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A JOURNEY WITH A STATUS CONFESSIONIS

A Journey with a Status Confessionis

Analysis of an apartheid related conflict between the
Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa
and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 1982-1998.

Lennart Henriksson

Studia Missionalia Svecana CIX

The picture at the front cover is by the South African cartoonist Jonathan Shapiro who since the end of the 80s regularly has been published in numerous dailies and elsewhere.

In his cartoons he is lashing not least the South African leadership—to their great indignation—but is also unmasking stupidity, racism and everyday problems in society.

The picture is from 23 July 1999 and is related to an actual bill on *the promotion of equality and prevention of unfair discrimination*.

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Fanny in Memoriam

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cover from a terrible headache (Ecumenical deliberations can be tough).

To write a dissertation in a ‘foreign’ language is challenging. The variation in the language becomes almost by necessity somewhat restricted and the precision might sometimes be lacking, but formally it must be correct. For that I have leaned upon my good friend Magnus Nydén whose sharp eyes have scrutinized the manuscript. For that I owe him great thanks. What I have done with the text after his correctional work is beyond his reach and every language error, misconception of the topic and incorrect footnote, or whatever, is my fault and no one else’s.

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Part I

1 Introduction

Prelude — on goalposts and confessions

Goalposts have an important function—to define a special place or to delimit a certain space. Often we would automatically think of goalposts in relation to certain sport activities—not least football/soccer, but it could also be conceived in a figurative sense, as a set of values.

For me who do not play much football/soccer but occasionally run marathon the goal is the distant point of arrival; the arc through which I have to run at the end of the race; what I increasingly long for, the more the further I come along the path; it is the point I know is 42,195 meters ahead at the outset; the distant oasis where I finally can rest and refill for the continued more normal walk in life. A goal that is moved further away is for the marathoner like a dried-up oasis.

If we stick to the football metaphor we know that when the ball passes within the limitations the goalposts provide, the player who manages to get the ball in place is honoured and the team receives points in the table. It also tells everyone that the aim of the action—the shot, e.g.—has been achieved. To be able to accomplish this, the goal has to be reasonably well defined and stable—not varying in size or having various, all the time changing, locations. To try to achieve something where goalposts are moving might be part of a fun challenge in some computerized games, while few would say so if the same thing happened at the real football/soccer arena.

This picture—of a football/soccer goal—was used by the leadership of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) in a discussion in the mid-nineties about the (white) Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in South Africa.¹ This church had been suspended in the early eighties from the fellowship with the other Reformed churches in the WARC and the question was whether it could be re-instated into the fellowship again after these years in the cold. At the time of the suspension some requirements had been established that the DRC had to comply with before any change in relations could take place.

Inevitably, the context in which the original demands were formulated differed in many respects compared with the prevalent situation some fifteen years later. Among the non-white churches belonging to the same family of churches—which were some of the main proponents of the suspension—the theological reflection around apartheid had deepened and a major outflow of that theological reflection was the confessional statement called *the Belhar Confession*. This statement provided a theological ground for a new united Reformed church to be that had sorted out the apartheid legacy and this confession was by many, not only in South Africa, seen as an ‘acid test’ on whether the DRC was prepared to abandon its previous support for apartheid.

One problematic question then was whether the WARC could demand from the DRC, as a requirement for being reinstated, to incorporate this confession into their constitution or not—or if such a demand would be just like moving the goalpost further ahead, to raise a new demand beyond what was set up in the conditions for a return into the fellowship some fifteen years earlier. That in turn opens for questions on the formulations from 1982: how accurate were they in the South African situation in 1998? Were the formulations too open and too vague, or could they maybe on the contrary in reality be conceived as too narrow?

¹ This metaphor seems to have been used widely internally but there are few visible examples of it. The former vice President Pieter Holtrop is reflecting on the situation after the re-instatement of the DRC into the WARC fellowship under the heading *The ball is now in our court*. (Holtrop 1999); It is also used by the WARC General secretary Milan Opočenský in his speech at the DRC synod in 1998 (see p. 190)

This situation, which I will sketch more clearly later—the suspension of the DRC and its reinstatement, without any moved goalposts—provides me with the framework for this dissertation.

The first part of this dissertation, on fundamentals, is divided into two chapters, the first of which presents the procedural elements and the second some concepts for my further deliberations. Section 1.3 provides a more substantial exposé over how the content of the study is structured.

1.1 The Problem

To write a about churches in South Africa, their ecumenical relations and their dealings during and soon after abolishment of *apartheid* could be comprehended as an imprudent or intrepid enterprise. One could without doubt question whether there are any stones left that still are unturned in all the uncountable attempts to understand the ideology inherent in apartheid and its emanations in or permeation of every aspect of social life in South Africa—as well as its effect in the surrounding countries and in international relations.

Therefore my interest, and the scope for this dissertation, does not lie in apartheid as such—neither in its origin, growth, manifestations and dire consequences for so many, nor in its (formal) demise. About this there is an almost limitless abundance of material available in every feasible academic discipline.²

As briefly indicated above I will take as my point of departure the conflict³ that emerged between on the one hand the world-wide commu-

² Yet, the previous huge interest in South Africa has declined substantially after the formal termination of apartheid, the Mandela epoch and the Truth and Reconciliation process. Now it is as ‘any other’ country. The main reason for a renewed interest at the moment is the approaching World Championship in football in June and July 2010.

³ It might have been possible to use other words to describe what was going on between the DRC and the WARC: Was it a debate, a dispute or a discussion? It was all of it but the word that incorporates the sentiments—not least on the white

Cont. next page

nity of Reformed churches that gathered in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches⁴ and on the other the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa.⁵ This conflict was expressed in different ways over time; it was during one period merely pronounced as a critical stance—on the side of the WARC—towards what they perceived as *racism* in South Africa and the DRC. Later the criticism was mainly directed towards *apartheid*—or against *separate development*, a euphemism often used by white South Africans—as such, but first and foremost against the theological acceptance and, furthermore, justification that the DRC gave to apartheid.

The examination I will undertake in this dissertation will start with the outstandingly strong statement by the General Council—the main governing body of the WARC—when they in 1982, at the meeting in Ottawa, expressed as their almost unanimous view that the DRC's stance in relation to apartheid was in conflict with the very heart of the Gospel. They therefore declared this situation to be a *Status confessionis*—a situation where the validity of the Gospel's teaching about reconciliation and Jesus' redeeming activity was at stake.

Practically this led to the suspension of the DRC from the community of churches that regularly met in the WARC for theological work, deliberations over different subjects, and—(about) every seven years—a General Council.

Fifteen years later the DRC was said to have fulfilled the conditions that was set in 1982 and the DRC was welcomed back into the fellowship, if only they at the coming Synod the following year declared

South African side—is conflict, especially as the power structure of the WARC permitted them to define the problem and to take measures against the other part.

⁴ The WARC is not the only Reformed community on the world-wide arena, but by far the largest and oldest. The WARC was established in 1875 under the name "The Alliance of the Reformed Churches throughout the World holding the Presbyterian System". In 1970 this Presbyterian movement united with the International Congregational Council to form the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (Presbyterian and Congregational). Today, since the General Council held in Accra, Ghana, in 2004, the membership consists of 214 churches in 107 countries, comprising some 75 million members. In June 2010 the WARC will merge with the Reformed Ecumenical Council, a smaller community of Reformed churches. The new name will be World Communion of Reformed Churches.

⁵ 'Definition' of the DRC will be provided in chapter 3. See also appendix I for a description of the complexity regarding the name.

themselves in favour of the *Joint Declaration* that already was taken at the WARC General Council.⁶

Thus, the problem I will deal with is about *the conflict between the DRC and the WARC from the outset in 1982, the reason for it, its development and finally how it was settled in 1998, and how that settlement should be understood*. There is one easy question that covers it all: What was it all about? This, the basic question, carries with it several others especially as this was a process that evoked many sentiments and reaction in different layers of the South African society, as well as on the international ecumenical arena, politically, socially, theologically and more. Therefore many different voices came to the fore.

This could be a study emanating from many disciplines, but my intention is to enter it from a missiological perspective. From there I will pose questions on why the decision in Ottawa was taken; what was inherent in the demands for a reinstatement; why the people in the DRC understood their own standpoints differently; how one can conceive the dealings leading up to the reinstatement; the outcome.

To meet what is needed to fulfil an examination of this I will have to study how this conflict and all deliberations were expressed—for instance in documents, minutes and conference reports—, listen to a broad variety of voices, validate them and to examine them in relation to the situation in South Africa in general and in the relevant churches. As this conflict also relates directly to several other churches in South Africa and to the overall social and political development I have to take in material from many others besides the two main parts in the conflict.

If the material on South Africa as such and apartheid in particular is overwhelming there is not much, according to my understanding, that is written about the process briefly depicted above—the direct dealings between the WARC and the DRC.

⁶ Also another South African Church was suspended on the same reason—the Nederduitsch Hervormed Kerk. Still in the spring 2009 the discussion is pending between them and the WARC whether they have complied with the requirements. Thus, they are still outside the WARC fellowship. I will not deal with this church except in minor comments, mainly in the background chapter, ch. 3.

The decision to suspend a church was in a way a courageous move in a challenging situation—no such decision was ever before taken in the history of the WARC. Besides, the decision could easily be comprehended as indicating that the churches and their representatives at the meeting regarded themselves as being much ‘better’ than the two South African churches that were challenged by it. Therefore the wording of the decision also challenged all other Reformed churches to reflect on the need for repentance and actions in their own settings—regarding inter alia questions about racism, social injustice, and economic suppression. The General Council also commissioned the Executive Council to keep the whole issue under regular revue.⁷

Certainly, few other questions received that huge amount of recognition in the ecumenical movement on the whole. Therefore it is somewhat astonishing that while several studies of the South African situation—including the situation in the churches—and the World Council of Churches has been carried forth, almost nothing more substantial has been written with relation to the WARC.⁸

A somewhat perturbing question arises immediately when one tries to define how the conflict really should be labelled.

Is it an ecumenical conflict? This view could easily be defended as the whole discussion takes place in the ecumenical arena. Furthermore, there are many more participants besides the two put forward above, the DRC and the WARC, and the so-called DRC-family of churches. There is the ecumenical movement in South Africa, not least in the appearance of the South African Council of Churches (SACC), but also the so-called English-speaking churches, the Catholic Bishops Conference, and many more.

⁷ (WARC, GC 1982, p. 179-80)

⁸ That does not mean that not much has been written about the DRC and its relation to the overall ecumenical movement. Its relation to the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the South African Council of Churches (SACC) had for instance been strained for a long time and about that much more had been written. E.g. AGS Gous: *Die Ekumeniese verhouding tussen die NG Kerk en die WRK*, (Gous 1994) and Pauline Webb: *A Long Struggle – The involvement of the World Council of Churches in South Africa* (Webb 1994). The WCC itself has provided a great deal of material, not least through its Program to Combat Racism.

Should it be described as conflicting views on Reformed ecclesiology? In 1881 the DRC detached⁹ the coloured members in the church and established the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) for them. That church became in 1994, together with the black Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA)—which is another from the DRC discharged church—the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA)¹⁰. In his doctoral dissertation about the DRMC Chris Loff¹¹ deals not least with the discussion on and the formation of the church. Besides, the confession of Belhar that was accepted by the DRMC and the DRCA and became a foundation for the establishment of the URCSA has an obvious ecclesiological character. Furthermore, the WARC in appendix 15 in the minutes of the Ottawa General Council describes the situation thus: Institute for con

“In certain situations the confession of a church needs to draw a clear line between truth and error. In faithful allegiance to Jesus Christ it may have to reject the claims of an unjust or oppressive government and denounce Christians who aid and abet the oppressor. We believe that this is the situation in South Africa today.

The churches which have accepted Reformed confessions of faith have therefore committed themselves to live as the people of God and to show in their daily life and service what this means. This commitment requires concrete manifestation of community among races, of common witness to injustice and equality in society, and of unity at the table of the Lord. Gereformeerde Kerk and the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk, in not only accepting, but actively justifying the apartheid system by misusing the Gospel and the Reformed confession, contradict in doctrine and in action the promise which they profess to believe.”¹²

⁹ Maybe it could be called semi-detached instead as the ‘mother—the DRC—kept all governing power for the next 100 years in these churches.

¹⁰ The acronyms are plentiful. To make it even more confusing they appear in both English and Afrikaans. Especially in Afrikaans they can have many different shapes. Please see appendix I for an overview.

¹¹ (Loff 1998)

¹² (WARC 1982, p. 177)

Or is the overall perspective about missiology? At about the same time as the decision by the WARC was taken in Ottawa, the DRMC minister and theologian Hannes Adonis defended his thesis entitled *Die afgebreekte skeidsmuur weer opgebou*.¹³ Therein he demonstrates, as is the main aim with the dissertation, that “the mission policy of the White DRC is deeply intertwined with the ideology and practice of apartheid”.¹⁴ To this can be added the contemporary widely acclaimed view that “[c]hristianity is missionary by its very nature, or it denies its very *raison d’être*”¹⁵, or to put it differently: To be a church is—by nature—to live in mission. Even theology, according to Bosch, “rightly understood, has no reason to exist other than critically to accompany the *missio Dei*. So mission should be ‘the theme of all theology’”. This all-encompassing focus on mission became utterly clear in the message of the *World Conference on Mission and Evangelism* in San Antonio, Texas, in 1989, which in its initial paragraph proclaimed:

“At the very heart of the church’s vocation in the world is the proclamation of the kingdom of God inaugurated in Jesus the Lord, crucified and risen and made present among us by the Holy Spirit.

The Triune God, Father and Holy Spirit, is a God in mission, the source and sustainer of the church’s mission (John 20:21; Acts 2). The church’s mission cannot but flow from God’s care for the whole creation, unconditional love for all people and concern for unity and fellowship among all human beings.”¹⁶

The perspicacious reader has already found that I have chosen to put mission as the super-ordinate perspective. This was, however, not self-evident. All three perspectives briefly indicated above might have been possible to use as point of departure. In one sense it is almost impossi-

¹³ (Adonis 1982) Engl. Title: *The broken down barrier is raised again* [my transl.]

¹⁴ (Adonis 1982, p. 223)

¹⁵ (Bosch 1994 (1991), p. 9)

¹⁶ (Scherer and Bevans 1992, p. 73-4) Reprinted from Wilson, F.R., *The San Antonio Report: Your will be done – Mission in Christ’s Way* (Geneva: WCC, 1990), p. 25-35

ble to make clear-cut distinctions between them. They are intertwined and interrelated. The choice of mission is—besides being in line with the actual ecumenical perspective of the church as of necessity living in mission—primarily based in the self-understanding of the DRC as a missional church and that it is rooting its own reflection on e.g. church and society in its mission policy.

While choosing mission as the overall perspective I will rely on David Bosch's magisterial work *Transforming Mission*—especially the later parts where he outlines the elements of an “Emerging Ecumenical Missionary Paradigm”¹⁷—in my analysis of the missiology of the DRC.

1.2 Questions to address and Hypotheses

In the theological conflict which I will deal with there are two main contestants—the WARC and the DRC. When that is said, one must immediately admit that there was a tremendous underlying conflict: between a far-reaching apartheid system—supported and to some extent promoted by the DRC—and those in South Africa that suffered under that system.

Seen in that way the WARC is the one that at a certain time in the (church) history of South Africa had the privilege and possibility to formulate the problem of the involvement of a church in a system detrimental to the reconciling grace of God. This was done in such a way that the DRC was forced either to totally break all ties to the fellowship of churches at every level and to become an almost lonely tramp also at the international ecclesiastical arena, or to try to develop a new theological understanding of what it meant to be a missional church in South Africa. Simultaneously it was a crucial time for the WARC. Had they refrained from taking the step they took—to declare the situation a *Status confessionis*—their credibility had been undermined or even lost, not only among the black churches in South Africa, but in the (Reformed) Christian community globally. This, in no way, means that there were no possibilities to act differently. It was a real choice that had to be made: to back off or to take a clear stand. They stood firm

¹⁷ (Bosch 1994 (1991))

and chose the conflictive way. A minority of about 10 percent of the delegates at the General Council, among them the DRC representatives, made another choice and voted against the proposals—of no avail.

In the following I will provide the story of the conflict from different angles. As one of these has to do with colonialism and post-colonialism it is important not to be a victim of the possible colonial tendencies this conflict is supposed to counteract. Sugirtharajah means that when dealing with this kind of issues the

“relevant question will be about how they affect the lives of the people, rather than whether the proposal is modern or non-modern, colonial or anti-colonial. The task of postcolonialism is to ensure that the yearnings of the poor take precedence over the interests of the affluent”.¹⁸

Consequently I will give space to those South African voices that often are described as subaltern by the power structures of the white Afrikaner society and its churches; I will not do that as a principle, nor as a result of a potentially biased mindset but because the conflict is in reality about them and their situation. Furthermore, without them and the voices ‘from below’ it is questionable whether the WARC would have stepped up its criticism in the way they did.

Questions

The decision concerning the DRC (and the NHK) taken by the Ottawa General Council is expressed in a resolution consisting on three sections.

The first section states

“At the present time, without denying the universality of racist sin, we must call special attention to South Africa. Apartheid (or "Separate Development") in South Africa today poses a unique challenge to the Church, especially the churches in the Reformed tradition. The white Afrikaans Reformed Churches of South Africa through the

¹⁸ (Sugirtharajah 1998, p. 112-3)

years have worked out in considerable detail both the policy itself and the theological and moral justification for the system. Apartheid ("Separate Development") is therefore a pseudo-religious ideology as well as a political policy. It depends to a large extent on this moral and theological justification. The division of Reformed churches in South Africa on the basis of race and colour is being defended as a faithful interpretation of the will of God and of the Reformed understanding of the church in the world. This leads to the division of Christians at the table of the Lord as a matter of practice and policy, which has been continually affirmed save for exceptional circumstances under special permission by the white Afrikaans Reformed Churches. This situation brings a particular challenge to the WARC.

...

In certain situations the confession of a church needs to draw a clear line between truth and error. In faithful allegiance to Jesus Christ it may have to reject the claims of an unjust or oppressive government and denounce Christians who aid and abet the oppressor. We believe that this is the situation in South Africa today.

...

The Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk and the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk, in not only accepting, but actively justifying the apartheid system by misusing the Gospel and the Reformed confession, contradict in doctrine and in action the promise which they profess to believe. Therefore, the General Council declares that this situation constitutes a *Status confessionis* for our churches, which means that we regard this as an issue on which it is not possible to differ without seriously jeopardizing the integrity of our common confession as Reformed churches".¹⁹

¹⁹ (WARC, 1982, p. 176-8)

The second section in the resolution notes “with profound disappointment” that the white churches “have still not found the courage to realize that apartheid ... contradicts the very nature of the church and obscures the Gospel from before the world” and therefore finds no alternative than to suspend them “until such time as ... [they have] given evidence of a change of heart”. This is thought to be expressed in the following three conditions that the DRC had to comply with:

- a. Black Christians are no longer excluded from church services, especially from Holy Communion;
- b. Concrete support in word and deed is given to those who suffer under the system of apartheid ("separate development");
- c. Unequivocal synod resolutions are made which reject apartheid and commit the Church to dismantling this system in both church and Politics.²⁰

The third section of the decision is directed to all other member churches and the WARC itself about the need to reconsider one's own misgivings in regard to racism in our own societies, but also by supporting the racist structures in South Africa through financial involvement. This section also challenged churches in the West to develop relations to those black churches that were directly involved in the struggle for justice in South Africa.

The issues in this third section of the decision lie mainly beyond the scope of this study, while the first two are at its centre.

The WARC at its General Council in 1970 discussed the situation with the DRC and clarified that a

“church that by doctrine and/or practice affirms segregation of peoples (e.g. racial segregation) as a law for its life cannot be regarded as an authentic member of the body of Christ”

Thereby they had already pronounced the criticism that twelve years later was elaborated into the expression on a *Status confessionis*.

²⁰ (WARC 1982, p. 177-9)

It is an overall criticism of the life of a church but furthermore, these harsh words might according to my understanding be understood as criticism of that church's mission policy.²¹ It was as an explicit expression of their missionary praxis that the coloured members in the DRC congregations in 1881 were thrown out from the existing church and referred to a separate church for coloureds, established and governed by the DRC. From then on there is not one Dutch Reformed church for everyone, but several Dutch Reformed churches. One which thereafter is designated as (the white) mother church and several, and over time varying, (coloured/black/Indian) daughter churches—not because of differences in belief/creedal base but as a consequence of different colour.

This coincided well with the pattern of the general colonial mission epoch although the colonialism in South Africa had begun early and this new phase more related to the time of gold and diamond findings and the rapid industrialization that followed thereafter. It is also a period when the question on the identity of the Afrikaner people begins to evolve and gains momentum.

Bosch is noting that the “nineteenth century colonial expansion would once again acquire religious overtones and [is also] intimately linked with mission”, contrary to the early period of trading company colonialism by e.g. the Dutch when they were having very hesitant attitudes towards missionary ‘intervention’.²² Thus, I find that there are reasons to believe that the expression of a *Status confessionis* by the WARC and the mission policy of the DRC are closely related to each other.

From this develops my first question. *The situation in the DRC and its relation to the so-called daughter churches—as an outflow of its idea of ‘separate development’, later also expressed in the support for and theological legitimizing of apartheid— can be understood as a consequence of a mission policy; Can the expression of a Status confessionis by the WARC therefore be seen as a critique of the mission policy of the DRC?*

²¹ (WARC 1982, p. 177); Cf. (WARC 1970, p. 226)

²² (Bosch 1994 (1991), p. 303)

The three requirements put forward in the Ottawa resolution had been worked out in a special working group during the meeting with the General Council. That is not a *creatio ex nihilo*. I will present the background and reasons—all of which developed over time—for the possibility to take this stand in the General Council. It is rooted in a time and a situation that takes in several different perspectives.

In this the black DRC churches are playing an important role; for instance through their internal development whereby they gradually developed a theological reflection of their own; given their growing emancipation from the white church; as a result of their growing involvement in the ecumenical fellowship nationally and internationally.

The social and political situation in South Africa and how the international community dealt with it is also one factor to take into consideration. Another factor is the overall ecumenical situation and the different ecumenical bodies' attitude to apartheid.

Although the time span for this study is short—only sixteen years—there are important changes that take place during these years. Consequently, it is quite possible that what was a potentially reasonable thing say in 1982 might be totally obsolete 15–16 years later. That must also be given appropriate consideration. In the above is the reason for my remaining three questions. They will all deal with the three requirements.

How shall we understand the meaning of the three requirements?

Did the DRC fulfil the demands?

Hesitant discussions went on within the WARC on whether the replies from the DRC really covered what many felt was needed (Had the ball been shot between the goalposts?). With that question unsolved—was the welcome back of the DRC rather an adaption to a new post-apartheid situation than an acceptance of its answer?

I suppose a quick glance at my questions could give the result that I rather clearly indicate that the outcome in 1998 did not correspond to what in my view a reasonable consequence of the *Status confessionis* ought to be.

Critical voices can be raised against this for at least two reasons. “It is easy to sit in Sweden, some eleven years later and tell what was right or wrong”. And secondly: “In this kind of evaluation one should

be neutral as far as possible”. That is a fair criticism. Nonetheless, my perspective is to a certain degree biased and so it must be.

Having visited South Africa for the first time in August 1986 with a State of Emergency in full swing; having participated in morning devotions everyday at the South African Council of Churches (SACC) office, Khotso House, listening to stories of the bestialities of last evening/night carried forth in the townships by the security forces; having learned about the work of local congregations and SACC field workers trying to give support to the victims; having met personally with Wolfram Kistner and Beyers Naudé²³ who were urging me to tell ‘the story’ at home; having during several days (and nights) met with people living underground of fear for (renewed) imprisonment and torture; having ‘sneaked’ into Soweto at night, together with those who did not give up (and knew the loopholes) to see what was going on—having experienced all this, it is impossible not to be biased.

On the other hand I am to a large extent a rather well-off, traditional liberal, western, middle-aged man, living in a rich, relatively peaceful, relatively equal and until late relatively mono-cultural country—all of which also provides me with a certain (underlying) code of interpretation. These two conditions must be handled, if not in harmony so at least in a balanced and conscious way.

This does furthermore not mean that I have not done my utmost to get sources that provide me an opportunity to evaluate the processes in a reasonably fair way. This goes for both the WARC and the DRC. Neither does it mean that I talk about right or wrong in an absolute way—which in itself is a tricky thing in a time when post-(or late)modernity compels us to reshape our understanding of truth. Especially as this dissertation basically is not about right and wrong at all.

My own involvement, in 1986 and in different ways before and after that, is part of the ‘story’. Let me only say that being open about this is the only possible hermeneutical attitude. Furthermore it is never possible for the scholar or researcher to be “really a neutral figure; he or

²³ Wolfram Kistner was director for the SACC department of Justice and Reconciliation and was breaking the rules of his banning to receive me at home neglecting its potential threat to him. Later I met with him several times and got access to his comprehensive archives. Beyers Naudé was by this time General Secretary at the SACC.

she is not really somebody who is standing above it all and just pontificating, but somebody who is really somehow involved in it".²⁴ By being explicit about it I am thereby giving the reader the possibility to make her or his own judgment—which in any case has to be done.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses I now will present underline my somewhat critical attitude.

I have the following two hypotheses:

- The DRC did not give a reply to the WARC that involved the deeper meaning of the *Status confessionis* but one that only complied with the explicit wording of the requirements
- The WARC followed a legalistic pattern in their assessment of the reply from the DRC and thereby let pragmatism prevail over radicalism.

1.3 Structure

This dissertation consists of four parts.

Part 1 is providing the formal background and introduction to the study. It is split into one procedural section—chapter 1—and one conceptual section—chapter 2—where the first, as already seen, contains information on the problem, the research questions and hypotheses as well as some notes on reflections on material used for the dissertation. The second chapter will deal with some conceptual considerations and thereby indicate my method.

The following part—chapter 3—is mainly a background chapter. My study deals with questions that relates to South African history, social history, colonialism, ecumenism, church history, and dogmatics to mention some views of relevance. This chapter could have been expanded unrestrainedly and beyond any control but I have chosen the different subsections to give the reader a necessary introduction to

²⁴ (Buttigieg and Bové 2004, p. 185) The words come from Edward W. Said in an interview partly about *Culture and Imperialism*.

what then follows. Without that much in chapter 4 to 8 would be very difficult to comprehend.

Chapters 4 to 8 are the investigating ones and make up the third part of the dissertation. In one sense chapters 7 and 8 are in the centre given their headings—they seem to deal with the two ‘combatants’ more directly. Nonetheless, as I mentioned above we are dealing with a time and a situation when and where there are so many different relevant participants that it is only partly true. All and everyone in the vicinity of the *Status confessionis* issue have to be listened to. So chapters 4-6 provide us with some additional entries to the issue. They clarify that all those involved are inter-related and that the different views are inter-woven into each other.

In the last chapter in that part—chapter 9—I will give a summary of my findings in the 5 previous chapters. Chapter 9 will do this, contrary to how I have dealt with the material earlier, chronologically and in this way also give a very brief résumé.

Finally, the last and forth part consists of chapter 10. Here I will give the feed-back on the questions I have put forward, and take up the hypotheses again for an examination in light of the material I have brought forward.

The appendices with some additional material—abbreviations and glossary as well as an index of themes and persons etcetera—is included as a service to the reader with the intention to facilitate a smoother reading.

1.4 Previous Research

To give an exposition over previous research on the (Reformed) churches relation to apartheid is almost an unworkable project.

