one from the other. For the most part, the Pentecostal church has thrived under the Group Areas Act. It has no qualms about having separate so-called Indian, Coloured, African and White sections within the church. Is this a true testimony to the one Spirit who unites us? (1Cor. 12.13).

3. THE RATIONALE BEHIND A CONSERVATIVE THEOLOGY

So far we have outlined the pertinent features of Pentecostal belief and we note the conservative way in which it has been implemented. We would be the first to admit that should these beliefs be contextualised then the church on the whole will be able to make a greater stride towards working for change in South Africa.

What is it that has made Pentecostal theology so conservative? The following reasons may be outlined:

3.1 The Pentecostal Message did not take its roots locally

It came from abroad, notably the U.S.A. When the early Pentecostal missionaries came to evangelise, they did not find it necessary to analyse the South African context. (This is still the practice today of Pentecostal pastors, evangelists and missionaries who come to South Africa to preach and to evangelise). They found it expedient not to jeopardize their position with the government of the day. Therefore, they did not get involved in any matter that seemed political. As a result, their message was conservative and upheld the status quo. We find this view in conflict with the tradition of the early church. The early Christians did not appease the ruling government so that life could be made easy. When unchristian demands were placed upon them, they defied these demands at the cost of their freedom and even at the cost of their lives. This is evidenced by the fact that much of the bible was written from prison.
3.2 The Pentecostal Message was Highly Spiritual

Reacting against nominalism in the mainline churches in the States, Pentecostals moved to the other extreme, in attaining a "high spirituality". Soon in most matters the "concrete" was replaced by the "spiritual", giving birth to a "other-worldly" theology. A person was seen as having a body, a soul and a spirit, and the greatest appeal was made to the soul. The social, political and economic conditions did not matter; what mattered was that the soul be saved. This is not the scriptural view of personhood. In the creation account the human person is seen as a living being, a holistic person (Gen. 2.7). Throughout the Old Testament the Hebrews always saw people as such. It was the Greeks who emphasised the idea of the soul. The New Testament followed the Hebrew tradition concerning its view of humankind. In any case, our spirituality can only be seen in relation to our humanity, for a tree is only known by its fruit (Mtt. 12.33). Because we have not attended holistically to the needs of people, many have seen the Christian gospel as irrelevant and have turned to other ideologies that can fulfil these needs.

3.3. The Pentecostal Preoccupation with Heaven

Heaven is seen as the goal to which all Christians should strive. Every aspect of life is seen from this viewpoint. In order to accommodate this one-sided view we tend to interpret everything spiritually. Thus, one is saved to enter heaven. Salvation becomes solely a spiritual possession. The Pentecostal preoccupation with heaven is seen in its liturgy, its songs and its ministry. Heaven is the focal point even in the counselling of the sick, the depressed and the bereaved. This "other-worldliness" has often led Pentecostals to be accused of being "too heavenly minded and of no earthly good". We believe that heaven is a promise to all believers, but while we are in this world we are to be witnesses to it. It is a world which God loved so much that he gave his only Son to it (Jhn. 3.16). As his church we continue this gift to the world.

4. A RELEVANT PENTECOSTAL WITNESS

We accept and affirm the Pentecostal teachings and its tenets. However, a Pentecostalism that ignores the concrete situation in which it works, can be extremely dangerous in its irrelevance. It can easily be infiltrated and manipulated by racist ideologies and exploitative structures. With deep regret we note that this has sometimes been the case. The recent statement, made in Durban on 3rd June 1988, by the Full Gospel Church is a case in point. On
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S.A.T.V. its stance against sanctions was given more coverage than its stance against apartheid. Unfortunately this statement was made to sound like one that may have emerged from the “Reform” programme of the Nationalist government. This does not mean that other Pentecostal denominations are any different. We believe that by making our witness relevant we will be obeying the call of the Gospel. We will also close the doors to any right-wing infiltration and manipulation.

As concerned Pentecostals we repent of our apathy to human suffering which has been the order of the day for so long in our country. We stand committed to work against apartheid in all its forms. Wherever possible we will seek to work with our brothers and sisters outside the Pentecostal tradition who are committed to bringing about a just society in South Africa. (“that they all may be one... even as we are one”. Jhn, 17.21). We also wish to affirm the fact that we are not closed to dialogue with others in the Pentecostal tradition. We need, however, to state our position quite clearly so that dialogue may proceed from this position.

By seeking a relevant witness we stand firm on the foundation of Scripture, and respond in the tradition of the Evangelical Witness.

5. PLAN OF ACTION

1. We need to take the message of a relevant witness to as many Pentecostals as possible throughout the country.

2. We need to link up and unite with other Pentecostals who are involved in a relevant witness.

3. Through workshops and other similar projects we need to work with clergy and laity on a theological education programme concerning a relevant Pentecostal witness.

4. We need to preach a relevant witness from our pulpits, incorporate it into youth programmes, the Sunday school syllabus, bible studies and the women’s groups.

5. As relevant Pentecostals we need to seek fellowship with each other, irrespective of our denominational ties. We need to meet for worship, exhortation and spiritual upliftment.

6. We need to make our witness practical by being involved in community projects in conjunction with progressive community organisations.
Dear Brothers/Sisters in Christ,

Christian Greetings!

The accompanying paper is the first impression of the Working Document for a Relevant Pentecostal Witness. It is our hope to expand on this Document according to this need within the Pentecostal Churches.

Therefore, we ask that you read this through carefully and prayerfully.

Your suggestions and comments on this Document are welcome.

Please direct it to the above address.