In an article about the *Belhar Confession* Dirkie Smit tries to list those who have been important in its establishment. He ends the two lists after several names by adding: “and many of their contemporaries” respectively “and again many more”.²⁵ That would be my fate as well if

²⁵ (D. Smit 2006, p. 292)

I would try. As pointed out earlier, not much at all has been written about the WARC and the DRC besides what they had written themselves while in the middle of the debacle.

As indicated above there are several issues that relate to the conflict that can be, and have been, dealt with separately as well— e.g. *Status confessionis*, the *Belhar Confession*, the *Kairos document* and the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. I will here just give some short indications as to where material concerning this can be found.

Status confessionis is not a specific Reformed expression and therefore references can be found in Lutheran discussions also; see especially Duchrow for that. It will be dealt with briefly in section 3.3.2. On the Reformed side I can mention Blei and Smit.²⁶

A major contribution to the discussion that emerged around the *Belhar Confession*—the coloured church's theological reflection over the declaration of *Status confessionis* (SC)—is a collection of essays under the common heading *A Moment of Truth*.²⁷ Smit, Durand, Cloete and others provide a thorough analysis over what a confession is, how it can be of value in the church unity process and how this confession relates to the SC. Lukas Vischer has expounded in several publications on the confessing in the Reformed tradition as such.²⁸

The discussion of the *Kairos document* is often dealt with in relation to a more wide-ranging discussion of contextual theologies. As a direct response to the document some ten articles were published in the *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, beginning in volume 55, June 1986. For a more general discussion on *Contextual theologies*, especially if one relates this to mission, one must mention Bevans, Schroeder, Schreiter and Bosch.²⁹

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is an event in itself and the discussion in South Africa about it has been vibrant: Is it right to give amnesty to people who have committed appalling crimes? Why

²⁶ (Duchrow 1981), (Blei 1994), (D. Smit 1984); Cf. (WARC 1989)

²⁷ (Cloete and Smit 1984)

²⁸ (Vischer 1982) (Vischer 1999)

²⁹ (Bevans 1992), (Bevans and Schroeder 2004), (Schreiter 2002 (1985)), (Schreiter 1997), (Bosch 1994 (1991))

wrap it in Christian garment by electing Desmond Tutu as chairperson and beginning the sessions with prayer? Did it provide the white population with a false feeling of having done what was needed? Etcetera. This and much more is discussed in an abundance of books and articles.³⁰

Most of what is mentioned here has been essays and articles. There are of course also South African authors who have written monographies that touch the themes in question here, such as Dirkie Smit, John W. De Gruchy, Charles Villa-Vicencio, Johann Kinghorn, Allan Boesak, Herman Gilliomee, Sampie Terreblanche, Gerald L'Ange, Desmond Tutu, Albert Nolan, Willie Jonker, Simon Maimela, David Bosch and 'many more'.

Nonetheless, to conclude this section, they have not dealt with the issues just mentioned within the framework of the conflict between the DRC and the WARC, more than in few, small fragments in some works.

1.5 Material

A major circumstance in writing this dissertation has been the necessity to spend much time in archives and libraries abroad. A considerable part of my material is somewhat special. It is unprinted material, not that easy to get hold of.

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches has its office at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva³¹, and deep down in the basement is their archives located.

No restrictions whatsoever was raised and I could during several visits come and go as of my own choice. The problem I have had to face

³⁰ E.g. (Botman and Petersen 1996), (Boraine 2000), (Cochrane, De Gruchy and Martin 1999), (Jeffery 1999), (Krog 1998), (Meiring 1999), (D. Tutu 1999), and Several issues of Journal of Theology for Southern Africa

³¹ The Ecumenical Centre is the headquarter for, among others, the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Action by Churches Together (ACT) and Ecumenical Church Loan Fund (ECLOF). The library, containing 100,000 books, periodicals and pamphlets on the ecumenical movement, is the largest in the world in the ecumenical field.

there is that the material is not very well organised and structured. The former General Secretary Edmond Perret did a paramount work after his retirement and indexed publications, minutes, special reports and conferences from the beginning of (the predecessor of) WARC in 1875 until 1992. It was valuable for me for background information but did not cover the whole period of my study. In addition, all other kinds of documents, besides those just mentioned, such as memos, reports, working documents and many more, are not indexed or catalogued.

Besides the archival work, the visits there have also given me the opportunity to have open discussions with members of the staff. Two formal interviews—with Setri Nyomi, present General Secretary, and Edmond Perret—has been carried forth.³²

The other part of this kind of material is what I have collected at the archives of the DRC in Stellenbosch and Pretoria. I was met with the same open attitude by the representatives of the DRC with which I was in contact regarding their archives. The archives are huge and organised in a totally other fashion, and it was neither allowed nor possible, as in Geneva, to look for material by oneself. This limited severely the possibilities to find material ‘that you did not know you were interested in’. So despite kind support this was a limitation.³³

Besides the non-printed archival material both organisations have some material that is printed but not published in a normal sense—such as minutes and other documentation from conferences, Synods or General Councils. At least the later ‘issues’ of these documents can often be

³² The archives is not the best possible to take care of important parts of the Reformed ecumenical history. I also found out that boxes that I earlier had ransacked at a later visit had changed designation so I cannot be absolutely sure that every notation I give in the bibliography is correct. I was also unsuccessful in my attempts to meet with Milan Opočenský who was General Secretary at the time of the re-instatement of the DRC. He, as well as Dr. Lukas Vischer passed away before I got a possibility to see them.

³³ When I began my search for South African material it was divided between Cape Town and Pretoria. Most of it is now transferred to a separate building in connection to the Kweek skool [Training school for DRC ministers]—now the Theological department of the University of Stellenbosch, earlier the separate institution for educating ministers for the DRC.

ordered from the offices, but most of those that are relevant for my study are out of print.

The material from the WARC and the DRC is my point of departure from where I search for additional material filling the gaps, giving background, adding necessary knowledge.

Part of that is what I already have mentioned in the section 1.4 on *Previous research*. Albeit being a study on a conflict between a local church in South Africa and an international organisation, this is about a South African situation, and those involved—persons and organisations—in the main are South African. Therefore I have tried to find as much South African views as possible. This goes for written material but also for the interviews I have made.

Besides the special circumstances with the archives there is one more threshold to overcome while writing about South African issues from Sweden. There is a scarcity of material here, generally speaking. Not much South African theology finds its way to academic libraries here. Instead I have had to rely on libraries abroad. The library at the University of Cape Town has been very valuable, and the same goes for the library at the theological faculty in Princeton, USA. I have also used the theological faculties at University of Western Cape and in Stellenbosch and the library at University of Pretoria. In principle I have always been met with openness and generosity so as to get access to what I needed despite not always fitting into their rules and regulations.

But as I already mentioned several times the situation is not that easy and clear. There are other churches playing an important role in the deliberations between the two main actors. Several organisations in South Africa hold positions in the process. Conferences arranged by others and documents and declarations that have come into being as a result of that are factors one must take into consideration. Therefore I will not even try to make any distinction between for instance monographies by well-known theologians held in high esteem in South Africa and elsewhere, and letters from WARC executive committee members, nor between a thorough consultation report and an interview with a former member of the leadership of one or other of the churches involved. There is interplay between them all that is enriching and is illuminating the situation during the period I cover.

Besides that I will present a methodical ground for that approach in the next chapter.

In addition to what I mentioned on archival material and ‘normal’ material in books and journals I have made several interviews. The interviewees are mostly people who have been moderators or active in the moderature in the various synods or executives in the organisations involved—i.e. having held important office and been in the epicentre of the story.

The interviews have mainly been for my own sake—to go to those ‘who were there’, ‘who saw it’ and ‘who heard it’. By comparing their stories with the printed material, such as minutes, letters, memos and other sources, the latter began to live and explore things that otherwise might have been hidden to me. They function as part of a hermeneutical spiral (or circle)—the live story illuminates the rather dull and rigid minutes, that thereafter raise new questions both to the story and the minutes. To a minor extent I use them also to confirm views that are expressed, or as a means to challenge or underline a view in documents. The interviews also give the context into which the text is set.

2 Conceptual considerations – a methodical outline

2.1 Hermeneutics

The first of my questions regarding the requirements raised in Ottawa foreshadows a hermeneutical problem. The question reads as follows: *How shall we understand the meaning of the three requirements?*

Inherent in that question lies a conception that the three requirements posed towards the DRC contains more than is said in its exact wording. At least it indicates that there are possibilities to read them in different ways, and that is a question within the hermeneutical sphere.

Werner Jeanrond means that we by hermeneutics mean *the theory of interpretation* by which we examine the relationship between the text (or a work of art) on the one hand and the people who wish to understand it on the other. When the reality of the reader and the reality of the text meet, hermeneutical reflections function as an aide to facilitate that meeting by “considering the possibilities and limitations of human understanding”.³⁴

One obvious reason to reflect on the ‘art’ of hermeneutics—‘art’, as it embraces a creative side—in the context with which I deal in this dissertation is that the DRC time and again between 1982 and 1998 expressed as their firm conviction, firstly, that they had complied with the requirements and, secondly, that it was totally wrong to understand the DRC view on apartheid in confessional terms and consequently to express a *Status confessionis*. Until the issue finally was settled at the DRC synod in 1998 these proposals by the DRC were turned down by the

³⁴ (Jeanrond 1997 (1991), p. 1-3)

WARC—and others—as a misconception. To put it simple: the DRC and the WARC had different understanding of the text. Very likely also about the actual context and definitely about the text read in that context.

At a basic level this could be understood as ‘just’ a text-linguistic problem. Jeanrond discerns three levels of a text: Of meaning, of grammar and of printing. They in turn can be related to three linguistic sub-disciplines; The semantic, studying the meaning of the words and texts; the syntactic, dealing with the connections between words and sentences; and the pragmatic, related to the external conditions of communication.³⁵

I would consider it likely that there might be several aspects related to these fields of hermeneutics—especially on the semantic level—that can explain why there seems to be a rather weak discussion between those involved, and why many white South Africans had difficulties to comprehend the demands by the WARC and therefore felt humiliated and misunderstood. Naturally the same problems are put before me in reading the same texts today.

Drawing on Ricoeur, Jeanrond argues that the disclosure of the *sense* of a text “is one of the interpreting activities through which the human being can gain some awareness of himself or herself” and thereby “unveil the existential possibilities”. That is a demanding task as it implies openness for various truths but when it is working it functions transformatively.

Bultmann’s hermeneutical program, which as a major perspective wanted a (religious) text not to unveil what it meant at a certain old stage in history but its meaning for the reader in his or her own time in an existential way, might be difficult to relate to the very contextual discussion that went on between the DRC and the WARC (and other adversaries). Nonetheless his view that the “decisive question was ‘whether we confront history in such a way that we acknowledge its claim upon us, its claim to say something new to us’” is not without merit also in this setting.³⁶

³⁵ (Jeanrond 1997 (1991), p. 84-5)

³⁶ (Jeanrond 1997 (1991), p. 110, 138), The quotation in the quote is from Bultmann, “The Problem of a Theological Exegesis of the New Testament”, 1925, *Interpreting Faith* p. 132

Basically there is an obvious element of intertextuality between the two organisations. Their essential adherence to each other lies in the common heritage of creed, theological reflection and ecclesiastical models. That is also apparent when we consider the actual texts I deal with in this study and the lives of both organisations. Both organisations give—or ought to give—each other mutual credibility and confirmation. The intertextuality-perspective is also discernible within the organisations themselves—they live in an ongoing debate on how to understand the historic heritage in a rapidly changing surrounding world. This is even more obvious when we reflect on the relation between the DRC and its so-called daughters. Every text, every situation, every dialoguean attempt in the situation I will describe in the following is part of a network of relations. Consequently, elements of contextual reflection have to be one of the core methods in the analysis.

The interpretative efforts must aim at an understanding of the message of the text in question—but it is a problem to use it as a starting point that structures the interpretation.³⁷

I will assert that for my study is the text-in-its-context more important than text in itself. My choice is therefore to refrain from some, in principle possible, analytical perspectives: the act of communication; a syntactic analysis; discussing genres; and many more. Instead I will provide a broad and rather comprehensive backdrop—the contextual setting—for my concluding analysis.

Secondly, by acknowledging that the text can have a claim on the reader, we confess that the author has no interpreting prerogative—when the text has left the author it is open for anyone to enter into a communication with it and to interpret it his or her way. By this ‘the other’s’ voice becomes even more imperative. This is for instance an important background for my interviews as such, and for making them also with people outside the narrow circle of ‘players’ from the DRC and the WARC.

But that the author does not have an interpreting prerogative does not mean that anything goes but that there must be room for pluralism

³⁷ (Jeanrond 1997 (1991), p. 160-1)

as it “is at the very root of the Christian movement itself”. Only by this can dogmatic and “colonial” attitudes by the Church be met and challenged. Jeanrond argues that “[t]he best precaution against such a temptation may be the willingness to respect otherness and even radical otherness”. With reference to David Tracy Jeanrond notes that this means to accept a double pluralism: a pluralism of the context and a pluralism regarding the interpretative results.³⁸

Both the above points, in my understanding, are pointing towards Edward W. Said and more specifically towards what he calls contrapuntal thinking.

2.2 Contrapuntal thinking

A more all-encompassing view of how to understand—or interpret—a text is given by Edward Said in his *Culture and Imperialism*:

“Instead of the partial analysis offered by the various national or systematically theoretical schools, I have been proposing the contrapuntal lines of a global analysis, in which texts and worldly institutions are seen working together, in which Dickens and Thackeray as London authors are read also as writers whose historical experience is informed by the colonial enterprises in India and Australia of which they were so aware, and in which the literature of one commonwealth is involved in the literatures of others. Separatist or nativist enterprises strike me as exhausted; the ecology of literature's new and expanded meaning cannot be attached to only one essence or to the discrete idea of one thing. But this global, contrapuntal analysis should be modelled not (as earlier notions of comparative literature were) on symphony but rather on an atonal ensemble; we must take into account all sorts of spatial or geographical and rhetorical practices—inflections, limits, con-

³⁸ (Jeanrond 1997 (1991), 172-5)

straints, intrusions, inclusions, prohibitions—all of them tending to elucidate a complex and uneven topography.”³⁹

There are several perspectives in the writings by Said that is valuable and valid for my study. Related to this contrapuntal reading he mentions in the quotation is ‘worldliness’—to consider the societal framework in which the text is read—, and secondly the concept of ‘the other’.

To look at—or read—something contrapuntally is to make up a set of intertwined and overlapping stories but not in a Hegelian dialectic way but in a dialoguean way that allows discrepancies and conflicting voices. It should be a way of giving both the dominant discourse and those acting against it a possibility to be heard. With reference to the classical music—a common reference in Said’s writing—he pinpoints that

“In the counterpoint ... various themes play off one another, with only a provisional privilege being given to any particular one; yet in the resulting polyphony there is concert and order, an organized interplay that derives from the themes, not from a rigorous melodic or formal principle outside the work.”⁴⁰

In a short and simple way it could be described as to let different—even dissonant—voices be heard simultaneously. By this, a greater whole is strived for, in which interdependent histories and overlapping characters are presented and where both dominant societies and subaltern voices can be heard.

In my approach to the task I have put before me in the study I have tried to follow this Saidian advice. It is done in at least two ways.

The structure of the dissertation, especially part III, is built on that concept. It consists of five chapters dealing with the same core problem—the conflict between the WARC and the DRC—but from different angles, dragging in players and situations that at the outset might seem

³⁹ (Said 1994 (1993), p. 318)

⁴⁰ (Said 1994 (1993), p. 51)

not to be directly related to issue but that add important views to the discussion. Chapters 7 and 8 might have a rather heavier weight, but all of them are directed on analysing the same thing. Therefore it is sometimes unavoidable to duplicate some views and information, or else it would be difficult to comprehend the text. Relying on Said's description of the provisional character of each 'voice' it is impossible to draw any definite conclusions until every voice is heard—if at all. Already the fact that I here cut out a short time frame, certain 'players', make a choice of what material I study and who I interview is delimiting my possibilities to proclaim any TRUTH about the conflict between the DRC and the WARC. Possibly a provisional one.

Secondly, my choice of material as well as the way in which I use it is determined by this basic consideration. As I mention above in section 1.5 there is a huge variety of sources—minutes and other 'formal' documents from the WARC and the DRC, and some other organisations; monographies and articles on different topics of relevance; interviews and some internet sources; etcetera. All of them make up the 'fugue' of interrelated and intertwined voices needed to give as fully as possible a picture of the conflict in the centre of this dissertation.

These two considerations are likewise part of my hermeneutical method.

2.3 Post-colonial analysis

A study of the church in Africa in general and the development of the DRC as a missional church in South Africa in particular cannot be done without taking into account the colonial development in that region. The DRC is more than many churches rooted in the colonial project. Also the processes in the WARC have to be related to this as neither the organisation as such, nor are the member churches themselves free from such influences.

Empires are not circumscribed to the expansion of the powers of the West or to a period post the Middle Ages. Historically we can talk about the Roman empire, the Arab Empire under the Umayyad Caliphate, the Empires under the Mongols, the Ottomans—to mention a few. For this study I will, when talking about the Empire or the Colo-

nial period, restrict myself to dealing with the thinking in the West and its consequences on African soil; I will even make that as narrow as to the colonial development in those parts of Southern Africa that today make up South Africa. In any case, my task is not to study colonialism per se, but to use it as a tool in my analysis of the church. So, for obvious reasons—relating to the scope of this dissertation—I will have to restrict myself hard.

To study a situation where colonialism is an important feature, one is obliged to consider the possible postcolonial perspectives on the situation. The South African ecclesiastical situation has many special features when it is interpreted in the light of postcolonial theory. While most parts of the African continent—except for minor sections—came under European sovereignty rather late in the nineteenth century the southernmost part, as a consequence of its military- and trading-strategic position, was taken over by Western interests rather early.⁴¹ In the wake of the emancipation of the Boers from the imperial powers in Europe, especially from the Netherlands, a home-grown internal imperialism evolved in relation to other population groups. Consequently my understanding of postcolonial theory is read in relation to that and my analysis of it as a critical discourse is based on the special South African situation.

For that reason, I will give just a brief history of the involvement of the Western powers in as far as they relate to the development of what today is the Republic of South Africa. Then, as I in my study will cover a rather short—and late—period in South African (church) history I will make use of postcolonial perspectives in my analysis of the relevant situation.

Although a scholar in literature one can assume that most people would paste the label of *post-colonialism* to Edward W Said's name. That is no surprise as he clearly states that “we can no longer ignore empires and the imperial context in our studies”.⁴²

Post-colonialism is an analytical tool that has much of its roots in the writings of him—in particular in the aftermath of his seminal *Ori-*

⁴¹ A short background story of this is provided in chapter 3.

⁴² (Said 1994 (1993), p. 6)

entalism from 1978.⁴³ It emerged as a theory in the field of literature criticism—not least related to the British Empire-building. But, albeit rooted in the study of literature, its perspectives were broadened vastly to include cultural identity—in an extended meaning—in colonised societies. Sugirtharajah argues that Said meant post-colonialism to be a “reading strategy”. This is not the only possible way to understand it but is the way by which I will be using it here.⁴⁴ Inherent in the post-colonial thinking according to Said lies the important notion of ‘the other’:

“Unlike with feminism or post-structuralism or even Marxism, the discourse of post-colonialism is ostensibly not about the West where it has originated but about the colonised other. For the first time probably in the whole history of the Western academy, the non-West is placed at the centre of its dominant discourse.”⁴⁵

Sugirtharajah suggests that with ‘the other’ in the centre post-colonialism becomes an active confrontation with the dominant system of thought and functions emancipatorily in relation to these systems, be they political, linguistic or ideological. In this, especially in the ideological level, are in my view theological and missiological patterns of domination included. Post-colonialism, Sugirtharajah says, is more than anything else a mental attitude, a “critical enterprise aimed at unmasking the link between idea and power, which lies behind Western theories and learning. It is a discursive resistance to imperialism”.⁴⁶

While imperialism in the past, in the main, meant settling on and controlling distant lands owned by and lived on by other peoples, it now

⁴³ (Kim 2006, p. 271); According to Sugirtharajah gave Edward W. Said, G.C. Spivak and Homi Bhabha “postcolonialism its theorization and practice”, although the expression was coined and used as a pedagogical tool earlier. (Sugirtharajah 1998, p. 92-3)

⁴⁴ (Sugirtharajah 1998, p. 93); Sugirtharajah mentions Homi Bhabha who rather defines postcolonialism as a state or a condition.

⁴⁵ (Sugirtharajah 1998, p. 92) Quotation from Harish Trivedi (1996:232): ‘India and Post-colonial Discourse’, in Harish Trivedi and Meenakshi Mukherjee (eds.), *Interrogating Post-Colonialism: Theory, Text and Context*. p. 231-47

⁴⁶ (Sugirtharajah 1998, p. 93)

has taken on disguises that make it more difficult to trace in the topography.

Imperialism according to Said means

“the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory; ‘colonialism’, which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory”.

He then understands the settlements—as the direct colonialism by and large has ended—in the way of a lingering presence in the “general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices”. The “almost metaphysical obligation to rule subordinate, inferior, or less advanced peoples” might have faded away. In the globalised world greed always finds new means to acquire the accumulation of wealth it strives for.⁴⁷

To talk about post-colonialism analysis is therefore not to talk about a period when colonialism has ceased to exist, as if there presently is a time ‘after colonialism’, but to trace in what way colonialism is present in the text, and context, we are studying at the moment.

A major reason for this kind of reading of the conflict between the DRC and the WARC is that we—to use the words of Said—are “mixed in with one another in ways that most national systems of education have not dreamed of”.⁴⁸

Mission in a South African postcolonial setting

Since the earliest beginnings in the fifteenth century of seafarers from the West crossing the seas it was self-evident assumption that “the pope held supreme authority over the entire globe” and that therefore the rulers who established distant dominions had both political and ecclesial supremacy. Thus, missions and colonialism went hand in hand.⁴⁹ The churches that developed after the reformation did not involve themselves in missionary outreach programs until the emergence of the

⁴⁷ (Said 1994 (1993), p. 9-10)

⁴⁸ (Said 1994 (1993), p. 331)

⁴⁹ (Bosch 1994 (1991), p. 227)

pietistic movement in the early eighteenth century. Against the earlier period the missions that were carried out now were rather a-colonial in attitude, mainly due to its layperson character, the ecumenical attitude, and its anti-nationalistic view.⁵⁰

A new wave of colonialism sweeps over the globe in the nineteenth century and again church and state are travel companions. With Great Britain and France in the lead the West divided not least Africa among themselves and a strong missionary zeal was presented.

The story in South Africa is different as the historic circumstances are so different but nonetheless it is said by South African missiologists that “[t]he social, economic and political context of the mission wave that started in the late 1850s [in South Africa] should be understood in terms of the bigger colonial picture.⁵¹ The South African structure is rather complex, as the DRC was rather active in the surrounding countries in a ‘classic’ outreach mission and established ‘DRC-churches’ in Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe etc, while at the same time overseas mission agencies established stations in the rural areas all over ‘South African’ territory. Although there are examples of missionaries that wanted to keep the colonial authorities short it appeared to be difficult, especially after 1880 when, according to Bosch, “there could no longer be any doubt about the complicity of mission agencies in the colonial venture”. Even the traces of racism were more prevalent at that time.⁵²

The apartheid state developed over time and many colonial elements were in place long before the National Party came to power in 1948. The same goes for the development of the mission policy of the DRC. Few would oppose an assertion that apartheid is an imperialistic expression and that the apartheid government was acting as colonizers. Especially when we look at colonialism—in line with Said and Sugirtharajah—also as control over the psychological, intellectual and cultural sphere.⁵³

⁵⁰ (Bosch 1994 (1991), p. 252-5)

⁵¹ (Kritzinger, Saayman and Smit 2004, p. 262)

⁵² (Kritzinger, Saayman and Smit 2004, p. 268), (Bosch 1994 (1991), p. 307-8)

⁵³ (Sugirtharajah 1995 (1991), p. 460)

It is therefore in my view natural to reflect upon the interrelatedness between the mission of the DRC and the colonial patterns of the apartheid government.

Part II

3. Some views on the settings for the conflict between the DRC and the WARC

”To understand the race problem it is necessary to take into account the historical causes to which it owes its present form. Its real nature and true dimensions become apparent only when the antagonisms which confront us today are seen to be the outcome of forces that have been slowly gathering momentum through the centuries and creating a situation which is now a menace to the peace of the world.”⁵⁴

Albeit more than 80 years old, Oldham’s comment, at the beginning of his book entitled *Christianity and the Race problem*, on clarifying the importance of tracing the roots of the actual situation by that time, has relevance also in 2009. In my research I will deal with what can be seen as modern history. It goes only some 25 years back. It is nevertheless impossible to write that story without a reasonable understanding on what in different fields preceded the dramatic events at the WARC 1982 General Council at Ottawa—the suspension of the DRC based in its completely irreconcilable views on apartheid.

⁵⁴ (Oldham 1925, p. 10) Oldham was the organizing secretary for the 1910 World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh and then secretary for the International Mission Council (IMC).

Long after Oldham, Edward Said also reflected on the understanding of the present and the past. He notes that

“[a]ppeals to the past are among the commonest strategies in interpretation of the present ... [as there] is not only disagreement about what happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty about whether the past really is past, over and concluded, or whether it continues, albeit in different forms, perhaps”.⁵⁵

With a background in a discussion on an essay by TS Elliot, Said continues to problemize this idea. Not only that past and present “inform each other”, or “implies each other” as Elliot says, but also that there is a “combativeness with which individuals and institutions decide on what is tradition and what is not”. Therefore, neither past, nor present has “a complete meaning alone”.⁵⁶

This chapter therefore aims at presenting a necessary background for an assessment of the situation I will discuss in detail in part III. The short quotation by Said is a severe warning to anyone trying to encompass, compress and summarize elements of some 350 years of Southern African economical and political history, as well as Church history, into a few dozen pages. I am aware that the bits and pieces of the past chosen below are selected as a result of my comprehension of the present, and will create the main frame-work within which my continuing analysis will take place, and that I run the risk of deciding beforehand what the analysis should arrive at. Nevertheless, while doing it, I hope to be able to provide tenable argumentation for the choices I make.

There are three areas of special interest for the backdrop I would like to paint in this chapter.

The first deals with the social and political history of South Africa. It is, however, at a space as limited as I have here, impossible to cover the full history of over 350 years. Especially as it, in addition, is so intertwined with European political and economical changes at that time. Therefore, my description must concentrate on an analysis of those

⁵⁵ (Said 1994 (1993), p. 3)

⁵⁶ (Said 1994 (1993), p. 4)

parts that more than others give the background to the growth of the Afrikaner identity. In this I will try to pin-point elements of special relevance. The journalist and writer Gerald L'Ange uses the word “ingrained” when he describes the importance of the old Afrikaner history for the post-1948 transformation and the “concept of black inferiority”.⁵⁷

In this part—*About the social and political origins of Apartheid*—I will briefly cover the period from the arrival of the colonists in 1652 up to the first democratic election in 1994, albeit with specific references to the churches.

The second part—*The Dutch Reformed Church 1824-1982*—in this chapter is about the church that is in the very focus for this dissertation. The period I deal with here begins when the DRC as a church on its own began to discuss the possibility of excluding non-white members from sharing the Lord's Table and the church service together with white members of the congregations. I will end the description of the DRC just before 1982, the year of the Ottawa General Council of the WARC when the DRC was suspended from participating in the work in WARC.

In this part I will describe the different steps that the DRC has taken on its road to align themselves with apartheid and National-Afrikaner mentality.

Finally the third part—*Some Ecumenical Church bodies*—depicts ecumenical bodies that have special relevance for my exploration. It is first and foremost the WARC as the worldwide reformed body to which the DRC belonged and that exercised a kind of church discipline when they realised that the very centre of the gospel was endangered by the theological views and the praxis in the DRC. Shortly I will mention its Southern African regional branch, SAARC, although it comes in existence as late as in 1989.

Finally I will also describe some involvement in the South African situation by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and about how the Lutheran World Federation dealt with the *Status confessionis*-issue.

⁵⁷ (L'Ange 2005, p. 227)

3.1 About the social and political origins of Apartheid

A major problem in writing about South African history—as about any set of historical events—is that it immediately raises questions on legitimacy. Who can claim the ability to describe and assess processes that deal with people, culture, politics, and geography over vast areas and over a long time far from your own time and culture?⁵⁸ It would be futile and inaccurate not to admit that my mind as a Western, liberal, white person is colonized and bent towards biased perspectives.

That the perspective is biased was obvious also when the DRC in 1974 wrote that they “[s]ince the beginning of South African history ... [has] had to grapple with the problems of a multinational and multiracial country”.⁵⁹ That expresses, deliberately or unconsciously, a lack of perspective and is, even more, a way of arguing that no South African history existed before the arrival of the Dutch to the Cape of Good Hope in 1652—a notion called ‘the myth of the empty land’ by many critical scholars. That also has some bearing on Afrikaner self-understanding and therefore on later changes in the church. The truth is that “nowhere can the whites truly claim first occupation”.⁶⁰

3.1.1 Early inhabitants

It might be possible to argue that one reason for this ignorance and of the ‘empty land’-notion has been that more comprehensive written history on the societies in the interior of South Africa began to emerge as late as in the nineteenth century. Furthermore these accounts were mainly provided by people belonging to the white invader groups and “Africans [often] appeared as shadowy figures in the background of the white historical experience ... [coming] into the picture only when they have blocked the path of white expansion or rejected white authority”.⁶¹

⁵⁸ ‘Culture’ here is perceived essentially in the way Said describes it as “a source of identity ... a rather combative one. ... a protective enclosure”. (Said 1994 (1993), p. xiii-xiv)

⁵⁹ (DRC 1974, p. 5)

⁶⁰ (L’Ange 2005, p. 51), (Maylam 1986 (1970), p. 17); For explicit examples of this myth see (Ransford 1974 (1972), p 17) and (Heymans 1986, p. 5)

⁶¹ (Maylam 1986 (1970), p. VII)

Only as late as in the twentieth century Africans themselves wrote about their own history.⁶² Nonetheless, the DRC ought to have had the knowledge and insight by the 1970s so as not to write as in the example above.

Due to the lack or scarcity of material the study of South African history has a strong need to be interdisciplinary. The base for the development of knowledge in early history is predominantly to be found in the findings of the archaeologists. It is somewhat ironic that some of the earliest fossils related to *Homo sapiens* overall are found in what since 1994 is the Eastern Cape province of South Africa.⁶³ More interesting for us than these extremely old findings are the results telling us that almost two thousand years ago people began to move in from the north. “Several centuries before the Christian era” these groups were cattle keeping and farming.⁶⁴ Apart from this, exploitation of minerals was carried forth at several locations, especially in the Transvaal area. There are examples that companies that began mining in the early nineteenth century did so only by extending some of these ancient workings.⁶⁵

Maylam is happy to be able to say that the old question by the “defenders of white supremacy”—‘who got here first?’—has been proven obsolete. Those who argue that the Africans came at the same time “have their chronology wrong by about 1400 years”.⁶⁶

Besides these facts—archaeological-historical and others, that refutes all notions of a white priority over the Africans to South Africa—Thompson points out another interesting sociological perspective. The black communities were early hurt by the white economic and political dominance, by the migrant labour system and later by all laws prohibiting them to live as equals with the white people. Thompson argues that it is impossible to understand the strength that made families survive despite being forced to live apart, or people’s ability to develop the strong resistance against apartheid, without having a life story rooted in

⁶² (Thompson 1995, p. 2)

⁶³ (Thompson 1995, p. 6)

⁶⁴ (Thompson 1995, p. 11-2)

⁶⁵ (Maylam 1986 (1970), p. 12-3)

⁶⁶ (Maylam 1986 (1970), p. 17)

“pre-colonial ideas” and in generations of reflection over “their customary social values and networks”.⁶⁷

These values could with one word be called Ubuntu: “the African philosophy of humanism”—to use the short definition by Antje Krog.⁶⁸ Of the same view as Thompson is Mfuniselwa John Bhengu who maintains that Africans “From time immemorial ... were imbued with Ubuntu philosophy”.⁶⁹

Ubuntu is put as an antithesis to victimisation, but much more than that. However difficult to translate one can use words like generous, hospitable, friendly, compassionate, and others but Ubuntu stretches far beyond that. Desmond Tutu says it denotes that “my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up” in the other’s.⁷⁰

3.1.2 The early colonists

Albeit not the first white to enter present-day South Africa Jan van Riebeeck on behalf of the Dutch *Vereenigde Oost-indische Compagnie* (VOC), established a new order for that part of Africa by occupying a piece of land in Table Bay—today’s downtown Cape Town—in April 1652. Over the following 150 years the white population grew slowly as a result of Dutch immigration added with some influx also from other European countries, mainly France and Germany. By the end of the eighteenth century the number had grown to roughly 14,000 whereof half of them were children.⁷¹ In addition to that the colony had imported a growing number of slaves, outnumbering the whites. With an increasing population more space to cultivate was needed so as to be able to provide for the daily needs of the colony’s inhabitants and for the trading companies. A growing number of so-called *trekboers* moved further inland and established farms and villages where the indigenous

⁶⁷ (Thompson 1995, p. 2)

⁶⁸ (Krog 1998, p. vi)

⁶⁹ (Bhengu 1996, p. 1)

⁷⁰ (D. Tutu 1999, p. 34-5)

⁷¹ (Thompson 1995, p. 35-6)

Khoikhoi⁷² had to pay the price for this expansion, “branded, thrashed and chained” by the colonists.⁷³

In contrast to most places in the Global South where Europeans established themselves, the Europeans who settled in the Cape province did not subordinate themselves to any European national state or king, but to the directors of the VOC⁷⁴. Also contrasting to other parts of Africa, the people who came broke the bonds to former homelands more definitely and saw themselves as white Africans—Afrikaners—and settled down with the intention of staying.⁷⁵ To be able to do this they had to be free burghers, and not to be ruled by the VOC, a change that slowly took place under great strains. Those who left the close proximity to Cape Town were to a growing extent autonomous. The farm was “controlled by the owner, functioning as the patriarch”.⁷⁶

In their establishing themselves as the rulers over what was conceived as unused or waste land they developed a pattern where not only slaves from abroad were used but also indigenous people were coerced to work for them in a kind of serfdom. Keegan stresses that the colonial society already from the outset was racially based. The legal status for different groups was racially determined, although it was from the beginning “not justified by explicit racial order”.⁷⁷ Discrimination was more based on religious affiliation than race. As a scientific biological concept the word ‘race’ was not used until much later. It was mainly used negatively as a cultural marker.⁷⁸

That the European culture was superior needed—according to the white colonists’ mindset—no proof. Nonetheless, at the early stage of

⁷² For a discussion on the designation of indigenous people see (Adonis 1982, n.p. (in a section with definitions of words)) and (The Khoisan 2008)

⁷³ (Thompson 1995, p. 38)

⁷⁴ (Gilliomee 2003, p. 3)

⁷⁵ To some extent it was due to the situation in Europe, where e.g. the Huguenots were driven out France as a result of the edict of Nantes 1688. Cf. (L’Ange 2005, p. 11-3), and (Gilliomee 2003, p. 4)

⁷⁶ (Gilliomee 2003, p. 37)

⁷⁷ (Keegan 1996, p. 13); Cf. (Du Toit and Gilliomee 1983, p. 7-8)

⁷⁸ (Gilliomee 2003, p. 13-4); Cf. (Said 1994 (1993), p. XIII) “*In times, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates ‘us’ from ‘them’, almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one...*”

their presence in the Cape even mixed marriages were accepted—at least to some extent and possibly due to the gender imbalance—as long as the contracting party was Christian.⁷⁹ Many who during the apartheid era—300 years later—proclaimed themselves having a lily-white heritage had in reality a mixed decent.⁸⁰ As there was a feeling that a Christian slave might have rights that a non-Christian did not have there was a hesitance to baptise slaves. Even more so, as one of the basic formulas for the reformed thinking, the Synod of Dort, stipulated that baptized slaves ought to be emancipated.

In the long run race became the dividing factor, more than religion. The ambiguity and fluidity of eighteenth century Cape Colony became transformed into a segmented order for the different groups.⁸¹

3.1.3 The Trek

This patriarchal and individualistic lifestyle—each man his own master—became challenged when the British in 1795 established themselves as the rulers over the Cape province and gradually over all that today is South Africa. This led to deteriorating relations between the newcomers and the older (white) population—henceforth called ‘boers’⁸². They differed in “language, traditions, religious affiliation, and experiences”.⁸³

Moreover, in England the parliament discussed the slave trade and due to liberal influences it was banned in 1807. For a few more years, it

⁷⁹ That this concept—Christian—was not an easy one to define, and led to far-reaching controversies is shown later in the conflicting views held in Cape Town and on the frontier on whether to Christianize heathens. See page 45

⁸⁰ (Gilliomme 2003, p. 18) Cf. Max du Preez who in *Pale Native* argue that the “concept [of] pure-white Afrikaners never existed”. To this, almost with *schadenfreude*, he adds a list of some very common boer names—of which some belong to prominent persons and families—that can be found in the lists over white men who have married black, Asian or mixed-blood women. (Du Preez 2003, p. 25, 30)

⁸¹ (Du Toit and Giliomee 1983, p. 6)

⁸² A derogatory term for ‘farmer’. They began to use the term ‘Afrikaner’ for themselves instead. Cf. (Thompson 1995, p. 56). According to Hexham the word Boer also have positive connotations. “Being Boer meant a simple, natural lifestyle, Biblical Faith and speaking Afrikaans.” (Hexham 1981, p. 139)

⁸³ (Thompson 1995, p. 56)

was possible to keep slaves in the empire but a new law was passed in 1833 that prohibited it. By this time the missionaries from the London Missionary Society had entered the scene and influenced the political agenda with their view that “social and political issues were central to the concerns of a Christian”.⁸⁴ In 1828 a law—the so called Ordinance 50—was passed in South Africa that should make “Hottentots and other free people of colour equal before the law with Whites”.⁸⁵

As the Boers felt this unreasonable, it sparked off the movement that became known as the Great Trek—one of the most important events in the Afrikaner mythology. After only a few years—commencing in 1835—some 6,000 people, called *Voortrekkers* or *trekkers*, together with about the same amount of coloured and black servants, left the Cape Province in an exodus with religious,⁸⁶ economic, political, racial and other motives as ingredients. In all, some fourteen thousand *trekkers* had, by 1854—the year they gained independence from the British in the Orange Free State—set out for a new future.

Among them were those who had strong feelings of being religiously elected. Their religious understanding made it impossible for them to accept that

“[the blacks were] placed on an equal footing with Christians, contrary to the law of God and the natural distinction of race and religion, so that it was intolerable for any decent Christian to bow down beneath such a yoke; wherefore we rather withdrew in order thus to preserve our doctrines in purity”.⁸⁷

Without denying the religious sentiments among the *trekkers* scholars like Timothy Keegan and Irving Hexham⁸⁸ argue that implementation of new politico-legal orders and the threat that they should result in a

⁸⁴ (Elbourne and Ross 1997, p. 41)

⁸⁵ (Thompson 1995, p. 59-60)

⁸⁶ While disapproving of the *trek* “the Cape [DRC] synod of 1837 expressed its concern over the ‘departure into the desert, without a Moses or Aron’ by people looking for a ‘Canaan’”. Quoted in (Gilliomee 2003, p. 176, 192)

⁸⁷ (Thompson 1995, p. 88); Fear of *gelykstelling* could also lead to an active resistance to give the Khoikhoi the Christian sacraments. (Gilliomee 2003, p. 88)

⁸⁸ (Keegan 1996, p. 188-193); (Hexham 1981, p. 4-24); Cf. (Du Toit and Giliomee 1983, p. 83-4)

kind of *gelykstelling*, equalization, were the major reasons for the Trek. Hexham is of the definite opinion that “Calvinist influence before 1870 is difficult to prove”.⁸⁹ Nonetheless, he later demonstrates that the Trek in the early 1900s was comprehended in a biblical-mythical framework; as a second Exodus, which led Afrikaners as a chosen people, out of the “Egyptian bondage of British rule” to their new Canaan.⁹⁰ Said meant them to have a “proto-Zionist ideology”.⁹¹

Bloomberg calls it “largely a protest against the British colonial regime’s attempt to implement a policy of extending certain civic rights and liberties to non-whites”. As such it was, among other things, an assault on traditional forms of lifestyle, on “white monopoly of political power, property and prestige”. The Trek was also, ideologically, an explicit visible exposure of an inherent conflict between two world views among white South Africans, “one originating in the French Revolution ..., the other based on seventeenth-century Dutch Colonial Calvinism” where the *Trekkers* sided with the latter. To Bloomberg the enduring significance in the Trek lay in that it gave the conditions for the creation of Afrikanerdom as a “separate entity”, a confessional-based Christian-Nationalism, with roots in the claim of being a ‘chosen people’.⁹²

For Gerstner the issue of whether the Calvinistic belief played any role in the Trek is simple. Yes, it did. But not in any easily decidable causal way. He means that

“Whether the understanding of religion shaped the opposition to equality or whether it was merely developed to defend theologically an attitude derived from other sources is one of the insoluble questions of South African colonial history. The religious concept and the economy reality grew up side by side”. Gerstner argues further that although “many other colonies had a similar slave labour structure, yet [they] did not defend inequality religiously, or linked it in a central way to the curse of Ham”.

⁸⁹ (Hexham 1981, p. 3)

⁹⁰ (Hexham 1981, p. 47)

⁹¹ (Shavit 2004, p. 451)

⁹² (Bloomberg 1989, p. 118-20)

In that sense the South African situation was “unique”.⁹³

Some reasons most scholars agree on as background factors for the Trek are: Economic factors making it more expensive and therefore difficult to expand farming; The slavery prohibition; Shrinking autonomy due to a new British rule; The language question—English became the administrative language—and the thereof subsequent feeling of being marginalised; Social unrest in the Cape Colony that was seen as a result of the new racial levelling policy in society; The ‘chosen people-concept’. Some of them have direct bearing on the conflict I am dealing with.

3.1.4 The Church and the Afrikaners

The roots of the belief that made it possible to think and act as these *Voortrekkers* did were to be found in the reformed faith they brought from the Netherlands. When Jan van Riebeeck stepped onto the African soil he prayed that he would manage to work for the “propagation and revelation (if that be possible) of Thy true reformed Christian religion among these wild and brutal people, to the praise and glory of Thy Name”⁹⁴. Nonetheless, not much effort was made to fulfil that obligation. It took the Church thirteen years to appoint the first permanent minister and at mid-eighteenth century there were only three present.⁹⁵ Even less was done in this field for the indigenous Khoikhoi and for the slaves. The Danish missionary J. G. Böving, who in 1709 spent some weeks at the Cape makes the remark that given the large number of slaves there could have been a “flourishing congregation ... among

⁹³ (Gerstner 1991, p. 260); R. Drew Smith who compares ecclesiastical racism in the USA and South Africa points to findings that indicate that in the New England setting it was not the Calvinism as such that excluded the blacks, but an ontological understanding of blackness, i.e. the notion that black people did not have the capacity for “meaningful spiritual instruction and refined religious behaviour”. This kind of resistance can be found also in South Africa, but more prevalent is argumentation along sociological lines. (R. D. Smith 2000, p. 55)

⁹⁴ Translation in (Du Plessis 1911, p. 23)

⁹⁵ (Du Plessis 1911, p. 46)

them”.⁹⁶ The VOC even forced the first Moravian missionaries who arrived in the 1730s to abandon their work after some years.⁹⁷

Contrary to what often has been argued about the strong religious zeal among the Boer population Keegan argues that it “never [was] a characteristic of the burger population”. To this can be added the assertion by Bredekamp and Ross that “the mission activities of the Dutch Reformed Church during the period of Dutch East India Company rule was minimal” and that “the process by which the majority of South Africans were converted to Christianity was one which began by the missionaries”.⁹⁸

Gerstner thoroughly exposes the doubtfulness among the early colonists to Christianize, or at least baptize, children of slaves and Khoi and San people. The thinking behind that was based in a covenant theology of the chosenness of some [read: white] who were holy from birth. In this the attitude of the leaders of the Great Trek can be foreshadowed and the evolving political struggle and religious calling was thereby intertwined.⁹⁹

Behind this lies what Gerstner calls the essence of Reformed theology, namely the covenant thinking. It consists inter alia of a view of a division between Christian and heathens as being a virtually uncrossable line and as two ‘nations’ of unchangeable groups. A consequence of this view in the South African setting is the notion of the Khoikhoi people as descendants of Ham – the servants of servants (Gen 9:25).

The main difference as a result of the covenant theology impact was accordingly not between ‘white’ and ‘non-white’ or between ‘European’ and ‘African’ but between ‘Christian’ and ‘Heathen’.

Thus, “the religious factor of covenantal holiness must take its place as one central factor in the development” in the rise of Afrikaner self-identity.¹⁰⁰ It corresponds moreover well with the perspectives expressed in a speech by the D. F. Malan¹⁰¹ who in the 1960s meant that

⁹⁶ (Du Plessis 1911, p. 46-9)

⁹⁷ (Elbourne and Ross 1997, p. 33)

⁹⁸ (Keegan 1996, p. 17)

⁹⁹ (Gerstner 1991, p. 233, 238)

¹⁰⁰ (Gerstner 1991, p. 246-59)

¹⁰¹ Malan was DRC minister who became the leader of the National Party and Prime Minister 1948. He is often referred to as the architect behind Apartheid.

“the last hundred years have witnessed a miracle behind which must lie a divine plan”. Moodie calls this the view of Afrikaner civil religion—that “God imbues all history with ultimate meaning”, or as he depicts it: the sacred saga of Afrikanerdom where the Great Trek is a proof of God’s election.¹⁰²

Until the end of the eighteenth century the reformed church in South Africa was governed by the church in the Netherlands, although the ‘Company’ strongly influenced the church, for instance by having the ministers on their payroll. As a consequence of the arrival of the British in 1795 this control came to an end, but instead a new British grip was taken over the church.¹⁰³

At the end of the eighteenth century foreign missions began to show interest in South Africa. First out were Moravians who “paved the way for other missionary societies to follow their example”.¹⁰⁴ These missions worked especially among the Khoikhoi people as their society had largely broken down under the pressure from the colonial forces. At the mission stations, they “could regain a measure of authority over their lives”.¹⁰⁵ This created a conflict in relation to the settler community who had a strong desire of having these people as “landless farm labourers, living permanently on white farms”. The missionaries on the contrary wanted them to stay in an “independent community, to become ‘respectable’, and to acquire the rudiments of an individualistic capitalist culture”.¹⁰⁶

Not until 1857 was the ‘mission question’ raised in the DRC itself on a formal base in the Synod. A proposal was made that the DRC should start mission work among non-whites—a proposal that “almost took the breath away of some older members”. Nevertheless, they quickly recovered and “with a curious smile on their face suggested that

¹⁰² (Moodie 1975, p. 1-7)

¹⁰³ (Gerstner 1991, p. 20); (De Gruchy 1991, p. 9); (Adonis 1982, p. 24)

¹⁰⁴ (Viljoen 1995, p. 60)

¹⁰⁵ (Elbourne and Ross 1997, p. 35)

¹⁰⁶ (Elbourne and Ross 1997, p. 37); According to Viljoen, the tension grew as it became more and more difficult for the farmers to get labour force. Instead they tried to capture “Khoisan people during commando raids” to keep them as “their slaves and property”. (Viljoen 1995, p. 55-7)

the four men who had introduced the courageous scheme, should be entrusted with the task of carrying it out”.¹⁰⁷ The period of missionary outreach that followed is by Kritzinger, Saayman and Smit denoted as the first of three waves of mission by the DRC. It was a paternalistic mission, run mainly by less educated missionaries with an evangelicalistic and pietistic fervour in areas that today make up South Africa and in neighbouring countries.¹⁰⁸

In the next section I will deal more in detail with the history of the DRC from mid-1800 until 1982.

3.1.5 Political change

The nineteenth century history of what is today’s South Africa is an extended story of battle for land and dominion. Fierce battles took place between the whites—either *Voortrekkers* or British troops—and different black peoples. At the turn of the century the fight stood between the two Boer republics Transvaal and the Orange Free State on the one hand, and the British on the other—the so-called second Anglo-Boer war, or South African War. It has had a deep impact on (Afrikaner) society, constituting important elements in the Boer mythology and consequently in the emergence and transformation of the apartheid policy.¹⁰⁹ The war ended in a hard-earned victory for the British. Some twenty-eight thousand civilians, mainly Afrikaner children and women died from different diseases in the concentration camps. The huge Boer losses created “a bitterness [that] permeated the South African society and festers to this day”.¹¹⁰

At the beginning of the last century a new awareness began to emerge among whites about a need to find other solutions to the con-

¹⁰⁷ (Du Plessis 1911, p. 284)

¹⁰⁸ (Kritzinger, Saayman and Smit 2004, p. 263, 266-8)

¹⁰⁹ Several scholars have dealt thoroughly with these important traits in the Boer history. E.g. Thompson, L, *The political Mythology of Apartheid*, 1985; Moodie, T.D. *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid and the Afrikaner Civil Religion*, 1975; Bloomberg, C, *Christian-Nationalism and the Rise of the Afrikaner Broederbond in South Africa*, 1918-48; Hexham, I, *The Irony of Apartheid – The Struggle for National Independence of Afrikaner Calvinism Against British Imperialism*, 1981; Loubser, J.A., *A Critical Review of Racial Theology in South Africa – The Apartheid Bible*, 1987.

¹¹⁰ (L'Ange 2005, p. 145)

flicting interests in South Africa. Not least the growing corporations with interests in the mining sphere pushed for a more conciliatory development. On May 31, 1910, as the outcome of several years of swaying deliberations, the South African Union was established over all what is South Africa today. It became a British dominion with an Afrikaner as prime minister.¹¹¹ Presumably this was at the time a more purposeful way for the British—who “would expand by trade and influence if they could, but by imperial rule if they must”—to strengthen their power in one of their so-called white colonies.¹¹²

Nonetheless, during the following decades the issue of strengthening Afrikaner identity and power became a central task for several groups in the boer community, politically, culturally, religiously—in which the concept of ‘the covenant’ played an important role.¹¹³ The language, Afrikaans, became official language besides English. A new flag symbolised a new era and new parties with the epithet ‘national’ were established. Also extended legislation against black participation in society began to emerge. The 1913 Natives’ Land Act laid the foundation for territorial segregation and was later followed by more far-reaching legislation.¹¹⁴

The 1948 election implies a fundamental shift in speed—or degree and direction, rather than in kind¹¹⁵—when it comes to the implementing of societal measures that by then already since the 30s had been called apartheid.¹¹⁶ The National Party, that for the first time came to

¹¹¹ (Thompson 1995, p. 147-53)

¹¹² Quotation from (Said 1994 (1993), p. 73)

¹¹³ They realised that “*they could capture the state if Afrikaner nationalism was consolidated*” (Walshe 1983, p. 2); (Gerstner 1991, p. 256-7)

¹¹⁴ (Maylam 1986 (1970), p. 166). This legislation paved the way for the system of ‘independent’ Homelands, and the Group Areas Act.

¹¹⁵ This is highly debated. Peter Lodberg seems to share a view that it was not that important (Lodberg 1988, p. 21), while John de Gruchy on the contrary, argues that “*1948 is symbolic*”. (De Gruchy 1979, p. 53-4).

¹¹⁶ (Thompson 1995, p. 185-6); As with many difficult words it comes also with a number of euphemisms and circumlocutions. Among the most commonly used is *Separate development*. John de Gruchy is referring to people who, seriously, to him had said: “We do not support apartheid; we promote separate development”. (De Gruchy and De Gruchy 2004, p. 32, footnote 55) In the literature I have found for instance ‘*distinct development*’, ‘*plural democracy*’, ‘*autogenous develop-*

Cont. next page

power and got the mandate to form the government, had a strong programme for the reshaping of South Africa.

The previous limited system of passes was now to be extended. All non-whites, both men and women, were obliged to carry them.¹¹⁷ From the very beginning in 1952 there were widespread and extensive protests against the passes. Not least women played an important role in the defiance campaigns. The tragic events on 21 March 1960 in Sharpeville where at least 69 people were shot to death by the police, many in the back, began as a peaceful demonstration against the pass laws.¹¹⁸

In a comprehensive account of the politics of apartheid, the economy Professor emeritus Sampie Terreblanche, defines *apartheid* as “the catch word for the multitude of racially based control measures implemented and regularly amended by the government to resolve the contradictions inherent in South Africa’s modernisation process and to perpetuate white political domination”.¹¹⁹ This was done in different ways and Terreblanche is depicting two different schools: The ‘purist school’ to whom total segregation between black and white was what apartheid aimed at, while for the ‘practical school’ the objective was white supremacy—as long as it did not “hamper Afrikaner business interests”.¹²⁰

The apartheid regime remained in power in a country that became increasingly ungovernable until the new democratic South Africa dawned on May 10, 1994, when Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as its first president under the new order of multi-racialism—the rainbow nation.

Adrian Guelce is arguing that there are five underlying reasons for the transformation of the South African society. They have to do with

ment’. The last one is especially interesting as it indicates that the difference that has to be upheld between whites and non-whites has ontological roots.

¹¹⁷ (Maylam 1986 (1970), p. 146, 178). The passes went together with legislation that prohibited black people to remain in cities and town for more than a short period. This legislation led to forced removals of hundreds of thousands of people on many locations all over South Africa with disastrous results in breaking up families, groups of peoples and whole societies.

¹¹⁸ (Maylam 1986 (1970), p. 189-90)

¹¹⁹ (Terreblanche 2002, p. 314)

¹²⁰ (Terreblanche 2002, p. 314)

demography; structural economy; direct, normatively grounded, external pressure; the ANC and other black voices managed to articulate and transmit a belief in another South Africa; and—more related to the ecclesial sphere—that the self-identification by the whites as Western Christians became difficult when the West at least seemingly disentangled itself from dogmatic views on racism and division of humanity that was inherent in apartheid and its support by the DRC.¹²¹

An analysis of apartheid as such, or its transformation in South Africa, is not my task to examine. Only in as far as the DRC allows itself to be influenced by it—or also to influence the legislation, or its implementation—will it be dealt with in section 3.2.

3.1.5.1 African National Congress

When some 3,000 people, mainly blacks but also Indians, coloureds and whites, met at Kliptown¹²² outside Johannesburg in June 1955, it was like a new beginning for the *African National Congress* (ANC) established already in 1912. The ANC does not play any poignant role in this study, but the statement taken there—the so called Freedom Charter declaring that “South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and ... no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of the people”—sets the tone for all the theological work, in- and outside South Africa I deal with in this study.¹²³

ANC’s policy of non-violence was abandoned after the killings in Sharpeville but they never managed to force society into such a state of instability and insecurity that the government felt the need to enter into negotiations. On the contrary many in the leadership—Nelson Mandela, Govan Mbeki, Albert Sisulu and others— were put in jail at Robben Island by the end of 1964.

Thereafter the profile was lowered until the mid-seventies at the time for the uprising in Soweto (1976). A new huge movement, the United Democratic Front, (UDF) consisting of some 575 organisations—trade unions, civic organisations, student organisations,

¹²¹ (Guelce 2005, p. 208-13)

¹²² Today situated within the confines of Soweto

¹²³ (Thompson 1995, p. 208)

churches, sport groups etc.—dawned and coordinated the internal opposition to apartheid. The base for its work was the same as for the ANC—the Freedom Charter from 1955. The incitement came from Allan Boesak as a plea for actions against the tri-chamber parliament.¹²⁴

While the UDF supported the ANC through campaigns and activities a movement of another kind began to take place behind closed doors. The business sector—and some enlightened politicians—realised that apartheid as an idea had lost all credibility and that it only was a question of time before it was about to be replaced. Discussions around that coming future took place, more or less secretly, at different locations around the world. At about the same time secret talks with Nelson Mandela started.¹²⁵

After the release of Mandela and the unbanning of ANC the UDF dismantled and the ANC resumed its role as the leading force for change and became the primary part for the government to talk to about the transition.

3.2 The DRC 1824-1982

In 1824 the DRC in South Africa became a church on its own, free from the Dutch mother church, and held its first synod but it was in reality only in 1862 that the DRC gained autonomy from the state.

When the congregations met for the synod in 1829—when the DRC was still located only in the Cape Province—a discussion emerged concerning whether the Lord’s Table should be admitted to ‘persons of colour’ at the same time as to the ‘born Christians’ (read: whites). The background for the discussion is a request by a *bastaard*.¹²⁶ The minister had accepted this but the church council did not allow for it. In reality the discussion did not result in any decision in any direction, either towards a discriminatory praxis or in accepting non-whites.¹²⁷ The first

¹²⁴ (Saunders and Southey 1998, p. 181)

¹²⁵ (Sparks 1996 (1994)); (Sparks 1991 (1990), p. 325)

¹²⁶ By this word must be understood a ‘coloured’, i.e. of mixed origin, who was a free man.

¹²⁷ (Loff, *The History of a Heresy* 1983, p. 11-17)

thing was basically impossible as the British government still by then kept an eye on the church and moreover had the last say on all church decisions. According to the Ordinance 50, all free people were considered equal before the law.¹²⁸

When the *Voortrekkers* began to leave in 1835, it was regarded as “an act of open rebellion” by the church and at first they refused to appoint any minister for them and their congregations or groupings were seen as illegitimate by the DRC.¹²⁹ Nevertheless, later the church followed the Afrikaners on their journey and established congregations in the Orange Free State and the South African Republic where the *Voortrekkers* settled.¹³⁰ Nonetheless, their hesitant attitude—together with differing theological views, mainly imported from the Netherlands¹³¹—paved the way for a split that led to the establishment in the 1850s of two more white Afrikaans churches—The Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk (1853) and the ultra orthodox Gereformeerde Kerk (1859).

Although the praxis in church and society in the Cape Colony was mainly based on a racist thinking the constitution was based on a “non-racial franchise based on a low property qualification”. To some, this was seen as “a great wrong to European inhabitants” and was one main reason for the establishment of the above mentioned two churches.¹³²

The DRC was, and still is, by far the largest and as we will see later much of the development regarding their reflexion on apartheid was carried out in close proximity to the development on the societal level.

3.2.1 1857

According to Loff the next significant formal step for the DRC in this issue came in 1857 although it had been on the agenda at several occa-

¹²⁸ The issuing of Ordinance 50 in 1828 was a success for the advocacy work of the London Missionary Society (LMS) who saw it as instrumental for creating possibilities for non-whites. (Elbourne and Ross 1997, p. 38)

¹²⁹ (Gilliomme 2003, p. 176); See also footnote 86

¹³⁰ (Hexham and Poewe 1997, p. 123); Cf. (Serfontein 1982, p. 59)

¹³¹ The scarcity of ministers made the church to fill the gaps with ministers from overseas, mainly Scotland and the Netherlands.

¹³² (Gilliomme 2003, p. 176-7)

sions before that.¹³³ An important prerequisite came about in 1843 when the government lifted its heavy overcoat from the shoulders of the church so it became free to take its own decisions. The background to the synodal decision in 1857 was that a group of Khoikhoi who earlier had had a relation to the London Missionary Society joined the DRC in 1831 as the first black congregation. When white people later moved to that area, the discussion arose about a separate congregation for them. The question was referred to the Synod. When it met, these discussions had emerged in more places; in some cases already from the very establishment of a new congregation. In certain places there were already separate congregations, in others black people had to sit in the back of the churches or at the balcony, and the Holy Communion was distributed separately for them.¹³⁴

The Synod in 1857 is disreputable due to the decision to allow the congregations to make provisions for the separation of church members on racial grounds. This decision expresses two contradicting things. First, that it is “desirable and according to the Holy Scripture that our heathen members be accepted and initiated into our congregations wherever it is possible”. Secondly: If this “as a result of weakness of some, would stand in the way of promoting the work of Christ among the heathen people, then the congregations set up among the heathen, or still to be set up, should enjoy their Christian privileges in a separate building or institution”.¹³⁵ Loff continues with the notion that the different examples of “racial intolerance that was nurtured by a deluded theology ... [that] went under the name of ‘mission’” got its logical follow-up and “final solution” in the establishment of the different racially separated so called Mission Churches whereof Nederduitse Gereformerde Sendingkerk (DRMC) was the first in 1881.¹³⁶ That DRMC

¹³³ (Loff 1983, p. 17-20); Here the description is rather comprehensive. In his unpublished doctoral dissertation (Loff, 1998) this is dealt with in detail.

¹³⁴ (Adonis 1982, p. 52). Adonis is here giving a comprehensive description of the situation before the coming synod in 1857. Chris Loff is dealing in detail with this in his dissertation in Chapter 5: *Van aparte sitpleke tot afsonderlike kerkgeboue*. (Loff 1998, p. 79-97)

¹³⁵ (Loff 1983, p.19); These ‘some’ were white members in the congregations.

¹³⁶ (Loff 1983, p. 20-2); The English name of the Sendingkerk is Dutch Reformed Mission church (DRMC)

was a separate church did not mean that it was autonomous. Its ministers were white for many decades to come and it was financially totally dependent on the DRC.¹³⁷

After 1881 no more black (coloured) congregations were affiliated to the DRC.¹³⁸ Even more, black members belonging to ‘mixed’ congregations were asked to leave even if there was no suitable DRMC congregation in the vicinity.¹³⁹ The decision of the synod, with the code phrase *due to the weakness of some* removed any hesitation. John de Gruchy is strongly critical in his judgement of this. “The missionary program of the DRC as it developed during the next hundred years followed custom and culture consistently, thus providing an ecclesiological blueprint for the Nationalist policy of separate development. Thus, this separation of settler and mission churches had implications far beyond the ecclesiastical realm”.¹⁴⁰

3.2.2 We are the ‘Family’

During the rest of the nineteenth century and about two thirds of the twentieth the DRC consisted of four different white ‘churches’—four synods. Each of them established Mission Churches for black people. When the ‘white’ synods joined forces in 1962 and besides the regional synods also initiated a General Synod for the entire Southern Africa the churches for blacks also became one, the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA). For coloured people the DRMC had covered the entire country from the outset. In 1968 a separate church for Asiatic Peoples was established—the Indian Reformed Church.¹⁴¹

These churches were until late strongly dependent on and influenced by the ‘mother church’, for clergy and for finances and held a low

¹³⁷ (Loff 1998, p. 288)

¹³⁸ (Strassberger 1974, p. 15)

¹³⁹ (Loff 1983, p. 22)

¹⁴⁰ (J. W. De Gruchy 1979, p. 9); ‘Mission program’ is here to be understood as this development with separated churches. This view that apartheid has old roots in South Africa corresponds well with views expressed by e.g. Desmond Tutu—“*Racism came to South Africa in 1652*” (TRC 1998 Vol 1, p. 16)

¹⁴¹ (Strassberger 1974, p. 15). Later the ‘Indian’ church changed name to the Reformed Church in Africa, RCA.

profile in questions related to society. Only slowly did the DRMC gain wider space to act on its own and get black ministers but in 1978 that development had reached a point where a clear and theologically strong condemnation of apartheid was possible to articulate. At the same time they expressed a yearning and support for a unified church into which all four 'branches' of the DRC 'family' should merge. According to Botman the DRMC by this puts "reconciliation at the theological centre of its critique against apartheid".¹⁴²

Important work on theological scrutiny on the apartheid issue was carried forth at the theological department at the University of the Western Cape, the so called coloured university at the outskirts of Cape Town.¹⁴³ It was presented before the DRMC Synod in 1978 and is one major reason for the proposal of the *Status confessionis* discussion in Ottawa in 1982. Another achievement of that work was the development of the Belhar Confession.¹⁴⁴ One of its main focuses is—in line with the decision in the Ottawa assembly—its declaration of apartheid as a heresy. Thereby the 'daughter church' accuses the 'mother' of being heretical.¹⁴⁵ A second important notion according the Belhar Confession is that reconciliation is the "*essence of the Christian message*".¹⁴⁶

The DRMC meant that an adoption of this confession also by the DRC constituted the significant, and necessary, sign of change in theology and life of the white church. This created strong reactions among both clergy and lay-people in the DRC arguing that there could not be any additional confessions alongside the 'Three forms of Unity'.

The Confession of Belhar will be dealt with more thoroughly in chapter 5.

¹⁴² (Loff 1998, p. 289); (Botman 2000, p. 110)

¹⁴³ "This identification of the theological centre of apartheid was born in a classroom [at the University of Western Cape] ... supervised by Jaap J.F. Durand". (Botman 2000, p. 110),

¹⁴⁴ Belhar is the Capetonian suburb where the DRMC had its office.

¹⁴⁵ (Botman 2000, p. 118-9)

¹⁴⁶ (Kinghorn 1997, p. 153)

3.2.3 Some features of the DRC during the twentieth century

After having established the separate churches as facts on the ground the DRC began to formulate its theological and sociological foundations for them. I will in the following point at three documents or situations that give evidence of how the *weltanschauung* of the DRC was expressed. First it is about its mission policy that was drawn up in the mid-thirties. Thereafter I will shortly refer to the 1950 congress on the native question and finally to two documents that mainly came into existence as a result of the international criticism that follows after the breakdown of the Cottesloe Consultation in 1960.

An important impact on the coming deliberations in the DRC was the emergence of what is called a neo-Calvinistic thinking within the church. Emanating from persons like Abraham Kuyper¹⁴⁷, it was argued that Calvin himself had not drawn the full consequences of “the fundamental principles of the Christian view of God, life and the world”. Themes like the ‘mystical body of Christ’, ‘diversity of peoples and the unity of humanity’, ‘creation ordinances’ and ‘sovereignty in its own sphere’ began to emerge. This thinking also easily incorporated concepts of ‘national calling’ and acquired the label ‘Christian-national’. The stage was set and these themes, as we soon will see, became important in the work of the DRC.¹⁴⁸

3.2.3.1 1935

A strong spiritual revival that took place among the Afrikaners in the concentration camps during the second Anglo-Boer war continued afterwards and led to a newborn interest in mission outreach.¹⁴⁹

At the same time a national awakening among the Afrikaners began. Parts of that had to do with a focus on purity among the Afrikaners and one of the means for that was to hinder racially mixed marriages as miscegenation was seen as a severe threat to the cause of the Afrikaners and leading to loss of identity and to bastardisation.

¹⁴⁷ Kuyper combined being theologian and statesman in the Netherlands at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth.

¹⁴⁸ (Loubser 1987, p. 33-47)

¹⁴⁹ (Loubser 1987, p. 20)

The first decades of the twentieth century saw how the developing nationalism more and more became clad in religious garment such as in the following quotation by D. F. Malan.

“The history of the Afrikaner reveals a determination and a definiteness of purpose which make one feel that Afrikanerdom is not the work of man, but a creation of God. We have a divine right to be Afrikaners. Our history is the highest work of art of the architects of the centuries.”¹⁵⁰

This understanding of the calling for the Afrikaners, as a chosen people in a new Kanaan—visible also in all geographical names on places and landmarks all over South Africa that was brought from Israel—resulted in a conception of whites and non-whites as different *nations*. Nonetheless, nowhere, according to Loubser, is there any biblical justification given for the differentiations between nations until around 1930.¹⁵¹

The DRC in the Free State held a missionary conference in 1929 about the welfare of the ‘native inhabitants’. That the “native was a human being of similar nature to [them] and that his soul was of equal worth to any other human being in the eyes of God” was acknowledged. But yet, he was not to exert these rights in the same way as white people. A national motive about how these rights were to be exercised was added to the expression above; “in his own community”, or to be more precise, in his own nation. Two years later this functioned as the base for the Mission Policy adopted in 1935 by all the DRC churches¹⁵². In reality this segregation, already the ecclesiastical praxis with a theological reference to just a few quotations from the Bible—among them Matt. 28:19 and Acts 17:26—, was now to be widened also to a social and political level. While elaborating on what evangelisation should be, according to the mission policy, it denotes clearly that it “does not presuppose denationalisation”. In his¹⁵³ own nation Christianity “must eventually permeate and purify his entire nationalism”.

¹⁵⁰ (Loubser 1987, p. 25)

¹⁵¹ (Loubser 1987, p. 24-6)

¹⁵² (Loubser 1987, p. 29); Cf. (Adonis 1982, p. 78-9)

¹⁵³ The word ‘his’ denotes what in other sections are named ‘bantu’ or ‘native’.

This policy did not take into account any references to church unity.¹⁵⁴ What was a concession in 1857—due to *the weakness of some*—hereby becomes an established principle, not only for the church but for the society. Connected to this “the Christian Afrikaner” sensed that he had a God-given calling to be the non-white’s guardian “to lead him to full maturity”.

Loubser calls this a position where the Kuyperian ideas has “infiltrated the church gradually until apartheid received its official go-ahead” and calls this new situation a “Pragmatic apartheid” and Gilliomée asserts that “thus DRC ministers and missionary strategists were first in the field to formulate an apartheid ideology”. Adonis points to the fact that this Mission Policy fitted as hand in glove for those who met at the *Volks Congreses* that met in 1944 and 1947 and paved the way for the success by the National Party in 1948 while putting strong emphasis on the “protection and preservation on the white Christian civilisation”.¹⁵⁵

3.2.3.2 1950

To promote mission work the Federal Mission Council—as a joint body for the different Synods of the DRC—was set up. One duty for the council was “to be involved in political policies regarding the well-being of the black people”.¹⁵⁶

In 1950 the Council organised a huge congress on the ‘native issue’ partly due to critical views in the English-speaking churches regarding the development since 1948.¹⁵⁷ Among the 560 delegates there was not one black. Information on the decisions taken should be

¹⁵⁴ An Addendum to the Mission Policy document was incorporated. There they in a way deal with the unity issue. “1. The Dutch Reformed Church accepts the unity of the human race, which is not annulled by its diversity. At the same time the Dutch Reformed Church accepts the natural diversity of the human race, which is not annulled by its unity. 2. Through free grace God assembles His Church out of all nations. This assembly of believers or communion of saints forms an indissoluble unity as the mystic body of Christ.” (Gerdener 1958, p. 269-73)

¹⁵⁵ (Loubser 1987, p. 52-3); (Gilliomée 2003, p. 459); (Adonis 1982, p. 81-7) Quotation from Adonis (1982 p. 84) originally in Afrikaans – my translation.

¹⁵⁶ (Strassberger 1974, p. 186-9)

¹⁵⁷ (Strassberger 1974, p. 200-1)

handed over to the black leaders in strictly ethnically organised regional conferences.¹⁵⁸

The earlier statements on a differentiation are maintained and the congress urged on total separation—in line with ‘the purist school’.¹⁵⁹ This made it reasonable for the DRC and the other Afrikaner churches not only to accept all new apartheid legislation but also express thanks to the government for laws prohibiting mixed marriages and sexual intercourse between Black and White, as well as the Group Areas Act and many of the almost 100 other laws that were adopted before 1960.¹⁶⁰

Prime Minister D.F. Malan was more pragmatic and blunt and turned down the total segregation view as unrealistic “in South Africa, where our whole economic structure is to a large extent based on Native Labour”. To that the DRC did not respond.¹⁶¹

This is the time for the second mission wave according to Kritzinger et al. It started—surprisingly enough—not in the church but as a response on a governmental report. This report identified what they saw as a need to Christianize more heathen black people in the rural areas. By missionary outreach work there the missionaries could contribute to a socio-economic development in those areas and thereby make the apartheid economy work better. Or, as it was stated:

“Our sons and daughters should realise that mission work offers the most wonderful opportunity to serve God, but also the most glorious opportunity to serve the fatherland.”¹⁶²

Mission became a patriotic thing with a focus on the “Bantu Nations”. The church and the state became team-mates when the church heavily subsidised by the government should help the “‘underdeveloped, undereducated and therefore uncivilised’ Bantu ... to grow up to mature

¹⁵⁸ (Adonis 1982, p. 93)

¹⁵⁹ See p. 49

¹⁶⁰ (Loubser 1987, p. 77-8, 86)

¹⁶¹ (Strassberger 1974, p. 202-3)

¹⁶² (Kritzinger, Saayman and Smit 2004, p. 264)

personhood and nationhood”.¹⁶³ The strong patriotic sentiment resulted in an extensive influx of young well-educated people to the corps of missionaries and large bible translation programs.

3.2.3.3 1966/1974

Time and again conferences were held, but after the Cottesloe conference¹⁶⁴ with its “fairly paralysing results”¹⁶⁵ something new was needed and in 1966 the DRC produced a small booklet entitled *Human Relations in South Africa* which in three sections deals with Scriptural perspectives, Church relations, and human relations in society.

As a platform for further deliberations it starts by defining certain words; among them *Race*, *People*, and *Nation*. By referring—not always consistently—to the use of Hebrew words for these concepts the document tries to vindicate earlier views on ‘diversity within unity’. New in this document in relation to earlier discussions are warnings against “liberalistic views” and “injudicious agitation for equality” that can wake up false expectations among black people.¹⁶⁶

The section on The Church and Church Relations is continuing the exercise to clarify the unity/diversity idea and new distinctions are revealed. While ‘diversity’ is God-given and consequently positive, ‘division’ is negative. In the same way ‘pluriformity’ has positive connotations, while ‘plurality’ signals this-worldly and negative aspects of life. With this goes a warning that “diversity (pluriformity) must not degenerate ... into division (plurality)”.¹⁶⁷

In describing the background of the development of the so-called ‘indigenous N.G. Daughter Churches’ the document states that as no “official objection against this separate ministry was ever registered” to the separate congregations that were set up after 1857 it paved the way for the formation of Nederduitse Gereformeerde Mission Church in 1881. Furthermore, they understood the mission societies as successful

¹⁶³ (Kritzinger, Saayman and Smit 2004, p. 270)

¹⁶⁴ See page 66

¹⁶⁵ (van der Watt 1987, p. 114)

¹⁶⁶ (DRC 1966, p. 5)

¹⁶⁷ (DRC 1966, p. 34): The word ‘plurality’ has a value or connotation in the proximity of ‘liberal’—also a word mostly conceived in the negative fashion.

in their task. Thus, they only did what was the best for everyone. Apart from that, the document maintains that most of the problems of division within South Africa have its roots abroad, in particular in the Netherlands.¹⁶⁸

The final section about ‘Human Relations in Society’ starts by warning about too tight an involvement in matters that are part of the Governmental sphere of life. Church and state has each its own identity. Therefore it also warns about using the word ‘prophetic’ as it is closely linked to some special persons who “lived in the particular period of Theocratic rule”. Instead words as ‘service’ and ‘ministry’ should be in the forefront when the Church is to “Christianise the civil sphere.”¹⁶⁹

After having said this, the document nonetheless turns to the discussion on the very political issue on migratory labour. It sees the situation in the context of “the necessity for the regulations of race relations” but notes that it was more prevalent than expected and obviously of great importance for the country’s economy and inevitable if “the Bantu population is to be helped to survive economically”.¹⁷⁰

The document also notes that there are problems with the migratory labour system but ends without any proposal and furthermore by noting that it is not the task of the Church to find solutions, but to point out the moral implications by the system. To that it adds “thanks and appreciation to the government for the processes which has already been made to solve the problem”.¹⁷¹

The ‘Human Relations’ document was then sent out to the congregations for discussion and in the 1974 Synod a sequel was adopted as a result of the deliberations.

The new document is called *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the light of Scripture*.¹⁷² The size is almost doubled but its

¹⁶⁸ (DRC 1966, p. 24)

¹⁶⁹ (DRC 1966, p. 39-40)

¹⁷⁰ (DRC 1966, p. 46-8)

¹⁷¹ (DRC 1966, p. 49-52)

¹⁷² In Afrikaans: Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die lig van die skrif

contents are in all essentials the same although the structure differs slightly.

Under the heading ‘The Church, the Kingdom and the Oekomene’ a new concept is taken up and criticised: *Horizontalism*. It is understood as a “conception of the calling of the church in the world—mostly in a disapproving manner or as an admonishment”. Furthermore, the idea is described as a view that “sees the regeneration promised in the gospel primarily as an answer to the social, economic and political needs of man ... instead of regarding salvation as a spiritual concept”. Closely related to this concept of Horizontalism is theology of revolution—a concept that is not biblically defensible and has to be rejected. The church is said to have as its task to give “shape to God’s redemptive salvation by devoting itself to the establishment of a responsible society”.¹⁷³

Despite ambitions to establish better relations “there are signs of estrangement, misunderstanding, prejudice and tension among the various population groups”. The now minimal contact between them needs to be increased. That does not imply, however, “obliterations of identity of the groups concerned”.¹⁷⁴

As a church the DRC cannot “stand aloof from the socio-economic problems of the less developed”.¹⁷⁵ The main task for the church related to development is “the creation of a spiritual basis for the development of a Christian philosophy of life and worldview”.¹⁷⁶

The conclusion when this is applied on politics, the document maintains, is that “state and church [are] separate institutions and instruments of God, each with its own authority, structure and function”. Therefore, “it is not part of the church’s calling to dictate to the authorities” on issues on which the latter has the authority. Whenever contact is to be taken from the side of the church it should be done through its official bodies.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ (DRC 1974, p. 53-4, 62) Bold text in the quote is original.

¹⁷⁴ (DRC 1974, p. 66)

¹⁷⁵ (DRC 1974, p. 67)

¹⁷⁶ (DRC 1974, p. 68)

¹⁷⁷ (DRC 1974, p. 69-70)

As in 1966 it is mentioned that “autogenous or separate development” is biblically justified.¹⁷⁸ In its reflection over Church and Missionary work the document starts by defining the existence of “separate Dutch reformed Church affiliations for various population groups ... as being in accordance with the plurality of the church affiliation described in the Bible”.¹⁷⁹ It furthermore appreciates them and their history as something that has served “the interests of the church in South Africa...well”. It should, however, be remembered that the fellowship of believers must not be rooted in one institutional structure but in the common fellowship in Christ.¹⁸⁰ This basic reflection is the basis for the missionary policy of DRC.

At the end of this part are a few pages on the special circumstances related to the coloured population. Special problems arise from the fact that coloureds not necessarily any more want to associate with the whites, but have “started to identify themselves more with Black Power”. An even worse problem is that they have begun to “admixture with the Bantu”.¹⁸¹

3.3 Some Ecumenical Church Bodies

Not long ago there were those who seemed to think it was possible to make the issue of apartheid a question of semantics. One National Party member, Mr N F Treurnicht, articulated in a speech in 1967, that “we have no race classification in the strict sense of the word. We have popular grouping. We in South Africa are not obsessed with race”.¹⁸² The Minister of Health, Dr. Carol de Wet, held the view that “Contact across the colour line is welcome so long as the motive for the contact is the greater separation of the races”.¹⁸³ Another example of this kind is

¹⁷⁸ (DRC 1974, p. 71)

¹⁷⁹ (DRC 1974, p. 82)

¹⁸⁰ (DRC 1974, p. 82-3)

¹⁸¹ (DRC 1974, p. 79)

¹⁸² (Maclennan 1990, p. 13)

¹⁸³ (Maclennan 1990, p. 83); Quotation from Sunday Times February 7, 1971

from the leader of the National Party in Transvaal, Connie Mulder, who meant that “South Africa’s internal policies should be described as aiming at a plural democracy rather than at separate development or apartheid”.¹⁸⁴

Not only can these sayings, in retrospect, be considered “funny Orwellisms”, but they also highlight difficulties inherent in words as race and apartheid. Here I will not go into a discussion on what we mean when we are talking about ‘race prejudice and injustice’, ‘imperialism’ or ‘apartheid’, just, as apartheid and race are important catch-words in this study, briefly depict how the reality behind these words has been dealt with historically by parts of the international ecumenical community.

Some kind of awareness of the importance of the issue was expressed relatively early in the Ecumenical movement. Already in the 1920s, the International Missionary Council (IMC) expressed an awareness of the inherent problem with the relation between church and race. Oldham wrote about it on behalf of the IMC in 1926: “[W]e must approach everything in the relation between races that cannot be reconciled with the Christian ideal”.¹⁸⁵ At the IMC conference in Jerusalem 1928 they stated that “[a]ny discrimination against human beings on the ground of race or colour ... is a denial of the teaching of Jesus”.¹⁸⁶ It is also possible to find traces of the race issue at gatherings with Life and Work (1937 in Oxford), Faith and Order (1937 in Edinburgh) as well as IMC (1938 in Tambaran).¹⁸⁷

3.3.1 The WCC

In the years after WWII, the discussion on ‘the race issue’ gained some momentum. Already at the founding Assembly of WCC in Amsterdam 1948, they touch the issue. The WCC statutes contain sections that condemn any segregation based on race or colour. The DRC reverend Ben

¹⁸⁴ (Maclennan 1990, p. 84)

¹⁸⁵ (Oldham 1925, p. 26)

¹⁸⁶ Quoted in (Sjollema 1994 a, p. 1)

¹⁸⁷ (Hooft 1952, p. 6)

Marais participated in the Assembly on behalf of his church and back in South Africa he laments the critique he met there due to his church's support of apartheid. Especially the question on "territorial apartheid" created indignation and Marais declares that "no explanation that I offered seemed to make the slightest impression".¹⁸⁸

The discussion on the race issue within the WCC developed much further at the next assembly, held in Evanston USA, in 1954. One of the sections had the theme "The Churches amid Racial and Ethnic Tensions".¹⁸⁹ The WCC General Secretary W.A. Visser't Hooft had two years earlier visited South Africa. In his report to the Executive committee he summed up his findings.¹⁹⁰ Indubitably, one must say that this is a very 'soft' report, which is remarkable as the planning for the trip was halted from the outset by the DRC and Hervormde Kerk who turned down the request from the WCC to send an ecumenical, multi-racial, delegation. It is difficult to understand the report by the Gen. Secretary in another way than that he seems to be eager to try to understand the argument that "apartheid does not necessarily mean ... discrimination".¹⁹¹ He continues to discuss different forms of apartheid that are proposed by varying groups, and puts forward the idea that the word 'apartheid' "ought to be replaced by a more adequate expression such as 'distinct development'".¹⁹² The main problem for him is the "disintegration of the Bantu society".¹⁹³ An argument Visser't Hooft seems to accept is that the idea of "total territorial separation"—which all parts of the DRC, including the 'mission churches'¹⁹⁴, recommended at a conference in Bloemfontein in 1950—would solve the disintegration problem.

¹⁸⁸ (B. Marais 1950, p. 139)

¹⁸⁹ (Fey 1993 (1970), p. 40)

¹⁹⁰ (Hooft 1952); The report can also be found in *The Ecumenical Review* Vol. V, Oct 1952, nr. 3, p. 174-97

¹⁹¹ (Hooft 1952, p. 9-10)

¹⁹² (Hooft 1952, p. 10)

¹⁹³ (Hooft 1952, p. 7-8)

¹⁹⁴ (Hooft 1952, p. 10)

Only two years later the tone had been sharpened and thereafter every WCC General Assembly dealt with the issue of race in a much more clear-sighted way.

3.3.1.1 Cottesloe

In March 1960, in the small town Sharpeville, south of Johannesburg, a group of people carried out a peaceful demonstration against the expanded pass laws. Of them at least 69 were shot dead, in most cases in their backs. Most English-speaking churches in South Africa reacted with disgust and blamed the government for this. The leadership of three of the four white DRC synods reacted sharply to this and issued a statement deploring the “shocking statements” against the government. They meant that the reaction of the English-speaking churches was part of “the pathological interest in and condemnation of South Africa” that springs out of “social humanism and of the hysterical efforts of the West to overbid the East for the favour of the non-whites of Africa with the ideological slogan of self-determination”. Furthermore, in their statement the DRC expressed their renewed support for apartheid or as it is described here: “the policy of independent, distinct development provided it is carried out in a just and honourable way”.¹⁹⁵ The relation between the churches reached a crisis never seen before.

The crises led the WCC to send its associate General Secretary, Dr. Robert Bilheimer, to South Africa to try to heal the rift.¹⁹⁶ The outcome of all his meetings was the proposal of a huge conference at the end of the year—what was to become the momentous Cottesloe conference.¹⁹⁷ All eight South African WCC member churches participated; each of them had ten delegates, whereof all but NHK had one or more non-white, eighteen in all.

¹⁹⁵ All quotes: (DRC 1960, p. 1-4)

¹⁹⁶ My presentation of this meeting rests primarily on the descriptions given by the WCC Report that was compiled after the meeting (WCC 1961). Colleen Ryan also gives a short but good overview – albeit with some special references to Beyers Naudé (Ryan 1990). Also (Walshe, 1983) and (De Gruchy and De Gruchy 2004) have brief accounts of the meeting. For Afrikaans-readers, (Lückhoff 1978), provides a comprehensive exposition.

¹⁹⁷ Cottesloe was a boarding house at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg – the Cottesloe College Residence. (Lückhoff 1978, p. 74)

The issues they had agreed on to discuss were about the understanding of basic facts on the South African situation, about what they as churches could do to establish the justice of which the Bible speaks and about what a Christian attitude towards race was.

After having discussed the different topics and the submissions by the churches, a statement was drafted. It is neither comprehensive, nor far-reaching. A paternalistic mindset was prevalent and Walshe argues that "had the white representatives been listening to the underprivileged, to the protests of, and alternative futures envisaged by, blacks, Cottesloe would have confronted the church and government establishment with a much more radical set of challenges than it did".¹⁹⁸ Nevertheless, the statement expresses a rejection of all forms of racial discrimination. It also maintains the view that there is no scriptural ground for prohibiting mixed marriages. The document also pinpoints that no Christian should be excluded from participating in any church due to race. Furthermore, it calls the migrant labour system unacceptable.

The delegates from the English churches were by some accused of having compromised earlier positions and taken a step back. For the DRC delegates it was perceived as a small step forward, away from earlier positions critical to racial mixing. Maybe even more important was that they, for the first time, differed from government policy.¹⁹⁹

There are differing views on whether the statement was strong or weak. To many, who have analysed the meeting, it contained a potential of being groundbreaking. De Gruchy talks about it as momentous.²⁰⁰ Walshe holds the view that the DRC delegates had taken an initiative "which, had it been accepted by the DRC synods, might have moved Afrikanerdom away from its racist policies of apartheid and uncompromising white control".²⁰¹ Maybe the most troublesome shortcoming of the document was not what it said but what it did not say anything about: the legality of the apartheid state, the very point in the

¹⁹⁸ (Walshe 1983, p. 17-8)

¹⁹⁹ (Ryan 1990, p. 60)

²⁰⁰ (De Gruchy and De Gruchy 2004, p. 65)

²⁰¹ (Walshe 1983, p. 16)

Kairos document 25 years later, that the apartheid state is per se tyrannical and must be gone, not reformed. On this the Cottesloe consultation statement did not say anything.

The DRC also added a special statement as a means to soften the joint declaration. They noted firstly that “a policy of differentiation can be defended from the Christian point of view” and secondly that such a view did not contradict the joint declaration.²⁰²

Soon after the meeting, critical voices began to be heard. The top-most levels in the state expressed severe criticism about outsiders’ interference in South African internal affairs. When the DRC synods met during the first half of 1961, their delegates at the Cottesloe meeting received strong criticism and the statement was turned down.²⁰³ The two DRC synods and the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk left WCC.

The process up to the Cottesloe meeting, the meeting in itself and the joint statement marked a major turning point in church relations in South Africa. According to Walshe Cottesloe established the fragile beginnings of a consensus on fundamentals, which might have bridged the gap between the South African Churches.²⁰⁴ The aftermath turned it upside down. What could have been a breakthrough, a beginning of a process of moving away from apartheid on the part of the Afrikaans Reformed Churches, resulted in those churches separating themselves from the wider ecumenical community in South Africa and abroad and becoming more confirmed than ever in their support of apartheid.²⁰⁵

It took another 31 years until a WCC delegation could visit South Africa again.

3.3.1.2 After Cottesloe

The storm after Cottesloe made the DRC participants wary and downhearted. The World Council of Churches encouraged them to start

²⁰² (WCC 1961, p. 34-5)

²⁰³ (Ryan 1990, p. 64-7)

²⁰⁴ (Walshe 1983, p. 16); (De Gruchy and De Gruchy 2004, p. 63, 65) speaks of “a gathering of great importance” and that outsiders already then realized that “something momentous was happening”.

²⁰⁵ (De Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio 1983, p. 144)

ecumenical study groups. These groups in their turn initiated different initiatives for the continuation of the reflection that had started at the Cottesloe meeting whereof two are of special interest: Pro Veritate and thereafter the Christian Institute. The journal Pro Veritate—*For the Truth*—presented in its first issue what was to be its focal theme: to demolish “biblical justification of apartheid by citing biblical texts which emphasised the unity of the Christian Church”.²⁰⁶ The other consequence of the disappointing results of the Cottesloe meeting was the establishment of the Christian Institute. The aim was to “search for a deeper insight into the will of Christ for his church through study circles and discussion groups and to strengthen the witness of the church by holding courses and conferences”.²⁰⁷ It also published a huge number of articles, pamphlets and other publications.

Instrumental in this was one of the DRC delegates at the Cottesloe conference who had encountered great difficulties afterwards—Beyers Naudé. The Veritate and the Institute played an immensely important role during the sixties and seventies until they both were closed down in 1977 by the apartheid government.²⁰⁸

A decisive moment for the future came at the following WCC assembly, the Uppsala 68-assembly. During the years since 1960, dramatic changes had taken place all over the globe and the issue of race had gained poignant significance. At the Assembly, it became utterly obvious that those who benefited from inequality, separateness and racial division would stop at nothing in their ambition to keep power and advantages. Martin Luther King who had been invited to hold the sermon at the opening service was assassinated not long before the meeting.²⁰⁹

There was a strong feeling that something had to be done, or as Sjollema expresses it: “A cry for action was heard”.²¹⁰ The Assembly decided that the WCC should “undertake a crash program to guide the

²⁰⁶ (Ryan 1990, p. 68-70)

²⁰⁷ (Ryan 1990, p. 77)

²⁰⁸ Besides that, the whole leadership of the CI was banned for five years. Also the Black Consciousness Movement, student and community organisations and many more were smashed at the same time.

²⁰⁹ (Sjollema 1994 a, p. 9)

²¹⁰ (Sjollema 1994 a, p. 10)

Council and member churches in the urgent matter of racism” and it was clearly pointed out that this program also should deal with economic and political aspects.²¹¹ It was in line with the expectations of the growing number of representatives in WCC from countries in the Global South where racism, colonialism and injustices were well known.²¹²

The following year the ‘Ecumenical Program to Combat Racism (PCR) was set up for which ‘white racism’ and South Africa would be of special interest. One important reason for that was that the government in South Africa claimed to be defending ‘Western Christian Civilisation’ and as apartheid was set up by and defended by people who called themselves Christians.²¹³

Prime Minister Vorster immediately tried to discredit PCR and meant that WCC was communist-infiltrated and providing terrorist organisations with money for arms. The moderator of DRC called the decision of WCC “one of the most atrocious offences that the Christian churches can commit against the Word of God”.²¹⁴

It is well known that much of that kind of critique from Christian right-wing groups world-wide that accused WCC of being influenced by communist views and of supporting terror was orchestrated from the South African government.²¹⁵ Around the mid-seventies the South African government provided for large-scale secret funding for covert activities by individuals and organisations. Fictitious organisations were set up, newspapers were established and numerous secret projects were launched—“a history of sleaze, corruption, violation of exchange control regulation, lies in Parliament and even murder”. Even the DRC was part of this propaganda machine by ‘selling’ the government’s view of apartheid. It was done through a department at the DRC church office financed by the Department of Information, aiming at countering the work of the WCC. In August 1979 the scandal also reached the DRC but the church denied being controlled in its use of the money from the

²¹¹ Cited from the Uppsala Report 1968 p. 130, in (Sjollema 1994 a, p.10)

²¹² (Sjollema 1994 a, p. 10-1)

²¹³ (B. Sjollema 1994 b, p.15); (Adler 1994, p. 53)

²¹⁴ (Pityana 1994, p. 91)

²¹⁵ (B. Sjollema 1994 b, p. 30)

government. The work carried forth by the means provided by the government was “honourable and justified in terms of Christian principles” according to the leadership of the DRC.²¹⁶

At the Central Committee meeting in 1980, WCC strengthened its position on apartheid. It also asked the churches to act for “comprehensive sanctions ... including withdrawal of investments, an end to bank loans, arms embargo and oil sanctions, and in general”, and to “cease any direct, and as far as possible indirect, financial involvement in activities which support the apartheid regime”.²¹⁷

The eighties also brought about another understanding among clergy and churches of the need for change. In their ministerial work they met people over and over again who had been assaulted, families who were brutalized as a result of all the violence and people in agony due to the constant repression.²¹⁸

De Gruchy holds the conviction that this also reflects the growing influence by the black membership in the English-speaking churches for whom “the issue of membership in the WCC became an important yardstick by which to measure the extent to which the churches were committed to the struggle against apartheid”.²¹⁹

3.3.2 The LWF family of churches

German immigrants brought their Lutheran faith with them to South Africa. Those who came early, in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, mainly joined the Reformed churches.²²⁰ Those who came later,

²¹⁶ (Serfontein 1982, p. 80-2); Serfontein gives further examples (p. 76-86) on how the DRC is acting on behalf of the government to disperse smoke screens and convey disinformation

²¹⁷ (Sjollema 1994 b, p. 30-1)

²¹⁸ There are numerous accounts of the terrible situation in the townships in the eighties and about the atrocities that was perpetrated against the most vulnerable in society. To mention just a few: (Noonan 2003), (Pauw 1997), (Krog 1998) and some chapters in (Allen 2006)

²¹⁹ (De Gruchy 1997, p. 164)

²²⁰ (Gerstner 1997, p. 21); Here is an obvious disagreement among scholars. (De Gruchy and De Gruchy 2004, p. 1) holds the view that “The German Lutherans were more successful [than the French Huguenots: my insertion] in their struggle to retain their own identity”, while Gerstner quotes sayings that the Lutherans “would more easily merge with Dutch Reformed congregations”, and adds that

Cont. next page

especially from the end of the nineteenth century and onwards, established their own churches. Besides that, a number of German Lutheran mission societies established mission churches in South Africa during the course of the nineteenth century.²²¹ As a result, these immigrant churches and societies built regional churches along ethnical confines and they were not in a position to disagree with or challenge the more and more far-reaching ‘apartheid legislation’, not even when they themselves felt its obstructing effects also on their work e.g. when the mission-schools were nationalised.²²²

Attempts during the early seventies to unite the different black and white churches into one failed due to white restraint, and instead four black churches formed a new united church.

After having dealt with the ‘race-issue’ in different ways for about three decades the LWF General Assembly at Dar-es-Salaam in 1977 at the instigation of bishop Manas Buthelezi decided to declare the South African situation a *Status confessionis*.²²³

In a rather short resolution the LWF starts by describing the confessional base for this resolution. The main part is, however, on clarifying that when political and social systems get too perverted and oppressive “it is consistent with the confession to reject them and work for changes”. Therefore the Assembly in this declaration “especially appeal to our white member churches ... to recognize that the situation ... constitutes a *Status confessionis*”. They are thereby urged “unequivocally [to] reject existing apartheid system”.²²⁴

As the LWF according to its constitution cannot bind the churches with its decisions, this declaration did not immediately result in any change in the relation among the Lutheran South Africa churches, or between them and the world-wide Lutheran community. Fur-

when the first Lutheran church was formed in 1780 “only a trickle of colonists joined the Lutheran Church, many Lutherans having already joined the Reformed church”.

²²¹ (Brandt 1983, p. 25-6)

²²² (Lodberg 1988, p. 37-42)

²²³ A thorough discussion on *status confessionis* will be accomplished in chapter 7

²²⁴ (LWF 1977, p. 11)

thermore a debate arose on the meaning of the *Status confessionis* concept as such ending in the development of a study program over the following years aiming at analysing “the meaning of *Status confessionis* [in order to] clarify the ethical and theological challenges inherent in the apartheid system”.²²⁵

Later it became obvious that this maybe made the question even more difficult to comprehend, or as Lodberg writes: “The *Status confessionis*-concept became disconnected from its ecclesiological context”.²²⁶

While little was done on the side of the white church to change the relation to the black churches, the latter took the initiative to propose a suspension which led to a decision at the seventh Assembly, held in Budapest in 1984, to suspend the two white member churches.

3.3.3 The World Alliance of Reformed Churches

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches—that since the GC in Accra in 2004 comprises 214 member churches in 107 countries—is the expression of a mutual commitment by churches worldwide to work together. It is a wide array of churches that among other things share a common heritage in the reformation emanating mainly from Switzerland and/or with a Presbyterian or Congregational background.²²⁷

The DRC became an early member of the WARC. Directly after the Second World War the contacts between the WARC and the churches were limited but there are no traces of hesitation regarding the DRC. The hope is that it can “play a very active part in our great Reformed family”.²²⁸ It takes until the 50s before expressions of concern about “the growing nationalism of the Afrikaans” [meaning Afrikaners: my insertion] is visible.²²⁹

²²⁵ (Lodberg 1988, p. 134); Cf. (Lorenz 1983, p. 7-9)

²²⁶ (Lodberg 1988, p. 142); [My translation from the original Danish text.]

²²⁷ (WARC 2009)

²²⁸ (WARC 1949). The letter is dated 20 August, 1949.

²²⁹ (WARC 1951, p. 6-7)

Besides this, there is almost silence until the Sharpeville events in 1960. With the killings there as a reference point the Executive council pointed out to the DRC that “the South African Government’s current application and working out of apartheid has deeply distressed and offended Christian opinion in all our lands and Churches”.²³⁰

The reply from the DRC starts by assuming that there is a “great deal of misrepresentation as well as misunderstanding of the D.R. Church and our views”. They continue to admit that there are “grievances”, but that they also know what role “agitators have played”.²³¹

The letter continues as follows:

“While we disapprove of man’s inhumanity to man and confess that many of our members are not above racial prejudice, it would be very unrealistic to suppose that all black Africans are more virtuous and less subject to racial prejudice. We realise that no race is inherently inferior and that given time and opportunity every race and nation can develop a sense of responsibility and reach maturity.

We believe that we have the moral right to maintain our own group identity and we are prepared to grant the same right to all other entities. ... We also believe that an honourable and just way must and can be found for free communication between all races without imperilling the identity of any of them and without harm to human dignity. In so far as the policy of the Government is basically in agreement with this concept of race relations, we are prepared to co-operate without thereby necessarily identifying ourselves with every detail of legislative measure”.²³²

To all this the WARC executive council responded with another letter stating that although some good things have been done, still there are some “positions taken by the Reformed and Presbyterian Christians in South Africa [that] appear to ... be clearly contrary to the Word of God

²³⁰ Dated at the end of April and enclosed as Appendix VIII in (WARC, EXC011 1960, p. 43)

²³¹ (WARC 1960, p. 41-2)

²³² (WARC 1960, p. 41-2)

and lacking the understanding of the legitimate aspirations of black African people".²³³

Indeed, with this letter of August 1960, WARC had given some important directions on how they were going to handle the race-issue—later called by its Afrikaans name, *apartheid*—for the future.

The coming years are characterized by an exchange of letters on the issue but without any substantial changes in reality. The 'mission churches' were present in their own capacity for the first time at the General Council in 1964—although represented by white ministers. A report on the 'Racial question' was presented at the gathering that pin-points this issue as one that affects the whole world at a rapidly developing pace. It even expresses fear that this, if not solved, can lead to "full-scale wars or revolutions". Secondly, the report gives a theological justification to why the Church, and the individual Christian, is obliged, in following the word of God to make no distinction between men due to race, colour, or nationality. Thirdly and lastly, the document proposes actions in line with this. It had to do with openness for anyone to participate in the life of the congregation. However, it also had to do with what was happening in society. The document is unambiguous on this and calls on every Christian to "protest in the light of God's Word not only in words but in action and to participate in responsible efforts toward the establishment of racial justice and equality".²³⁴

To this, the delegates from the white South African Churches protested and proposed a deletion of this part of the document but "a large majority" rejected that.²³⁵

When the WARC met for a General Council next time, in Nairobi 1970 many churches in former colonies had become independent during the

²³³ The letter is enclosed as Appendix XXX in (WARC 1960, p. 105-6)

²³⁴ (WARC 1964, p. 230-2, 50-1)

²³⁵ (WARC 1964, p. 50); Cf. list of participants from South Africa p 8-9.

last decade and now joined the WARC.²³⁶ That had certainly an impact on what issues were discussed and on the radicalism in the conclusions.

One of the sections of the council dealt with the theme *Reconciliation and Society: Freedom of a Just Order*. It took up the racism issue and stated in its final declaration that it is “incumbent upon the church to recognize racism for the idolatry it, in fact, is”.²³⁷ Based on that declaration they reaffirmed the position on Race that was adopted in Frankfurt in 1964, and furthermore they declared that

“The church of Jesus Christ does not make room for walls, be they tribal, racial, cultural, economic, national or confessional. The church that by doctrine and/or practice affirms segregation of peoples (e.g. racial segregation) as a law for its life cannot be regarded as an authentic member of the body of Christ”.²³⁸

In the documentation of the section—with some examples on critical situations around the globe—was also their impression that the DRC gave its support to the South African government’s policy and practice of racial segregation. The DRC delegation—including, interestingly enough, the ones from the black Dutch Reformed Church in Africa—tried to get the part on the South African situation deleted and then voted against the adoption of the text but that attempt to escape criticism did not only fail but also turned out to be counterproductive as the council even strengthened the text.²³⁹

Due to financial and other reasons, the Alliance did not have its next General Council until 1982.

In the meantime, the WARC tried to advocate regional meetings in South Africa to get an opportunity for members of the Executive Council together with representatives of all South African churches to confer on multilateral as well as unilateral basis according to various

²³⁶ Equatorial Guinea, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi are but a few of the African examples of countries from where new independent churches came to the 1970 council for the first time

²³⁷ (WARC 1970, p. 226)

²³⁸ (WARC 1970, p. 226)

²³⁹ (WARC 1970, p. 234)

needs and wishes. The slow and unwilling responses from the DRC and NHK forced some years later the General Secretary to announce that the idea was dead and had to be dropped.²⁴⁰

To be on speaking terms with each other seemed to be difficult, and Dr. Perret, then General Secretary of the WARC, in a report to the Executive Council, pointed out that “public statements which were considered by us to be fraternal words of concern and warning ... were not received as such by all our member churches”. Another problem was that cooperation between the member churches “in spite of all our efforts ... has not improved greatly”.²⁴¹

A sign of change in the South African situation in the last half of the seventies is that the black, coloured, and Indian churches are beginning to play an increasingly important role among the churches in South Africa and especially within the reformed family both nationally and internationally. Dr. Perret is talking of them as holding a “key position”.²⁴² One example of an increased confidence is when some fifty coloured ministers in the DRMC in 1979, relying on a statement at their synod previous year that adherence to the Broederbond negatively affected the loyalty to the brotherhood in Christ, demanded of their white colleagues to make a choice and declare publicly their belonging to, and loyalty to, either the Afrikaner Broederbond or the DRMC.²⁴³

Emanating from the 1970 WARC General Council a study program on *The Theological Basis of Human Rights and a Theology of Liberation*²⁴⁴ gained some speed. Local member churches were challenged and encouraged to continue the study starting from their own actual situation to be better skilled to serve dehumanized people, to protest against inhuman acts and structures, to participate in making HR into Civil rights and laws, and to cooperate with any Human Rights-movement, whether Christian or not. These principal strategies could then be transformed into proposals about concrete actions.

²⁴⁰ (WARC 1974, p. 18)

²⁴¹ (WARC 1977, p. 8)

²⁴² (WARC 1977, p. 9)

²⁴³ (Serfontein 1982, p. 94)

²⁴⁴ (WARC 1970, p. 172)

The increased severe unrest that was prevalent at the end of the seventies, starting in Soweto in June 1976, caused the WARC to send a delegation, headed by its President James I. McCord, to South Africa.

In their report to the Executive after the tour they argue that the situation is dangerously deteriorating. Therefore it is a great pity that “[i]n the Dutch Reformed Churches the theology of apartheid not to speak of the practice is certainly in evidence”. But the report also states that there is a growing number of ministers and faculty staff who are in doubt when it comes to how the church is handling the situation. The reporteur’s view is that “there are ‘Bonhoeffers’ in all the churches, who are radically questioning the theology implicit in the present church/state relationship not to speak of the hermeneutics underlying the traditional theological support for apartheid policies”.²⁴⁵

The last period before the Ottawa meeting is dealt with in section 7.1.2.

3.3.3.1 The Southern Africa Alliance of Reformed Churches (SAARC)

A small group of people representing black Christianity in Southern Africa initiated, at a meeting in Maputo in the late eighties, a discussion on the need to create some kind of task force among the churches in the region for dealing with the problems among the peoples in Southern Africa. A request to the WARC to support a consultation on the issue led eventually to the establishment on January 1, 1989, of the regional branch of WARC with an office in Gaborone, Botswana. Every church belonging to the WARC could participate in the SAARC.²⁴⁶ The objectives of the SAARC formulated in the by-laws are among others the following: To help member Churches which may be weak, oppressed or persecuted; To promote and defend religious and civil liberties; Share ecumenical experiences; Function as a communication network provider; To create structures for cooperation between the member Churches in their commitment to the struggle of the poor and oppressed.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ (WARC 1979, p. 144)

²⁴⁶ (SAARC 1994)

²⁴⁷ (SAARC, By-Laws n.d.)

One of the frequently occurring tasks of the SAARC was to assess the processes in the DRC. The comprehensive press releases after its executive meeting in April 1991 is but one example. There they present an analysis of the DRC *Church and Society 1990*-document and declares that the SAARC “resolves to maintain the *status quo* with regard to its own ecumenical relation with the DRC until such time as the requirements set by the WARC are met”. Furthermore they call upon the other WARC members to endorse this view and to “refrain from disempowering the black sister churches ... by establishing direct ecumenical links with the DRC”.²⁴⁸

The WARC executive is every now and then mentioning the assessment of the SAARC as a foundation for their decisions²⁴⁹ and requesting the SAARC to monitor ongoing processes on behalf of the Executive council in order to be able to “promote justice in the multi-racial South Africa”²⁵⁰.

3.3.4 The South African Council of Churches

Many South African Church leaders were inspired by the Edinburgh conference in 1910 and the following decades a number of mission conferences were held in South Africa. This paved the way for the establishment in 1936 of a joint Christian institution—the *Christian Council of South Africa* (CC). Two DRC synods were among the founders, the Cape and Transvaal synods.²⁵¹ The other two refused to participate. Unfortunately, it did not take long before also these two who participated in establishing the organisation withdrew. Already from the birth of CC there had been discussions going on between the Afrikaans and English members on “different views ... on almost all questions affecting the African population”. In 1941, as a follow-up of their critique the DRC left.²⁵²

²⁴⁸ (SAARC 1991)

²⁴⁹ (WARC 1991, p. 42)

²⁵⁰ (WARC 1994, p. 19)

²⁵¹ (De Gruchy 1997, p. 158)

²⁵² (Strassberger 1974, p. 145)

Nevertheless, CC played an important role as a convenor of meetings giving the member churches opportunities to grapple with burning societal issues. This became especially obvious in the years after Cottesloe.²⁵³ Thereby CC came to play a role far beyond what was said in its constitution that “emphasized evangelism, study, and service, and said nothing about politics”.²⁵⁴

The Christian Council became in 1967 *South African Council of Churches* (SACC).

One of the first major events organized by the SACC was the preparation of the *Message to the People of South Africa* which was published in 1968. It was the result of a theological commission established by the council to “consider what obedience to God requires of the church in her witness to her unity in Christ in South Africa”.²⁵⁵ The main content of the *Message* was to show that apartheid and separate development were contrary to the gospel and denied the redemptive work of Christ. Not surprisingly this awoke fierce reactions in certain ranks in society. Prime Minister John Vorster not only criticised it for trying to do in South Africa what “Martin Luther King did in America” but was openly threatening the SACC by telling them that “the cloak you carry will not protect you”. While doing this by appealing to his respect for the word of God he explicitly demonstrated the two fundamentally different ways in which the biblical message was conceived in South Africa. The discussion highlights the ecclesiological consequences of this dichotomy. Botman argues that when the policy of separation is forced upon the churches it will result in “the destruction of the church since it is based on the reconciling work of Christ”.²⁵⁶

The council expanded greatly during the seventies—and became more ‘black’—and launched several programs. Besides a wide variety of development and community projects the struggle against apartheid became a central issue for the council, especially after the banning of

²⁵³ (De Gruchy 1979, p. 115-6)

²⁵⁴ (Elphick 1997, p. 363); Cf. The constitution in extenso is present in (Strassberger 1974, p. 142-3)

²⁵⁵ (De Gruchy and De Gruchy 2004, p. 115); The following description relies mainly on the account on this matter given by (De Gruchy and De Gruchy 2004, p. 112-23)

²⁵⁶ (Botman 2000, p. 107)

the Christian Institute in 1977. One should therefore not be surprised that when DRCA in 1976 became a member of SACC it was regarded as “siding with the enemy” by the white Afrikaner churches and by the government.²⁵⁷

3.4 Closing reflections

The above has by necessity been covering, not always in a way that looks coherent, a broad spectre of perspectives. In the following it will be obvious that the debate that went on during the 80s and 90s related to many things: the story of the Afrikaner people, the Reformed heritage and the early history of the DRC, the huge geographical area we today call South Africa, political development, and much more—all of which had a bearing on the conflict between the WARC and the DRC described in chapter 4-8.

In the first part of this chapter I could show that there is a line from the time of the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck up to the chaotic events of the nineteen eighties regarding the view that there is a demarcations line difficult to cross between people from different cultures. Edward Said's words about culture, understood in his broad sense, as the combating arena for securing one's own identity seems to be valid. Under certain periods this cultural clash was expressed in religious terms also by people who normally did not take religion as a deep personal matter. At other times scientific anthropology provided the ground for racist views. The fear of '*gelykstelling*' was another strong motive for the separation of people. Whether the difference was expressed in the dichotomy European – Native, White – Black, or Christian – Heathen the outcome became the same: A small group, almost only white, benefited and the large group, almost only black (which includes everyone who was not seen as white by the authorities) had to pay the price.

In this the Dutch Reformed Churches played a significant role. Therefore, in the continuation of my work, I will concentrate on the DRC and its 'daughter churches'. For that there are several reasons, not

²⁵⁷ (Kinghorn 1997, p. 152); (Walshe 1983, p. 390)

only that the DRC is by far the largest. Of the three Afrikaans churches it has had a much more poignant and visible profile in the ecumenical movement, be that the WCC or the WARC. The Gereformeerde Kerk did not belong to any of these bodies and the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk left early.

The second section above has proved that there is a long story to tell about their journey with apartheid²⁵⁸. However, it goes much further back than to 1960. Desmond Tutu is talking about 1652 as the starting date. The same view is true for the DRC itself when arguing in 1974 that they have had a special God-given task “since the beginning of South African history”. Religious motives behind the *Trek*, separate church services and buildings, and later totally separate churches, a mission policy that confirmed the factual situation and theologically motivated it—and thereby paved the way for the political and social adaptation of these policies—, are some of the elements in this story.

The third part of the chapter, that finalizes the background, is more fragmented but in the following the focus will be on the theological reflection and practical dealing by the WARC. Nonetheless, this part gives some basic understanding on the involvement of the worldwide ecumenical movement in the situation in South Africa up to 1982. Despite early awareness of racism as contradicting the gospel, it goes from a kind of understanding of aspects of apartheid to strong criticism and active involvement to overthrow the apartheid government.

One more thing has to be said. What I have not done in this chapter, deliberately, is to describe, more than in some minor details, the impact of the British Empire. Without any doubt a different lifestyle, different language, different *weltanschauung*, and different commercial interests of the British—just to mention some differences—played an important role for the development of the Afrikanerdom. It did so in many aspects by provoking a contra-reaction. It did so by supporting political aspirations among certain groups within the Afrikaner community. It did so also in giving an open field for at least parts of the apartheid pol-

²⁵⁸ In 1997 the DRC produced “The story of the Dutch Reformed Church’s Journey with Apartheid, 1960-1994. (DRC 1997)

icy – when it came to creating a system where factory-owners, mining companies and farmers had easy access to cheap labour.

My understanding is that it for my needs, nonetheless, is subordinate to the sectors I have exposed above.

Part III

As mentioned in section 1.3, and 2.2 part III is the main investigating part of the dissertation. It is presenting varying doorways that in their different ways open up for a broad spectrum of perspectives on the main question—how to understand the conflict between the WARC and the DRC.

The Dutch Reformed church is part of a world-wide church movement that has provided important theological insights related to different aspects of the societies in which it has been located. Theological reflection on societal involvement has been a trademark for the reformed movement, and consequently this has been in the centre also for the DRC and the community of reformed churches in the WARC. Therefore an analysis of the above conflict cannot but reflect thoroughly on the South African setting, theologically and socially.

Furthermore, it is often challenges from others, what they do or say that makes the DRC enter the field to begin kicking the ball.

Each of the 5 chapters will have a short introduction in which I give a motive for the different sections I have inserted under the particular heading. For obvious reasons there are no absolutes when it comes to why a certain section is placed in a specific chapter. (Hadn't the Kairos document section been better placed in chapter 6, or chapter 6 been put before or maybe merged with chapter 5? Or ...) Naturally, the subject matter could have been 'cut' differently. It will also become clear that it is almost unavoidable to get overlaps. I do nonetheless hope that I have managed to keep it down to a minimum and that in each chapter new voices will come to the fore and provide new insights that in the end will make up a broader and more comprehensive picture of the conflict.

Each chapter ends with some short closing reflections summarizing my main conclusions.

4 State and Church

While discussing a situation in a church that to a large extent has to do with apartheid it is inevitable to reflect on its relation to the state. Naturally, this is an immense subject and could be a dissertation on its own but the following aims at giving some basic introduction in as far as it relates to the overall theme of this study, and to show how the church/state issue has come to the fore and been debated in some crucial aspects relating to the DRC. In that way it will serve as a back-drop for the understanding of the way that the DRC reflected and acted.

I will here first give a short sketch on a general Reformed reflection on church and society/state beginning with John Calvin himself. In the course of time varying views contended. It would be to go beyond the scope of my task here to enter into any lengthy consideration about that and I will only very briefly describe the views that became prevalent on South African soil.

The Afrikaner Broederbond is dealt with in this context as it played such an instrumental role in keeping the (white) Reformed churches tight to the bosom of the state to reciprocal benefit. Thereby it is a good(?) example of how factors besides the DRC's own theological reflection on the church-state issue had an impact on its response to the Ottawa requirements and is therefore not possible to leave out although if in a sense can be seen to be on the fringe of the issues discussed here.

The strongest theological critique against the kind of relation that had unfolded between the apartheid regime and the white Reformed churches that was ever presented in South Africa came in 1985 in the so-called *Kairos document*. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss that document in this connection.

4.1 In early Reformed thinking

4.1.1 Calvin

Being a sixteenth century theological reformer must have been a daunting task. Not only did he have to be scholastically well trained with deep insights in contemporary philosophy and theology and prepared to withstand attacks—academical as well as physical, sometimes furious

in kind—from theological antagonists in general and protagonists of the established leadership of the present church in particular. He also—with a modern expression— had to be street-smart in relation to those in power for the time being. It was the inevitable consequence of Calvin’s ambition not only to reformulate the theological dogmas but also to reorientate civic life “in accordance with what God discloses as God’s will in Scripture”.²⁵⁹ Jean Calvin’s opus magnum, *Christianae religionis institutio*,²⁶⁰ is therefore much more than an epic over the evangelical faith or a guide to theological understanding in a ‘reformed’ way.

At the same time as he a) developed a new theological understanding and demonstrated how the Catholic Church according to him had gone astray, he also b) had to try to convince the king—Frances I—that this new reformed thinking was not heretic or threatening to the stability of his kingship, and, when this at times was less than successful, he c) had to keep himself at some safe distance from where the heat was more than healthy—Paris.

Already from the outset Calvin’s church-building work led to conflict with the authorities. When he more or less just happened to land up in Geneva in July 1536 and was compelled to stay, the city had only a few months before voted in favour of adopting the Reformation and “to live henceforward according to the gospel”.²⁶¹ In addition to that, Geneva had not long ago managed to acquire the status of being an independent republic. This newborn feeling of being free became an obstacle when Calvin in his work on the church order for the new Church in the making held the view that the ministers should have a significant amount of control also related to societal matters. The city leadership—the magistrates—feared this and demanded instead the state to have control over the church. Consequently, as this conflict grew Calvin only after two years had to move again. Some years later the Genevan magistrate nonetheless changed its mind and managed to persuade Calvin to come back again given the assurance that his views on church order

²⁵⁹ (Elwood 2002, p. 28)

²⁶⁰ In English: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. According to Elwood a more accurate translation might be something like: *Formation in Christian Piety*. It was first published in 1536 and over the next twenty years revised several times and expanded greatly.

²⁶¹ (Elwood 2002, p. 20)

would be upheld. Thus, from the very commencement of the work of Calvin the question of the relation between church and state/society played an immensely important role. Yet, the expectation and fear some had that he for himself aimed at developing a ruler's position in society came to nought; he never exercised any civic power.

4.1.1.1 *The Institutes*

Albeit the conflicting relations Calvin had experienced vis-a-vis the Genevan authorities and the earlier need to flee the threat of repression from the king of France, he argues that he is “under the necessity” to point out that the civil government, like the church, is a gift of God. As such it has a duty to express God's rule of the world. There was a two-fold reason for this ‘necessity’. Calvin criticised both those—frantic and barbarous Anabaptists (and others)—that “furiously [tried to] overturn the order established by God” and those who on the other hand were flattering “the princes [who were] extolling their power without measure”. Although we are pilgrims on this earth, trying to follow the will of God, none of us are free from sin and its impact, he argued. For that reason and as the “insolence of the wicked is so great” we need the aid given by a civil authority working under the permission of God. They should be “viceregents of God ... [that] exhibit a kind of image of the Divine Providence, guardianship, goodness, benevolence, and justice”.²⁶² De Gruchy argues that the

“substance of many of Calvin's sermons, was the conviction that a just and well-regulated government will be distinguished for maintaining the rights of the poor and afflicted ... [and] insisted on the need for the church to speak out clearly on their behalf in protest against injustice done to them”.²⁶³

Therefore a Christian should on the one hand recognize the authorities as a good God-given gift aiming at serving the needs of the citizens but on the other be a guardian against misuse of power by the same authority. Calvin meant that one “ought rather to spit in their

²⁶² (Calvin 1979, p. 652, 655 (Book IV, Ch XX, sect. 2 and 6))

²⁶³ (De Gruchy 1991, p. 251)

faces than obey them when they are so shameless as to want to despoil God of his right”.²⁶⁴

Although both the church—as an expression of the spiritual kingdom of God—and the civil government are of God, one who “knows to distinguish between the body and the soul, between the present fleeting life and that which is future and eternal, will have no difficulty in understanding that ... [they] are things very widely separated”.²⁶⁵ It is of utmost importance that man in daily life does not place the one above the other. The Church and the government/state (or, as it often is designated in the Institutes as well as in Calvin’s Geneva: the magistrates) have to side with each other. Yet if the situation occurs where a ruler, be it a prince or a magistrate, becomes “bent on their own interests, venally prostitute all rights, privileges, judgments and afterwards squander it in insane largesses ... [or] act as mere robbers, pillaging houses, violating matrons, and slaying the innocent” they no longer are able to be seen as the “minister of God, who was appointed to be a praise to the good and a terror to the bad”.²⁶⁶ Then one must be careful that the imposed obedience to the rulers is not “incompatible with obedience to Him to whose will the wishes of all kings should be subject, to whose decrees their commands must yield, to whose majesty their sceptres must bow”. Therefore, in such a case the words in Acts 5:29 that “we ought to obey God rather than men” are valid. As this can create an “immanent peril” Calvin encourages his followers by referring to the words from 1 Cor. 7:23, that “we were redeemed by Christ at the great price which our redemption cost him, in order that we might not yield a slavish obedience to the depraved wished of men, far less do homage to their impiety”.²⁶⁷

4.1.1.2 *Geneva and onwards*

While Calvin’s thinking gave rise to complementary models for organizing the relation between church and state in Geneva, rather than a hierarchical one, still there was a clear bond between the two. Where

²⁶⁴ (Elwood 2002, p. 123)

²⁶⁵ (Calvin 1979, p. 651 (Book IV, Ch XX, sect. 1))

²⁶⁶ (Calvin 1979, p. 670 (Book IV, Ch XX, sect. 24))

²⁶⁷ (Calvin 1979, p. 675f (Book IV, Ch XX, sect. 32))

the Reformation was approved by the leading class in society, as in the northern part of the Netherlands and in Scotland, the same interdependent pattern as in Geneva became the rule. In the ongoing development in other countries and regions a clearer division evolved, often due to a political situation. So it was, e.g. in France where the reformed church remained a minority church, time and again under severe persecution, and consequently developed a much more independent attitude towards state and society. Due to that de Gruchy is maintaining that

“Calvin did not provide us with an inflexible blueprint for church-state relations or Christian political responsibility that would suit every situation. His theology—and subsequently, in principle if not always in fact, Reformed political theology—was and remains flexible and contextual”.²⁶⁸

It is therefore no surprise that the evaluation of Calvinism is differing due to the angle from which you look: from situations where suppressed people see it as an ideology/theology strongly supporting them in their liberation struggle, to situations where groups clearly related to the power structures make use of its restraining characteristics.

Thus, there is a great risk—as in South Africa—that Calvinism degenerates into an imperialistic tool.

4.2 At the SA scene

4.2.1 The church and the traders

With the beginning of the 17th century the Reformed tradition began to spread world-wide; to the New World, Africa and South East Asia. This was not least due to the rise of the Dutch as the leading global commercial power and the newly established Dutch East India Company (1602). Yet, in many places where the Dutch established some kind of presence the religious impact was weak, at least initially. Often the pastors only ministered to the Europeans that served the company or other

²⁶⁸ (De Gruchy 1991, p. 253)

Dutch authorities in the colonies.²⁶⁹ The Reformed church in the Netherlands had by the time of its establishment in the Cape gone through a schismatic period during which the question of its relation to society had been debated. The battle stood between the so-called ‘remonstrants’ or ‘arminians’ who pleaded a more liberal view on, inter alia, the doctrine on election and the more conservative ‘counterremonstrants’. The ‘arminians’ asked for a national synod called by the government to discuss the matter, while the ‘counterremonstrants’ more firmly dismissed the idea of governmental interference in ecclesiastical matters. Finally the synod took place in 1618-1619 in Dordrecht and the outcome became the important confession called the *Canons of Dordt*.²⁷⁰ Although the ‘counter-remonstrants’ played out the ‘arminians’ they had to accept a considerable governmental impact in the church’s life. The *Canons of Dordt* had to be approved by the States General and the church and the government in cooperation took disciplinary measures against the ministers of ‘arminian’ background who didn’t accept adherence to the new confession. New ministers were to be given approval by the government and they have “zealously and faithfully to inculcate on the entire congregation the obedience, love and honor that they owe to the magistrates”.²⁷¹

Albeit the church in the Netherlands in many ways acted—or were forced to act—as if it was a state church, still it did not become a state church in the sense that every citizen was obliged to be a member of it. On the contrary, according to the church a potential member had to comply with certain conditions. Blei therefore instead of ‘state church’ uses the phrase ‘public church’.²⁷²

The church that was established in the Cape, the DRC, functioned as a daughter to the Dutch mother church. As such it was therefore under the control by the ‘Classis’—the church governing body—in Amsterdam, but was in its daily life subordinated to the Company and this relation between church and state “was in veel opsigte ‘n afspieëling van

²⁶⁹ (Vischer 1999, p. 12)

²⁷⁰ Another spelling: Dort

²⁷¹ (Blei 2006, p. 34)

²⁷² (Blei 2006, p. 19-36)

die kerk-staat verhoudinge in Nederland".²⁷³ The Company, furthermore, for more than 100 years refused any other church admission to areas under their dominion. The DRC in the Cape Province functioned in reality as a state church subjected to the Company until 1795 and thereafter to the British.²⁷⁴ A sign of this close connection between church and state during the first settler period is that the ministers were on the Company's pay roll. The Company followed the pattern from elsewhere and their ministers were designated to cater for the whites that arrived from Europe. Nevertheless, as the main interest for the Company, bluntly imperialistic, was first and foremost to strengthen its commercial interests, other business, such as church related matters, were pushed into the background and as a result it took thirteen years before any minister became present on a regular basis.²⁷⁵

4.2.2 Later development

As the British took over as rulers at the Cape in 1795 and installed a new administration the time of the Company was over. Now ministers were found, not least, in Scotland. Even so, the ecclesiastical supremacy was in the hands of the Dutch mother church and the Classis in Amsterdam. On location at the Cape the control of the church was exercised by the *Kommissarisse-politiek* who participated in all gatherings by groups that had any character of being a decision-making body. This function remained also after the British take-over as the church then was "subject to the King's authority" and the *Kommissarisse-politiek* should see to that the "[a]ssembly [of the church] limits its proceedings

²⁷³ "was in many respects a reflection of the church-state relations in the Netherlands" [my transl.] (Adonis 1982, p. 22-3)

²⁷⁴ The drive to get independence started with the mother church in the Netherlands, obtained in 1824, and continued vis-à-vis the government which was reached in 1862 after a law from 1843 declaring that the civil government and the church each should have its peculiar rights and functions.

²⁷⁵ (Adonis 1982, p. 22-4); Cf. section 3.1.4. The Church and the Afrikaners; See also (Du Plessis 1911, p. 24)

to the internal concern of the Reformed Church, without entrenching on the rights of the Crown or the Civil rights of the King's subjects".²⁷⁶

The first step towards a change in church-state relations came in 1824 when the bonds to the church in the Netherlands were cut, or at least substantially eased, and the DRC as a church in its own capacity held its first synod. Nonetheless, the new political leadership in the Cape continued to hold a firm grip over the church structures. Later, in 1843, an ordinance was passed regarding a new order for church-state relations. This, the Ordinance 7, stated that "the Civil Government and the Church will each have its peculiar rights and function"²⁷⁷. In reality it took until 1862 before the DRC gained autonomy.

Parenthetically can be noted that the schismatic Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk, who broke away from the DRC in Transvaal in 1853, intended to become a *volkskerk* for the Afrikaners in the South African Republic (Transvaal). This also became the reality as NHK formally functioned as a state church there until 1910 when the South African Union was established and the former provinces ceased to exist as independent units.

Since then the issue of church and state relation has been dealt with thoroughly at several occasions. One already mentioned is the story of the Cottesloe Consultation (section 3.3.1.1-2). One major reason for the strong resistance from the government and direct involvement in the aftermath is related to the question on delimitations between church and society.

In the continuing text there will be many more. I will present some important documents from the Dutch Reformed Church in which this issue plays a significant role (3.2.3.3 and chapter 8). Another document that deals with this is the Belhar Confession that plays such a significant role in the dealings between the black and white DRC as well as in the conflict between the (white) DRC and the WARC (chapter 5).

²⁷⁶ (Adonis 1982, p. 26) Quoted by Adonis from A. Dreyer, *Boustowwe vir dir Geskiedenis van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid Afrika*, Deel III: 1804-1836 (Kapstad, 1939), p. 306

²⁷⁷ (SACC 1988, p. 9)

4.2.3 Broederbond

One obvious expression of how close the DRC was to the bosom of the government was the mingling between the two entities within the confines of the Afrikaner Broederbond (AB). The roots of the Brotherhood—which is what AB means—are to be found just before 1920. The goal for the organization, as it was expressed some years later, was to work not for one political party or another but to secure that “Afrikanerdom will reach its ultimate destiny of domination in South Africa.” To obtain that goal “Afrikaner Broederbond [must] govern South Africa”. Its premise is to be found in the conviction that “the Afrikaners were placed by God on the southern tip of Africa to fulfill a spiritual, religious calling”.²⁷⁸ Or to use the words of Hexham: “Afrikaners were Christian; therefore, it was assumed rather than argued that Afrikaner politics were Christian politics if they had a nationalist spirit.”²⁷⁹

To be a possible nominee for membership in the AB in the mid-seventies one had to be proposed by a couple of well established members and not being a member in any other secret organization. At the initiation the nominee had to answer certain questions about his dedication to work for the Afrikaner society and to swear an oath about his fidelity to the Broederbond and that he would keep all knowledge about the Broederbond secret. Among other things he had to swear was to “cling to the Christian national viewpoint of the Afrikaner, as prescribed by *the word of God* [my italicizing] and the traditions of the Afrikaner”.²⁸⁰ The “almost metaphysical obligation to rule subordinate, inferior, or less advanced peoples” that Said thought mainly might have faded away is still in the late 70s clearly visible in the South African setting among National party/Broederbond/DRC-people.²⁸¹

When a defector in 1978 provided the two journalists Ivor Wilkins and Hans Strydom with a comprehensive amount of secret material they got insights into a world that, in accordance with the regulations of the

²⁷⁸ (Wilkins and Strydom 1978, p. 2, 290)

²⁷⁹ (Hexham 1981, p. 184)

²⁸⁰ (Wilkins and Strydom 1978, p. 379)

²⁸¹ (Said 1994 (1993), p. 9-10)

AB, albeit not totally but nevertheless to a large extent, had hitherto been hidden. Never before had the secrets of the Broederbond been unmasked so thoroughly²⁸². For quite some time the inside of the organisation was revealed every Sunday in the Sunday Times—to great agitation within the AB-circles who in vain tried to buy the silence of the journalists.²⁸³

One might say that it is an irony of fate that Beyers Naudé's father Jozua was one of the founders of the Afrikaner Broederbond and became the new organisation's first president. For him, who had felt the hardship among the Afrikaners after the second Anglo-Boer war and sensed the inferiority to the English-speakers, the AB aimed at the reconciliation of all Afrikaners and the promotion of their interests. In years to come that increasingly became synonymous with the nurturing and championing of apartheid.²⁸⁴

Since the modest start the AB had grown but was still at the end of the seventies not a very huge organization—some 12,000 persons—but its influence stretched far beyond the size of its constituency. Wilkins and Strydom argues that

“The South African Government today is the Broederbond and the Broederbond is the Government. No Afrikaner government can rule South Africa without the support of the Broederbond. No Nationalist Afrikaner can become Prime Minister unless he comes from the organisation's select ranks. ... From this pinnacle of executive

²⁸² One exception is presented by Ryan who is giving a broad expose over the debacle in the early sixties when Beyer Naudé broke the oath of silence to support his friend Albert Geyser who was an outspoken critic of apartheid theology. (Ryan 1990, p. 86-95) An even more detailed report about this incident is available in (Wilkins and Strydom 1978, ch. 16). Geyser was member of the Hervormde Kerk and professor in New Testament at University of Pretoria, and was by his church, with support from the AB, falsely accused of heresy. The church commission that found him guilty in a dirty trial consisted of fifteen members of whom thirteen were AB members. The two who disagreed with the verdict were, not surprisingly, not. This affair became also a serial story on the pages of the Sunday Times. In addition, Hennie (JHP) Serfontein has between 1963 and 1975 been reporting in South African newspapers ABOUT the Broederbond. Besides his articles it resulted in *Brotherhood of power – An Exposé of the Secret Afrikaner Broederbond* in 1978.

²⁸³ (Wilkins and Strydom 1978, n.p. (preface))

²⁸⁴ (Ryan 1990, p. 10)

control over South Africa's affairs, the organisation's 12,000 members permeate every aspect of the Republic's life." ²⁸⁵

At the end of the forties the National Party, The Broederbond and the DRC acted together as the three musketeers: One for all—all for one. In her biography over Beyers Naudé, Collen Ryan maintains that "while the National Party provided the institutional pillar for apartheid and the Broederbond the ideological pillar, the religious and moral pillar was supplied by the NGK".²⁸⁶ This process had gained momentum already at the beginning of the thirties when romantic nationalistic influences of Nazi-German origin began to catch attention among Afrikaners.²⁸⁷

This closeness between the AB and the DRC is illustrated in a story Beyers Naudé is recalling from the mid-fifties. At a DRC synod (Transvaal 1955) the theologian Ben Marais²⁸⁸ proposed a ban on membership in the Broederbond for the ministry of the church, analogous with the ban on participation in the Freemasonry movement. After an adjournment a vote was taken whether the proposal was in accordance with the formal order of dealings at a Synod, and could be debated, or whether the proposal should be left without any consideration. The vote turned down the question, and afterwards Beyers Naudé ashamed told Professor Marais that the Broederbond in the meantime, during the adjournment had called for a meeting discussing how to break Ben Marais. Furthermore, Beyers Naudé once also reflected over how the Broederbond had come to play an increasing role in his life: He had come to realize that his "first loyalty in sharing Christian concerns was with fellow members of a secret society because [his] bond with them

²⁸⁵ (Wilkins and Strydom 1978, p. 1)

²⁸⁶ (Ryan 1990, p. 24)

²⁸⁷ (Kingham 1986, p. 86); Cf. (Ryan 1990, p. 25-6)

²⁸⁸ Ben Marais, a minister of the DRC, was already 1948 criticising his church's bible-based justification for apartheid. (Ryan 1990, p. 35) That does not mean that Professor Marais was against every aspect of apartheid. See e.g. (B. Marais 1964). A thorough analysis on Ben Marais is given in Hans S.A. Engdahl *Theology in Conflict – Readings in Afrikaner Theology* (Engdahl 2006)

was closer than the bond to the wider Christian community.”²⁸⁹ It is also obvious that the adherence to the Bond played an immensely important role for its members and even those who for one reason or other had to leave the Bond felt bound by the oath they had sworn not to reveal anything. The apparent risk of being ostracized, losing business opportunities and societal positions is but one reason for this. The religious dimension of the Afrikaner cause and the oath itself are other factors.

Even for non-members much in life was jeopardized when raising a critical voice against the AB as such or against the tight relations between the DRC and the Bond. The denial of the church to accept David Bosch, being a non AB member, for the missiology chair at the Theological department at the University of Pretoria, instead giving it to a much less qualified scholar and member of the Broederbonder executive (and son-in-law to Prime Minister Verwoerd), Carel Boshoff, is but one example. Later Bosch experiences a similar episode in Stellenbosch.²⁹⁰ Nico Smith, on the other hand, tells about how he—without being able to find any other reason besides being an AB member—was appointed lecturer, before other more qualified scholars, at the theological faculty at Stellenbosch. After some years, having gradually been convinced that “it was an evil organisation, functioning under cloak of religion”, he left the AB.²⁹¹

That the Broederbonders themselves did not see any distinct delimitation line between the teaching of the church and the ideological stand by the Bond became obvious, for instance, in the aftermath of the Cottesloe conference. Given that ministers were the second largest group of members, after those from the educational sector, counting somewhere in-between 40 and 60 percent of the DRC clergy, that was not unexpected. Albeit the Cottesloe conference²⁹² was a church matter

²⁸⁹ (Ryan 1990, p. 42-3, 49)

²⁹⁰ (Serfontein 1982, p. 215-6). Carel Boshoff is nowadays active in ‘his’ enclave Orania in the Northern Cape province close to the Free State, where no non-white person is permitted to live and work. The community is striving for self-determination in what could be described as a kind of white *bantustan*.

²⁹¹ (N. Smith 2004, p. 83)

²⁹² For a description of Cottesloe, see section 3.3.1.1

in principle—a meeting between South Africa Churches and the WCC—both the state, through Prime Minister Verwoerd, and the Broederbond acted swiftly and resolutely in condemning the resolution taken at the meeting. The AB circulated a document warning its members of “the serious detrimental effects on our nation” given that the findings were accepted by the church. Thereby was the “fate of Cottesloe ... finally sealed”.²⁹³ Afterwards the Broederbond executive with satisfaction and appreciation could state:

“For the positive action of Broederbonders in the editorials of church magazines, synodal commissions, moderatures, other church bodies etc in maintaining the unity of the Afrikaner in the church field, the Executive Council has only the highest appreciation.”²⁹⁴

The first and foremost aim for the Broederbond was to keep the *laager* tight, not to let any dissident voices create rifts in the wall, be that pressure from external forces or tendencies from within the Afrikaner community. Among the external evil forces were not only the UN, the WCC and countries overseas but also for instance Methodists, Baptists and not least the Roman Catholic Church in South Africa.

The internal threats, even perceived and described as enemies, were especially those *dominees* and members of the academies belonging to the Afrikaans churches who had been held in esteem, who were prominent scholars and/or were ‘coming men’ in church and society but had become hesitant to the Bond’s involvement in the churches’ sphere in general and the apartheid policy in church and society in particular. Geysers and Naudé belonged to that group of course, but during the sixties and seventies that group grew although the Bond managed to make many wary regarding their future and consequently held themselves back refraining from overt criticism. At some occasions the question about the church’s relation to the Bond became an issue at synodical level in the DRC. In 1949 a committee was appointed the task to prepare a report to the NGK Raad “concerning the Broederbond, its

²⁹³ (Ryan 1990, p. 64)

²⁹⁴ (Wilkins and Strydom 1978, p. 300)

existence, work and spreading”. [My transl.]²⁹⁵ The rather short report, only a few pages, ended with the assertion that the AB does not accept any politicizing in the organisation, that the work of the Broederbond is directed only for the best of the Afrikaners and has no damaging effect on anyone else, and that the Bond is a “*heilsaam en gesond*” [beneficial and sound] organisation.²⁹⁶ When the issue about an investigation on the influence of the Bond in the Church came up in the DRC synod in the early sixties it was met by an official statement by the Bond. Due to a well done ground-work by the Bond some 60 percent of the delegates accepted the Bond’s view that such an investigation would only “cause suspicion and uncertainty at a time when we cannot afford to divide the Afrikaner forces”. *Dominee* Beukes who was the advocate of the Broederbond views at the synod ten years later became moderator of the General Synod of the DRC, and was member of the Executive Council of the Broederbond.²⁹⁷

A common way by the Bond to undermine the criticising voices was to accuse them of expressing communistic and liberalistic views and thereby being contrary to the will and word of God.²⁹⁸ In a report from a meeting 1968 with the AB executive it is unequivocal that “humanism, communism and liberalism ... [are] undermining philosophies that are threatening our nation” and that measures had to be taken to combat them.²⁹⁹

When the Afrikaans churches in the sixties formulated its own views on Church and society matters, the influence from the Broederbond is obvious and these views are clearly visible. Later, for instance, in the 1974 *Human Relations*-document, the DRC uses the somewhat dim term *Horizontalism* to cover these perspectives.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁵ (DRC 1951, p. 49) Org.: "om die aangeleentheid van die Broederbond in sy bestaan, werking en strekking te ondersoek en te rapporteer."

²⁹⁶ (DRC 1951, p. 111)

²⁹⁷ (Wilkins and Strydom 1978, p. 311)

²⁹⁸ (Wilkins and Strydom 1978, p. 310)

²⁹⁹ (Wilkins and Strydom 1978, p. 6)

³⁰⁰ (WARC 1960, p. 45-8), (DRC 1966, p. 5), (DRC 1974, p. 53-62 §42-45)

Both Wilkins and Strydom and others have the standpoint that the influence of Bond waned at the end of the seventies/beginning of the eighties but none the less is “a tremendous force to be reckoned with—especially in the NGK”.³⁰¹

When the pressure, internally as well as externally, to abandon apartheid grew in the eighties almost every role-player on the South African scene had to reflect upon, and possibly revise, their own agenda. While, the governmental repression on ANC, UDF and all other movements and persons advocating a just and non-racial South Africa grew in the mid-eighties, the corporate sector and the Broederbond seemed to take on a more pragmatic stance and began to hold talks with representatives of the ANC. L’Ange describes a meeting in New York in 1986 between the AB chairman, Pieter de Lange—whose election is said to reflect “the new thinking within the white tribe”—and Thabo Mbeki.³⁰² Serfontein is more hesitant to believe in a quick change at heart within the Broederbond ranks as the “thinking, indoctrination and philosophy ... is ingrained on the souls of most of [the AB members]”.³⁰³

4.3 The Kairos document

The Kairos document (KD) is an important theological expression in a critical time. It is not beyond limits to say that it was epoch-making in the South African context. Evidently, this is not the first document that criticizes apartheid. However, contrary to the many predecessors, it did not come into being as a result of the reflection in an office, in a church or at a church based organisation. Instead it developed—under inspiration from the Institute for Contextual Theology³⁰⁴ (ICT) and the South

³⁰¹ (Serfontein 1982, p. 87) Giliomee argues that the influence of the AB is “always overrated by scholars”, but is nonetheless pinpointing that the AB leadership “had an open door to the cabinet” and was “the organisation that wielded the most influence on the ruling elite with respect to socio-political policy” in the late eighties. (Giliomee 2003, p. 581)

³⁰² (L’Ange 2005, p. 399)

³⁰³ (Serfontein 1982, p. 91)

³⁰⁴ The role of the ICT was not to teach theology. Its methodological idea was to enable people to do their own theological reflection upon their own experi-

Cont. next page

African Council of Churches—out of the “agonised thinking” among some ten black pastors actually living and working in the townships around Johannesburg and can as such be called a ‘people’s document’.³⁰⁵ These pastors’ need to find ways to serve their congregations in a situation characterized by national crises and state of emergency gained immediate hearing among many more and at no time some 150 theologians, pastors and lay persons all over South Africa had signed the document. They came with denominational background in a wide variety of churches—albeit mainly among the mainline group (Catholics, Lutherans, Baptists, Methodists, Anglicans, black Reformed etc.).

Although coming from a very concrete situation of suppression and hardship, the document should not—according to the signatories—be seen “as a final statement of the truth but as the direction in which God is leading us at this moment in history”.³⁰⁶

The Kairos Document is not a Reformed document in any special sense. Nonetheless it played a role in the deliberations between the DRC and the WARC. Furthermore, nearly one third of the signatories have some reformed background. In the following I will sketch its main views as it provides an inescapable theological backdrop from which the DRC provides its theological standpoints regarding the church and society, apartheid, church unity and missiological foundation.

ence and their praxis. The ICT facilitated the discussion, supported practically and bestowed with resources for research.

³⁰⁵ (Kairos theologians 1986 (1985)); Albert Nolan gives a vividly impression on how this meeting about the current State of Emergency sparked off an extremely momentous process. (Nolan 1994, p. 212-3) ; Cf. also the editorial of JTSA No. 53 (De Gruchy, Editorial 1985, p. 3). The Kairos Document was originally published by the Kairos Theologians, but was also almost immediately printed in extenso in JTSA, Dec 1985, No. 53. Internationally it was available through Eerdmans the year after. In 1986 a similar document rooted in ‘evangelical’ groups was published: *Evangelical witness in South Africa - Evangelicals Critique their own Theology and Practice*. (1986)

³⁰⁶ (Kairos theologians 1986 (1985), p. 54)

4.3.1 The document

As the subheading of the document indicated—*A Challenge to the Church – A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa*—the KD was a theological comment on the political crisis in South Africa and as such a challenge to the church. That such a challenge was no coffee party is obvious when one reads that the calling of Christians in South Africa was to unmask and confront the “the structures of evil and injustice or to betray their faith”.³⁰⁷

That the time—the Kairos—had come was obvious when one tried to comprehend the present South African society at this very moment; it was shaking in its foundations. Children were killed by the police, anti-apartheid activists disappeared (and were never found, alternatively later found dead), churches were burned down and people of different ethnic groups were incited against each other under the guidance of the security police.³⁰⁸ The country was about to become ungovernable and the state of emergency was almost permanent in the second half of the eighties.

Such a situation makes it obvious that there was no escape from the reality anymore. Nonetheless, it seemed as if many churches tried to go into some kind of hiding. So it became clearly visible that there was a separating line drawn between the churches dividing them into black and white churches. That line was sometimes also drawn not only between churches, but also in the midst of a denomination or a church. Some people were inside, sharing the Lord’s Table with their peers, whereas others were hit by a Christian policeman outside the church or tortured by some Christian officers in the security police branch “while

³⁰⁷ (P. Walshe 1997, p. 392)

³⁰⁸ That the direct or initiated violence by the (security)police and the Defence Forces really was a living reality became obvious in the amnesty hearings during the proceedings by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission—if not earlier—where the most gruesome testimonies were given. But long before that there were numerous testimonies of that. One such example ABOUT how the police was intimidating the youngsters of the townships came in 1985 when the Johannesburg based free cultural institution *The Open School* in 1985 published a book—*Two Dogs and Freedom*—containing children’s’ thoughts and drawings. The risk of being hit or shot by the police is one of the most prevalent fears they express in their drawings and texts. (Open School 1985). Cf. also E de Kock, *A Long Night’s Damage*, 1998, and J Pauw, *Into the Heart of Darkness*, 1997.

yet other Christians stand by and weakly plead for peace". The conclusion by the authors of the KD was that "[t]he Church is divided and its day of judgment has come".³⁰⁹

Therefore they felt forced to make a thorough analysis of the present theologies in the churches. They distinguish three different theologies: the STATE THEOLOGY, the CHURCH THEOLOGY and a PROPHETIC THEOLOGY.

State Theology is the kind of theology that the apartheid state makes use of. Expressed simply it could be described as "the theological justification of the status quo with its racism, capitalism and totalitarianism".³¹⁰ As such it blesses injustices and suppresses the poor and already marginalized. The State Theology can do this by misusing theological concepts and misreading the Bible to suit its own needs and interests. In its critique against this theology the KD points at four perspectives.

The first has to do with the understanding of the text in Romans 13 about how to behave in relation to the state. The KD holds as its meaning that the present government in its theology overlooks the basic fact that this text by Paul is not static but has to be read in the context of its time-place, and understood in the present context where it is to be applied. Although without any reference to Calvin, it sounds much like what de Gruchy says about Calvin's theology as being flexible and contextual.³¹¹

Secondly the KD deals with the issue of 'Law and Order'. The reason for keeping to the concept of law and order was to be able to keep status quo. And status quo according to the apartheid government meant in reality systematic discrimination and suppression.

The third perspective is about what is called the threat from communism. What the KD says is that everything that threatens the status quo is presented as communism. If this should be the case "millions of Christians in South Africa ... are to be regarded as 'atheists'". For some

³⁰⁹ (Kairos theologians 1986 (1985), p. 15-6)

³¹⁰ (Kairos theologians 1986 (1985), p. 17)

³¹¹ See quote on page 89

people the threat of being called atheist might have been threatening enough to keep them from criticizing the government.³¹²

The fourth and last perspective on State theology is called ‘The God of the State’. This deals with the misuse and blasphemous use of God’s name. The god that the state refers to is an idol, and therefore “the oppressive South Africa regime will always be particularly abhorrent to Christians precisely because it makes use of Christianity to justify its evil ways”. Even more horrifying is it “when they see that there are churches like the white Dutch reformed churches and other groups of Christians who actually subscribe to their heretical theology”.³¹³

Next theology dealt with is the Church Theology.

Church Theology is the kind of theology that one finds when one analyzes the speeches and press statements about the apartheid regime and the present crisis by church leaders. In a soft and guarded way this theology criticizes apartheid. Nonetheless it is too shallow and therefore counterproductive, according to KD.

One key concept in that theology is about reconciliation. One common feature in the discussion about reconciliation is that one has to ‘listen to both sides’ as if it was a conflict between two similar parts quarrelling about an issue where the arguments of both sides could seem plausible; as if it was a symmetrical conflict. What is often forgotten is that the conflict in South Africa is not a symmetrical conflict. To try to reconcile both sides in South Africa would—according to KD—be the same as trying to reconcile good and evil, and “it would be totally un-Christian to plead for reconciliation and peace before the present injustices have been removed”. True reconciliation needs also repentance but the authors of the Kairos document cannot find that in the recent speeches by PW Botha, rather that he is talking about continued military repression.³¹⁴

The second major concept is justice. The most important question—a question that the proponents of the Church theology representatives according to the KD do not pose—is: *What* justice? The KD

³¹² (Kairos theologians 1986 (1985), p. 22)

³¹³ (Kairos theologians 1986 (1985), p. 23-4)

³¹⁴ (Kairos theologians 1986 (1985), p. 26-7)

means that the reformist view of justice that is prevalent among the Church theology representatives totally refrains from taking into consideration the real need of the people. The justice of reform is the justice of the oppressor. It does not go further than the giving of charity.

This analysis comes from the fact that almost every Church based statement is directed to the government or to the white population, indicating that the change must come from above. It also indicates that change to be carried forth is mainly found at an individual level, not at a structural-societal level. Instead the churches ought to “demand that the oppressed stand for their rights and wage a struggle against their oppressors”. This is seen as necessary as “true justice, God’s justice, demands a radical change of structures. This can only come from below”.³¹⁵

The third reflection in this section is about Non-violence. A substantial problem is that the government has granted itself the preferential right of interpretation of what violence is. Violence according to them is open skirmishes in the townships, burning of cars and the necklasing³¹⁶ of renegades. The lack of healthcare and freedom to move and live together with husband/wife, the suppression of human rights in a multitude of aspects were not seen as violence. The factual violence by the governmental power structures, irrespective of whether it was carried out by the police and military themselves or initiated by them but executed by other black groups, was easily forgotten. Therefore, speaking for non-violence in reality became a way of siding with the oppressor and promoting status quo.³¹⁷

Finally the KD—in relation to Church Theology—pinpoints that a fundamental problem to be found in that theology is the lack of social analysis. This has its root in an inability to comprehend that “Changing the structures of a society is fundamentally a matter of politics”. Therefore the Churches have to bring the gospel into the actual political situation and not think that the “gospel provided [them] with a non-

³¹⁵ (Kairos theologians 1986 (1985), p. 30)

³¹⁶ A summary execution whereby the victim was killed by getting a burning petrol-filled tyre around his neck—often by a lynching mob who suspected the targeted person to be a collaborator or political antagonist.

³¹⁷ (Kairos theologians 1986 (1985), p. 33)

political solution”. The reason for this want of social analysis is according to KD to be found in the since long prevalent type of faith and spirituality that is other-worldly and has little, if anything, to do with this world. As the Bible does not separate man from the world (Rom 8:18-24) “[i]t hardly needs saying that this kind of faith and this type of spirituality has no biblical foundation”.³¹⁸

Finally the authors behind the KD argue that the present *Kairos* demands a new answer from “Christians that is biblical, spiritual and, above all, Prophetic”.³¹⁹

Several critical perspectives that were propounded against the other two theologies are now coming back as prerequisites for a Prophetic Theology that is taking a clear stand against injustices and tyranny, and for a message of hope.

In the social analysis there is a need to recognize that not only is there a racial war going on in South Africa but even more a conflictive situation between an oppressor and the oppressed. The conflict is between “irreconcilable *causes* or *interests* in which one is just and the other is unjust”; it is a situation where there are those who benefit from the system and others who are suppressed for the sake of the privileged beneficiaries. Therefore the situation must be seen as a civil “war or revolution” with “two conflicting projects ... [where] no compromise is possible”.³²⁰

Regarding the issue on oppression the KD presents a view that this is a central theme throughout the Bible, in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament. While describing oppression the Bible does not hide the realities. An important feature in the mind-set of God is to take sides with the oppressed. He is a non-neutral liberator and when today’s victims look at Jesus—himself a victim—they realize that he is with them in their oppression.³²¹

A good part of this section deals with the question of what attitude one is to take in relation to a tyrannical regime. A ruler who by his rul-

³¹⁸ (Kairos theologians 1986 (1985), p. 35)

³¹⁹ (Kairos theologians 1986 (1985), p. 37)

³²⁰ (Kairos theologians 1986 (1985), p. 38)

³²¹ (Kairos theologians 1986 (1985), p. 40)

ing becomes an enemy of the people makes himself thereby an enemy of God. The document is here relating to the word of Jesus in Mt. 25:40, 45 about the Final judgement: “whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me ... whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me”. The KD lays down as its meaning that when it is beyond doubt that a ruler is a tyrant, he has forfeited his moral right to govern and must be replaced by a ruler who is elected by the majority of the people to govern in the interest of all the people.³²²

Finally this section points to “the very centre of all true prophecy”—the message of hope. Those who put their faith in the messages of the oppressors have a “false hope”. Real hope can only be based on Jesus’ teaching of God’s coming kingdom. The KD is criticizing the Church leaders for not having highlighted this “powerful message” and wonders if it is because they rather have been relating to the oppressors than the oppressed.³²³

The last chapter of the document is called Challenge to Action and contains more instrumental perspectives on how the continuation should be carried out. Then there is a short Conclusion addressing the KD not only to Church leaders, but

“all those who are committed to this prophetic form of theology to use the document for discussion groups, small and big, to determine an appropriate form of action, depending on their particular situation, and to take up the action with other related groups and organisations”.³²⁴

4.3.2 Reactions on the Kairos Document

As mentioned above the Kairos Document was widely acclaimed by the WARC who distributed it to its members for ‘study and action’.

³²² (Kairos theologians 1986 (1985), p. 41-4)

³²³ (Kairos theologians 1986 (1985), p. 45-6)

³²⁴ (Kairos theologians 1986 (1985), p. 52)

Naturally there were numerous reactions in South Africa and elsewhere in theological and anti-apartheid circles.³²⁵ The *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa (JTSA)*, just to mention one theological publication, contains eleven contributions to the debate in six issues between June 1986 and September 1987. I will only give indicative examples.

Among the reactions in the *JTSA* is one response from a local DRC congregation, but otherwise there is no trace of reaction from the DRC to be found there.

The DRC presented their view in the Ecumenical department information publication *DRC News* instead.

4.3.2.1 *The Kairos Document reviewed by the DRC*

The critique by the DRC was rather fierce. According to them the KD cannot even be seen as an “impressive rendering of Liberation theology ... [but] an alarming stimulus for continued and uncompromising polarization and violence”. After this dressing-down of the Kairos theologians and the document the Plenary Executive (PE) ends the summary of their analysis by stating the compassion they feel about “everything that causes vexation and pain” and indicates their interest in being an instrument for peace by entering into discussions with the compilers of the Kairos document.³²⁶

Already the language used here indicates that the PE neither want to recognize those who wrote the KD as theologians, nor give the document itself any significant value, by using the word ‘compile/rs’—a somewhat derogative expression for an explicit theological work whereas those involved in its coming into being by all other commentators are called ‘the Kairos theologians’.

Secondly, by using a word such as vexation that can be substituted with ‘irritation’, ‘displeasure’, ‘aggravation’ or ‘exasperation’—all of them denoting minor disturbances in daily life, but no real problem—

³²⁵ Cf. the introduction to the Kairos debate in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* by John de Gruchy. (De Gruchy, Introduction to The Kairos Debate 1986, p. 42)

³²⁶ (*DRC News* 1986, p. 4)

they show even less comprehension than expected of the situation for huge groups in contemporary South Africa.

The criticism delivered is a relatively lengthy document comprising some 4.300 words. Emotive words occur frequently in the text. As in the summary the whole KD is slashed in the beginning of the analysis: “If what the Bible teaches us about (God’s) Kairos had been looked at honestly, the document would never have been published. It is thus also a one-sided, contemporary, situational world-view from which this document finds its point of departure.”³²⁷ Despite that this ought to be a reason for not dealing more with the KD the PE continues. They discuss the hermeneutical approach and finds a ‘secular Kairos’; God as political liberator; an attitude of lovelessness as the commandment of love is trampled upon; a fanatical, deterministic holding; a drastic lack of gratitude; manipulation of the biblical theme of liberation. This part of analysis of the hermeneutics of the KD ends with the following conclusion.

“In view of the fact that the document abuses the Holy Scripture and is influenced by particular social and political preferences and versions, the document can offer no convincing evidence that it is in the words of its compilers—‘a Christian, biblical comment’ or ‘an attempt to find an alternative biblical and theological approach’.

This way of working with Scripture leads of necessity to further deviations which warrant attention.”³²⁸

The second part of the PE critique—on the content of the KD—contains a long list of details that are misunderstood, wrong, and tendentious or beyond all bounds for a sound theology according to the DRC. Even worse, they find that this

“[k]airos document contributes nothing, but stirs up a climate which is in direct conflict with the Bible. Such a contribution to the eventual dechristianising of Southern Africa has to be rejected with dismay. Even a fiercely emo-

³²⁷ (DRC News 1986, p. 1)

³²⁸ (DRC News 1986, p. 2)

tional reaction such as to be found in the Kairos document should not be allowed to degenerate into an opposition to the stated aim of finding ‘an alternative biblical and theological approach’.³²⁹

In the third section—Comments on some constitutional aspects—the PE for instance turns down the position in the KD that the present South African government is morally illegitimate; they demand at the same time from the Kairos theologians that they should be able to present a fully-fledged alternative to the present constitution plus safety mechanisms for the monitoring of reforms from below. The absence of this is seen as another flaw that reduces the meaningfulness of the KD and even more underscores the unreliability of it.

The final section on ‘relevant standpoints of the Dutch reformed church’ lists more or less an extract of what a few months later is presented in the Church and Society document at the Synod.

All in all, this is just what the KD is criticising.

This document—the PE critique—is sharper in its repudiation of views expressed in the KD than when the DRC expresses itself to the WARC. I can distinguish (at least) two reasons for this: The KD constitutes a new and sharper analysis from within in which I guess that this expression of proud blackness that also was seen in the mid-seventies now is gaining new momentum. This is perceived as dangerous as it quickly can spread in the climate that is prevalent at the moment. Blacks do not bow anymore; neither in the so-called daughter churches, nor within the English-speaking churches. If the leadership there takes the critical stances towards ‘church theology’ ad notam the Afrikaans churches will be even more isolated. Secondly, I suspect that this small group of men—from the very centre of the church—who has written this represents a more conservative and cautious group than the average DRC minister or member. Most of them are presumably members of the Afrikaner Broederbond and in that sense also linked to the governing bodies in society.

³²⁹ (DRC News 1986, p. 3)

The Synod that met in October was asked to endorse the text (in Afrikaans). Only some insignificant amendments were added. Every official as well as Church member was in addition asked to refrain from having anything to do with the KD.

The decisions were taken without any discussion possible to trace in the minutes, and the leadership was asked to let the view of the DRC regarding the KD be known as widely as possible—in South Africa and abroad.³³⁰

4.3.2.2 Other reactions regarding the Kairos Document

While the reaction from the DRC was unequivocal the reactions in the JTSA covers a span from ‘enthusiastic’ via ‘enthusiastic with minor objection to some aspects’ to ‘critical on certain basic foundations but on the other hand maintaining that the KD is important’.

I will here only give a portion of the varying reactions.

One very appreciative contribution was delivered by the systematic theologian James B. Torrance on behalf of the Church of Scotland. Their main objection was on the understanding of forgiveness that they saw as weak. Forgiveness they said—contrary to KD’s view of ‘no reconciliation without justice’—is always unconditional. Not to forget, they added, that forgiveness must be received in repentance. The Scottish church realises that many will regard the KD as one-sided, but argues that

“even that criticism might reveal our own ‘ideological taint’—or tacit or implicit biases! It is a call to the churches of the world not to sit on the fence as some kind of “third party” between the oppressor and the oppressed, but with the mind of Christ—to listen to the cry of the oppressed—, as God did to Israel in Egypt, and to be willing to participate in the struggle for love, justice and liberty”.³³¹

³³⁰ (DRC 1986, p. 60-5, 595)

³³¹ (Torrance 1986)

A short comment from the dean of the Faculty of Theology at Fort Hare—the university for black people by that time—Gideon Thom, takes as its point of departure for a critical assessment that the KD “justify and even encourage anarchy”, according to him. He also stresses that the ideological character of the view that the present government is ‘irreformable’ makes it impossible for the Kairos Theologians to consider the “considerable reforms announced by the government”. The impression, he says, is that the argumentation is within an ideological circle. Nonetheless, he “welcome[s] and endorse[s] the Kairos Document’s rejection of a subservient status quo theology, its call for a prophetic theology and its professed identification with the poor”.³³²

An American response is given by Dr. Clifford Green at Hartford Theological Seminary. The issue of tyranny is discussed at some length in relation to Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Barmen Declaration to which it is easy to associate, according to him. Dr. Green argues that the KD is courageous in its dealings with these difficult issues but finds that it “however, poses the ethical dilemma of violence and nonviolence, which is also the dilemma of how, in a revolutionary situation, the church can simultaneously witness to both justice and peace”. He also asks for a more explicit Christology in the next revision of the KD; that only would strengthen the Kairos position as “it is impossible to make Jesus into the projection of racial power or the legitimator of state oppression”.

Finally he notes that the KD has been widely studied and discussed in the USA and has been a “focal point of solidarity between churches of South Africa and the United States”.³³³

A local DRC congregation, located in Stellenbosch in the somewhat more liberal Cape Province regarding ecclesiological considerations has provided a response to the KD in December 1986 after having “studied and discussed the document at length and penetratingly”. This could have been very interesting if only they had not made vital parts of their contribution as a carbon copy of the Church and Society 1986 docu-

³³² (Thom 1986, p. 46)

³³³ (Green 1986)

ment. Under the heading ‘Our own position’ they “acknowledge that the policy of segregation or separate development, in spite of good intentions which there may have been, has in practice been effected in such a way ...” etc. In the conclusion they “appeal to the authorities to proceed on the course of meaningful reform...”. According to themselves they are trying to find a ‘radical’ third way.

The good thing and a marked difference from the above mentioned reply by their leaders in the national body is the tone, the recognizing of the urgency of the matter and an understanding of its importance for a large sector of South African society.³³⁴

The New Testament Professor John Suggit expresses one of the most critical standpoints in the debate. Not that the KD in principle is wrong, but that it is *The wrong Way on the Right Road* as the headline states. The biblical foundation, he asserts, for two crucial linchpins in the KD is highly insecure; the Kairos is not a specific moment in time/history but “every moment in life [that] calls for a decision to act for God and his truth and justice” and the assertion that God is siding with the oppressed is only valid in a certain context related to “*his people, Israel*” [Italics original]. Nonetheless, Professor Suggit maintains that the “[t]he challenge of The Kairos Document is so important that it cannot be made to depend on a few selected biblical texts”. As he thinks that “it needs to be backed by biblical evidence” he produces his own different (right?) way on the road.³³⁵

Professor Suggit’s contribution evoked some reaction—as well as a response by him—in the following two volumes by the JTSA. J. R. Cochrane and J.A. Draper who disagree with Professor Suggit both exegetically and hermeneutically point out that the KD is based on a sound theology. Furthermore they argue that, contrary to Professor Suggit’s claim that The Kairos Document has chosen the ‘wrong way on the right road’ it has really demonstrated that

“there is a split, a fork in the road, a parting of the ways, and that this split gives rise to a conflict in interpre-

³³⁴ (The Church Council of the DRC of Stellenbosch-Sentral 1986)

³³⁵ (Suggit 1987)

tations as well. The point of announcing this split is important: it is a claim to assert a new paradigm for a contextual theology that challenges the older paradigms. It does this not simply to replace the old paradigms (to which it seems Professor Suggit may still be bound) but for the sake of the generation of - new meaning. The direction of our path has changed. At least this is so for the *Kairos* Theologians, and their claims, in our opinion, remain sold.”³³⁶

The above examples give an insight into an important part of the framework within which the DRC had to act and react. It also foreshadows a situation where the Ottawa decision³³⁷ soon might be almost obsolete. The demand posed by the Ottawa *Status confessionis*-decision, though strong in one sense, is much weaker regarding the need for action as a necessary consequence of the theological reflection than the voices now coming to the fore in South Africa—from below; those that could fit into the group of ‘others’ that Said is highlighting.

4.4 Closing reflections

“We are subject to the men who rule over us, but subject only in the Lord. If they command anything against Him let us nor pay the least regard to it, nor be moved by all the dignity which they possess as magistrates.”³³⁸

That the state had an important function as exerting God’s rule in the world is crystal clear. That a ruler who does not live up to that and is deviating from ruling with justice is nothing to adhere to is likewise obvious in Calvin’s writings.

Consequently there is a strong bond also between Church and state/society, as the church more than any other ‘public interest’ is the one who best can evaluate the governing by those in power.

³³⁶ (Cochrane and Draper 1987)

³³⁷ About the Ottawa decision see ch. 7

³³⁸ (Calvin 1979, Book iv, ch. 20, section 32)

In the South African setting this bond grew too tight despite the drive by the DRC in the 19th century to create a certain distance.³³⁹ The church that almost was a state church but broke loose returned as we will see more of later in this study—not formally as a state church but in reality even closer—and placed itself on the lap of the power structure. The writings of Calvin might have been read very selectively by the Calvinistic Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa.

The Afrikaner Broederbond was but one structure that promoted that. Numerous nationalistic, cultural organisations held the same view but did not have the same direct influence on the church. Through the direct influence on selecting ‘trustworthy’ people to important positions in church, academy and at the political/governmental level the Broederbond played a huge role in shaping the mindset of large fractions of the white population. Part of that was about paternalistic and imperialistic views on the Afrikaners as having a special position, especially in relation to the non-white groups. On that ideological base the DRC and the state could interact in harmony in shaping a society where ‘the other’ was kept apart—economically, sociologically, theologically.

The fierce reaction by the DRC towards the Kairos document is therefore understandable. It was like being caught with the fingers in the cake tin. Those who were supposed to be grateful for whatever was done to them are now the ones who accuse the big, old church for not living up to its Reformed heritage. Hence, attack is supposedly the best defence. Furthermore, this was not the first time, as I will show in coming chapters. It happened time and again beginning in the later part of the 70s, and even later. The Kairos document is built on a new hermeneutic—coming from below, starting in the direct experiences of people. A theology of that kind was difficult to comprehend for a church that saw itself—theologically, practically and politically—as a guardian of the non-whites. The fear of this new hermeneutical approach led to a long series of missed opportunities to change and develop a new church.

³³⁹ See above section 4.2.2

Internationally, as well as among the black churches in South Africa, this was an important expression of renewed theological thinking from below, pushing for action, not only accepting a situation that was dreadful. The immediate responses by people who wanted to be signatories and that it quickly became a study object in churches world-wide affirm its importance.

To act—in line with the Calvin view—as a watch dog

“is to be the church in obedience to Jesus Christ, and by so being it will enable the state to be the state. ‘This is the most loyal service which the church can render to the state, to a particular government and to itself—it is to protect the government from itself and from unreasonable demands by its people’”.³⁴⁰

³⁴⁰ (Villa-Vicencio 1986, p. xxv) The quotation in the quote is from a “Response to the Evaluation of the Activities of the SACC Division of Justice and Reconciliation in the Memorandum of the South African Police” submitted to the Eloff Commission by Dr. Wolfram Kistner, director of the SACC Division of Justice and Reconciliation.

5 Belhar – a refractory Confession

The office of the then Dutch Reformed Mission Church is to be found in the Capetonian suburb Belhar, some 25 kilometres from down-town Cape Town and located north of highway number two. As a former coloured suburb it is somewhat better off than e.g. Khayelitsha and other black districts at the Cape Plains south of the highway, that to a large extent still are made up by squatter camps; the results of apartheid's Group Areas Act is still clearly discernible in the topography. Only a few minutes' drive from the office of the DRMC one finds University of Western Cape (UWC) that since 1972 has harboured a Faculty of Theology for the training of ministers for the church.³⁴¹

Despite the socio-geographical differences between different population groups, and the ambition of the apartheid authorities to create antagonism and tension between them, huge coloured groups felt the same alienation, bitterness and 'blackness'³⁴², and shared the same conviction as those who were defined as 'black' by the apartheid authorities that apartheid had to go, not to be reformed. When a person who normally did not share the black group's normal conditions—also a white—sides with the poor and oppressed blackness could be conceived as a "condition"³⁴³ or "merely a state of mind"³⁴⁴.

³⁴¹ (Department of Religion and Theology - UWC n.d.) At the end of the eighties the faculty was opened also for student from other denominations and today it is a non-denominational theological department. The pastoral training for those who will be ministers in the URCSA moved to Stellenbosch.

³⁴² One definition of *blackness* is that it "means [being] dehumanized and suffering under a myriad of unjust laws" (Abreca 1981, p. 56); More about the concept of *blackness* in section 7.1.1

³⁴³ (Boesak 1984, p. 24) From an address to the National Conference of the South African Council of Churches in July 1979

³⁴⁴ From a quotation assigned to Allan Boesak. (SACC/Ecunews 1981 Vol 17, p. 18). When ABRECSA – Alliance of Black Reformed Christians in Southern Africa –

Cont. next page

Nonetheless, this was not self-evident for many in the coloured church in the DRC family until late. Robinson notes briefly how the DRMC due to the ‘external’ power of the DRC or due to an internalized subservience refrained to act contrary to the will of the white ‘mother’. Consequently, it made its voice heard on the ecumenical and international arena rather late.³⁴⁵ But a change was beginning to be discernable in the seventies and early eighties. A broad reflexion on the impact of apartheid on the life of the church and on what the response ought to be was carried out in the DRMC. In this both the church and the academy—particularly the University of the Western Cape—were engaged.³⁴⁶

One main result of that reflection is the so-called Belhar Confession—described in 1984 as a document “as important for today’s crisis in South Africa as the Barmen Declaration was for Nazi Germany”.³⁴⁷

In the following I will discuss the confession, give the background, and present its role in the dealings between both the DRMC/URCSA and the DRC on the one hand and the WARC and the DRC on the other.

As a way of giving a broader framework to relate the Belhar Confession to I will start by dealing with the confession in the reformed tradition as such, whereupon I, secondly, will sketch the actual reflection going on in South Africa. Thirdly I will take up the main issue in the chapter, the Belhar Confession, its relation to the Barmen Declaration and something about its missionary implications. Finally I will end with the criticism the DRC expressed and the question on what role it should play.

was established the word *black* did not mean a person with black skin but someone with a black mindset.

³⁴⁵ (Robinson 1984, p. 43)

³⁴⁶ John Allen describes, in his recent biography over Desmond Tutu, the UWC as an “academic centre for resistance against apartheid”. (My translation from the Swedish edition, p. 350] (Allen 2006) This was vindicated in an interview with Leonardo Appies who described the uprising there at the mid-seventies when he on behalf of the DRMC was student chaplain there. (Appies 2007)

³⁴⁷ At the cover of “A Moment of Truth”, (Cloete and Smit 1984)

5.1 Confessions and confessing in the Reformed tradition

5.1.1 Confessions in the historical context

The evolution of the Reformed tradition is a multi-faceted story that took place over a long time and developed in different ways in different parts of the world. Besides the major reformed giants, such as John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli and John Knox, a wide gallery of skilled theologians made their imprint in the theological development. Reformed theology has never been *one* but incorporated various views and standpoints. Therefore, the Reformed churches have never held one confession as *the one* that has been valid for every church. Unity among the Reformed churches had to do with “mutual recognition rather than through acceptance of a single text”.³⁴⁸

This said, it is nonetheless a fact that groupings over time and at different places, in confessional form, developed what could be seen as a comprehensive description of the Reformed faith. Often these confessional statements came into being, not only as a result of a theological reflection in a narrow sense, but also as a result of circumstances in the surrounding society. The first of the three confessions that later became known as the *Three forms of unity* was the so-called Belgic confession from 1561. The aim was primarily to prove to the Catholic King Philip II that people who adhered to this new Reformed view were no revolutionaries but law-abiding citizens relying on the word of God, and that it would be a mistake to persecute them. A few years later, in Heidelberg, a catechism, named after its birth-place, was compiled as the second in this triad. When challenges arose at the beginning of the seventeenth century regarding the Reformed orthodoxy that had emerged in the latter part of the previous century and the need grew to find a common understanding of what Reformed faith was about an international synod was summoned. The proceedings were in progress between November 1618 and May 1619 and a major result was the third of the *Three Forms of Unity*, The Canons of Dordrecht (also called Dordt)³⁴⁹.

³⁴⁸ (Vischer 1999, p. 8)

³⁴⁹ See also p. 90

Over time numerous other confessional documents were produced. One of the most widespread was the *Westminster Confession* from 1647. Although the three mentioned above together with the Westminster confession were widely acclaimed, they were also often targets for criticism. This was especially so when the *Enlightenment* began to raise new questions not only on the Bible itself as the source of knowledge but also on the role of man himself in finding the truth. The rise of the pietistic movement also challenged old truths. Step by step this created a “double face”, to use Dr. Lukas Vischer’s words³⁵⁰—on the one hand the challenges of a changing world that demanded new interpretations, or at least new ways of expressing old insights, and on the other hand the ambition to keep the bonds with tradition.

5.1.2 Later Confessional development within the WARC family of churches

A crucial moment in the history of confessional development within the Reformed churches—inspired by Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Niemöller and others—was the adoption of the *Barmen Declaration* in 1934. It was a response to and criticism of the approval the Nazi ideology had been met with in several German churches. They felt that the “authenticity of the church and its witness was at stake”. The churches that took part in the extraordinary synod that led to the *Barmen Declaration* became part of a new *confessing church* (Bekennniskirche) and paved by this also the way for a new thinking around confessional matters. Not only that it was a strong pronouncement of faith in a grave situation, it was also a new and outspoken way of gathering “the church around the truth of the Gospel”.³⁵¹ It also compellingly illustrated that the days of developing confessional statements were not only something of the past.

In 1981 the WARC undertook an examination of how Reformed churches world-wide were reflecting on their contemporary confessional basis. Edmond Perret, the then Gen. Secretary of the WARC, argues that it is distinctive for the Reformed church to be open to varying

³⁵⁰ (Vischer 1999, p. 15)

³⁵¹ (Vischer 1999, p. 21)

expressions of its confession of faith.³⁵² A consultation, held in Leuenberg, Switzerland, assembled some 25 participants who discussed Confessions of Faith and statements of faith from union negotiations from nearly 30 churches or (in a few cases) special groups. Dr. Lucas Vischer, who organized the consultation pin-points five different reasons for the development of these faith statements: 1) An update or re-definition of earlier statements or confessions; 2) For catechetical purposes or so as to make the Christian belief more accessible to members of the church; 3) To re-state the Reformed heritage in a new or changed context; 4) As a part of a reflection on the Christian answer in a critical political situation and as a way as to make church members aware of the implications of the faith in Jesus Christ; 5) The need to rethink their faith in a situation of unity talks with other churches.³⁵³ The statements that were dealt with in this consultation—and that are presented in extenso in Vischer’s report—came from all continents.

That this kind of theological work was in progress as widely as was shown at this consultation, not least in relation to churches of other traditions, must be conceived, Vischer argues, as an incentive for all Reformed churches to commence their own reflection. Not that every new confession automatically is better than the old ones or without demur. However, they at least raise questions on how to relate them to the older ones and to what extent they, in their contextual approach, and thereby sharpening the identity of the church, also can be seen as unifying. That does not mean that every church necessarily should have the same confessional base but hopefully reach a situation of *pia conspiratio*—breathing together—to use a term from Calvin.³⁵⁴ This term is pointing to an important development in many of the new confessions that take up issues such as peace and reconciliation as unifying themes. It had over time been more obvious that it is not only about saying the right things in the church, but, furthermore, to live the content of the confession, as at the heart of every confession is the crucified

³⁵² (WARC 1982b, p. 1) This booklet is number 2 in a series of publications from the WARC office under the common title “Studies from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches”.

³⁵³ (Vischer 1982, p. 7)

³⁵⁴ (WARC 1982b, p. 5)

Christ and the calling to “his confessing people to take up their cross and follow him”.³⁵⁵

Given the above, the old confessional history as well as the newer one, it is not to overstate to argue that there is an apparent interest in and sensitiveness related to the issue of confession. The old ones are still held in high esteem at the same time as a renewal and reformulating work is going on. The crucial thing is how to relate these two to each other.

5.2 Reformed confessional thinking in the South African context

When the government in the mid-seventies clamped down on, and banned, for instance the Christian Institute, the Black Consciousness Movement, Pro Veritate and many other organisations and publications as well as individuals the stage was set for others to take up the work after those who were hampered. The SACC became a very important actor, as was the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference. As mentioned above, also the so-called daughter churches within the Reformed family began to act much more independently and became much more outspoken socially and theologically.

5.2.1 The Broederkring

Among the examples of recent confessional statements that were presented at the WARC consultation 1981 and in the subsequent report was one elaborated in 1979 by a group of concerned ministers, and a few others, mainly belonging to the non-white DRC churches. They called themselves Broederkring—circle of brothers.³⁵⁶ They expressed their goal and basis as follows:

³⁵⁵ (WARC 1982b, p. 5-6)

³⁵⁶ They changed their somewhat gender biased name to Belydende Kring – Confessing circle. In October 1981 this group was instrumental in establishing the Alliance of Black Reformed Christians in South Africa (ABRECSA) of which Allan Boesak was the first chairperson.

- To bring about organic church-unity and to strive towards the practical expression of that unity on all levels of church life: congregational, circuit and synodal levels.

- To take seriously the prophetic mission of the church where the oppressive structures and laws in Southern Africa are concerned, and furthermore, the priestly mission, where the victims of the un-Christian policy and practices of these countries are concerned, including the fearful oppressors themselves.

- To let the Kingship of Christ triumph over the ideology of ‘apartheid’ or ‘separate development’ or whatever ideology, so that the people of Southern Africa can have a way of life worthy of man.

- To advance the Evangelical liberation from injustice, dehumanisation, alienation, and lovelessness of the church and state.

- To support the ecumenical movement which advances the Kingship of Christ in all spheres of life, and all organisations both in and outside South Africa, that strives towards the above aims.³⁵⁷

On that basis they formulated their faith statement, the *Theological Declaration*, as the starting point for guiding and exerting pressure on the church in the struggle against apartheid and strive for attaining church unity. In four rather short sections this statement challenges the church to bring about God’s justice and reconciliation in the midst of a politically tense situation—as a way of taking the confession of faith seriously. It is valid even if it has to be done “in conflict with human authorities”.³⁵⁸

In a report from the Broederkring executive in March 1981, it becomes obvious that this had created resistance among certain groups within the DRC family of churches—the “white leaders of the NGK and NGSK”—who criticised the Broederkring for dealing with things beyond its competence and wrongfully to talk in the name of the church. The attacks

³⁵⁷ (Broederkring 1982, p. 20-1)

³⁵⁸ (Broederkring 1982, p. 22)

came not only from within the church but also from representatives of the government, such as the Minister of Police, Louis le Grange, who recommended them, in a report published in the *Star*, a Johannesburg daily, to “reconsider their stand”.³⁵⁹ This is an apparent sign of how the DRC and the state were good comrades in their hunt for apartheid critics. Minister le Grange’s words seem soft but are for those to whom they were directed clearly understandable as a threat, albeit subtle, and are an unambiguous indication that unless they did not renounce their views strong measures could be taken against them. That had happened many times before by way of banning people and organisations, as well as by imprisonment and even through lethal measures. The Broederkring executive saw the way this sequence of criticism developed—critique by white ministers in the ‘mission’ churches first, preparing the way for a follow up by government—as a preparation for “the final *coup de grace*” by the authorities.³⁶⁰

Under the heading *The onslaught against us* the Broederkring refuted all criticism. They identified the support for the Broederkring by overseas churches and financial bodies—and their providing of financial support, inter alia for bursaries for theological students—as the major predicament for the DRC and the white leadership within the ‘mission’ churches and as the main reason for their criticism. The foreign support meant that the DRC lost control over young students and theologians who now got increasing possibilities to study overseas and, furthermore, to a much larger extent at institutions of their own choice, not where the DRC preferred them to study.

All in all, it is evident that the theological declaration of the Broederkring is pointing towards new and important perspectives on how to read the confession afresh in the midst of a changing world order and to make use of it in the daily life of church and society. As we soon will see, this declaration was an important predecessor to and provides much of the theological base for the Belhar Confession.

³⁵⁹ (Broederkring 1982b, p. 289)

³⁶⁰ (Broederkring 1982b, p. 290)

5.2.2 Abreca

At the end of October 1981 the ABRECSA—The Alliance of Black Reformed Christians in Southern Africa—was established by some 50 delegates from 8 churches belonging to the reformed family. One main question during the five-day meeting was whether it was a burden or a challenge to be ‘black and reformed’, or rather, about the *meaning* of being black and reformed. As well as in the Broederkring Allan Boesak played an instrumental role in formulating its standpoints and to some extent they had their roots in his doctoral thesis *Farewell to Innocence—A Social Ethical Study on Black Theology and Black Power*, defended in 1976 at University of Kampen in the Netherlands.³⁶¹

In the statement on “Black and Reformed” the ABRECSA dealt with the problematic situation that a common, even the major, understanding among blacks of what it meant to be reformed in South Africa was paired with “oppression, racism and justification of tyranny”.³⁶² To ABRECSA this made, among other things, the Word of God subservient to “claims of cultural and racist ideology”, and confined the Lordship of Jesus to a “narrow ‘spiritual’ realm while the rest of life is surrendered to the power of false gods”.³⁶³ The understanding of culture that they describe here comes close to what Said describe as a rather combative source of identity.³⁶⁴

In contrast to that, ABRECSA re-affirmed a “true Reformed tradition” where

“the Word of God is the supreme authority and guiding principle ... that gives life and offers liberation that is total and complete” and where “Christians are responsible for the world in which we live, and ... [wherein] it is an integral part of our discipleship and worship of God [to reform it]”.³⁶⁵

³⁶¹ His extensive “selected bibliography” at the end of the dissertation indicates inspiration from e.g. Bonhoeffer, Manas Buthelezi, James Cone, Martin Luther King, John Mbiti, James Baldwin, J.M. Bonino, G. Gutierrez, and R. Niebuhr.

³⁶² (Abreca 1981, p. 56)

³⁶³ (Abreca 1981, p. 57)

³⁶⁴ See footnote 78

³⁶⁵ (Abreca 1981, p. 57)

Although the ABRECSA did not express itself in a declaration of faith, confession or similar documents, as did the Broederkring, the above statement comes close to it and serves as one. The ABRECSA members reject what they see as a false interpretation of the Reformed heritage carried forth by the DRC and impose on themselves the task to “articulate our faith in terms which are authentic and relevant” while in this struggle trusting the words of the Belgic Confession: “That faithful and elect shall be crowned with glory and honour; and the son of God will confess their names before God and his Father ... all tears shall be wiped from their eyes; and their cause which is now condemned by many judges and magistrates as heretical and impious will then be known to be the cause of the Son of God ...”.³⁶⁶ The quotation is but an example on how difficult the situation was perceived.

By referring to the first of the three Formulas of Unity and its words about the ‘faithful’ and ‘elect’ they are picking up a theme that has been central to the ancestors of those who now are challenged and apply it in a totally new and diametrically opposite situation.

5.3 The Belhar Confession

At its synod in 1978 the DRMC took a firm stance regarding the situation in South Africa, declared apartheid “unambiguously ... to be in conflict with the gospel of Jesus Christ” and meant that theological justification thereof was heresy. This did not fall into good soil with the DRC that “told the DR Mission church in so many words that its declaration was not worthy of serious attention”.³⁶⁷

Durand means that the development of a confession often is somewhat polemic in character and thereby raises the tension among parties involved, and if the aim is to change a situation it might function contrary to what one wants to achieve—schism, not unity. Would not dialogue with the DRC have been a better way to go? He answers himself by pointing to important factors of which some are: the seriousness of the question addressed—the heresy of a church—, and the

³⁶⁶ (Abreca 1981, p. 58) [Underlined in original]

³⁶⁷ (Durand 1984b, p. 38)

inability of the existing (old) confessions to provide a relevant answer. Thus, a line had to be drawn as the talks cannot continue forever under these circumstances. Besides, the DRC did not seem willing at all to discuss the matter with the DRMC, so “[a]ll that remained for the DR Mission Church was to confess its faith”.³⁶⁸ Parenthetically, one can also note that discussions, to no avail, since long also had been going on not only between the DRC and the WARC but between the DRC and sister churches especially in Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States. The experience made by the DRMC was not unique.³⁶⁹

By taking this step the DRMC established itself as a church with a firm theological basis for its teaching and life in society. They also categorically refuted the criticism that they by means of this were endangering the unity within the DRC family. That could only have been done if there was “a true unity in the biblical sense” between the two churches, but no such unity was present. On the contrary, as the situation had become a battle between the Gospel and a pseudo-gospel—a true confession against an un-Godly ideology given biblical sanction.³⁷⁰

Furthermore, the DRMC had for long held itself back from having relations to other churches and on the ecumenical arena in their own capacity as the DRC had seen that kind of liaisons as harmful to themselves and dissuaded them from doing that. The “traditional role [of the DRMC] as ‘receiver’ and the ‘mentality of poverty’ that held it captive for so long” had now given way for a totally new understanding of what it meant to be a church. This is especially interesting when one knows that the DRC still at that time in different ways recognizes the DRMC as part of its mission work: News about the DRMC is categorised as mission news; it is regularly dealt with in the DRC mission committee official organ *Die Sendingblad*; in the DRC synod its work is presented in the mission report.³⁷¹

Seen in relation to this the Belhar Confession is an apparent turning point in South African church history.

³⁶⁸ (Durand 1984b, p. 34-6)

³⁶⁹ The standpoints of the DRC at that time are to be found in the *Human Relations and the South African Scene* document. See section 3.2.3.3

³⁷⁰ (Durand 1984b, p. 40, 35-36)

³⁷¹ (Robinson 1984, p. 43-4)

5.3.1 The Confession

A draft of the Belhar Confession was presented at the DRMC synod in October 1982, a few weeks after the WARC Ottawa General Council, and was received unanimously.³⁷² It is a rather short text—less than 1200 words—consisting of 5 paragraphs whereof number 2-4 are dealing respectively with *Unity*, *Reconciliation*, and *Justice*. Paragraph 1 is a very short introduction that describes how this confession is relating to a triune understanding of God. The final paragraph, also very short, clarifies that in obedience to Jesus Christ the Church has to confess in this way, and to live according to it, even though authorities might criticise and punish them for it.

All three keywords above are not explicitly present in the *Theological Declaration* of the Broederkring but clearly discernable in the formulations.

The confession was the logical consequence of the decision at the synod—in line with what had happened in Ottawa a few weeks earlier—to express a *Status confessionis* regarding the current situation in South Africa.

Its first main section of the declaration—on unity—says in short that unity rooted in Christ’s work of reconciliation has to become visible and manifested in many ways but that can only be established in a situation characterized of freedom. Therefore the confession among other things “rejects any doctrine which absolutises either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutisation hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation”.

Next section, on reconciliation, calls the church to take up the message of reconciliation “in and through Jesus Christ” to share it in a country “which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced

³⁷² It was finally adopted at the following synod in 1986. In the meantime local congregations and circuits had had time to reflect and comment. The full text of the Confession can be found for instance in (De Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio 1983, p. 175-82) and in (Hofmeyer, Millard and Froneman 1991, p. 342-9) as well as on the home page of the URCSA: (URCSA Home page 2008); (Cloete and Smit 1984, p.1-6) also provides the accompanying letter that gives some information on the background and thinking around the confession.

separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity". As the "credibility of this message is seriously affected" the confession rejects "any doctrine which, in such a situation sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and colour".

Finally, the last main section of the confession—on justice—notes that God

"wishes to bring about justice and true peace among men; that in a world full of injustice and enmity He is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged and that He calls his Church to follow Him in this".

About this perspective of justice Botman maintains that

"[t]he Confession of Belhar took the matter of reconciliation beyond the responsibility of the state and focused it ecclesialogically on the theology of the church as a matter of justice. It thus disclosed the political and economic dimensions of the doctrine of reconciliation over and against the political and economic dimensions of the theology of apartheid".³⁷³

De Gruchy's reading of the Institutes leads him to note that love expressed through just and equitable laws and government was "at the heart of Calvin's political agenda".³⁷⁴

The conclusion of the Belhar Confession is that the "Church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the Church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice" and must therefore "reject any ideology which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel".

³⁷³ (Botman 2000, p. 111)

³⁷⁴ (De Gruchy 1991, p. 247)

5.3.1.1 *Missionary implications*

That the presentation of this text, briefly summarized above, had the effect of a powerful blast—as an uppercut, maybe perceived as a left hook—on the leadership of the DRC ought not to surprise. The ‘daughter’ utters harsh words directed to the ‘mother’ and

“places its very being in the balance. Its ecclesiastical policy and practice in respect of racial and national relations is rejected confessionally as being in conflict with some of the central tenets of Christianity”.³⁷⁵

To this P. J. Robinson adds another perspective: namely that this document is a missionary document. In his understanding this moves the DRMC from being a *missionary object* in the eyes of the DRC to a *witnessing church on its own*. No traditional mission terminology is used in the Confession. Instead Robinson points to some other characteristics: The first is the use of the phrase “we believe” commencing all five articles; By confessing the most central convictions a church provides its most powerful witness. Furthermore, he highlights that the Confession deals with the relation of the gospel to the actual situation. Thirdly, while the DRC talked about the need for spiritual unity, impossible to discern, this Confession talks about visible unity in word and deed. The fourth characteristic mentioned has to do with recognising the social implications of the gospel—in addition to individual salvation. Lastly the Confession is clear on the need to strive for social justice.³⁷⁶

Read in this way the Belhar Confession becomes not only an important means for the DRMC to find its own place in the ecclesiastic realm in South Africa and pronounce its theology afresh, it also has produced strong antithesis to the mission perspectives of the DRC emanating from the 1930s and then reiterated in the documents that came in 1966 and 1974, the *Human Relations in South Africa* respectively the *Human Relations and the South African Scene*.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁵ (Durand 1984, p. 119)

³⁷⁶ (Robinson 1984, p. 44-8)

³⁷⁷ These two documents (1966 & 1974) are shortly described in section 3.2.3.3

One important perspective that I think has slipped Robinson's analysis is that the Confession also moves the understanding of what mission is from a colonial project to the question of what it means to be a church in the context of separation, oppression and suffering. Without any doubt, the Belhar Confession in this is a forerunner to the Kairos document in 1985.

5.3.2 Belhar and Barmen

Besides saying—as many have done—that these fairly few lines of the Confession of Belhar are as important to South Africa as the *Barmen Theologische Erklärung* to the *Bekennniskirche* in Germany in the thirties, it is also necessary to say that there are far-reaching similarities between the two. Dirkie Smit, theologian at the Theological faculty of the University of Stellenbosch, argues that there is a long and ongoing conversation between them.³⁷⁸

Although a bit truistically one must say the Belhar Confession would not have been as it became without the Barmen Declaration.³⁷⁹ Many leading theologians and church leaders, not least Beyers Naudé and those working with the Christian Institute until it was closed in 1977 and thereafter at the South African Council of Churches, learned from the situation in Nazi-Germany and understood the situation in South Africa and the struggle against apartheid in an analogous way. Besides those there were several South African theologians, of whom Smit mentions some, who made an important impact on the process leading up to Ottawa and the Belhar Confession. Moreover must be noted the huge role of Barth and Bonhoeffer who through their visionary theological writings and inspiring lives during rough times played an immensely important role in the South African situation.

After this historic link Smit points to the formal similarities between the two confessions.

³⁷⁸ The *Barmen Theologische Erklärung* is available in English for instance at www.warc.ch/pc/20th and www.ekd.de/english/barmen_theological_declaration (Barmen declaration 1934)

³⁷⁹ (D. Smit 2006, p. 291)

“Both were documents of the church, not of individuals; both targeted false doctrine, not specific people; both were binding and authoritative and not optional, not mere theological opinions and contributions to a discussion, born in a *Status confessionis*, a moment of truth, when the gospel itself was at stake, according to those who confessed. Both therefore did not cause the crisis but were responses to an already existing crisis.”³⁸⁰

Both confessions, due to their understanding of what a confession is—not a political but a theological statement, or even a statement of truth—refrains from referring deliberately to the actual context. Only in the accompanying letter is the “present church and political situation” mentioned more explicitly, but even there is for instance the word apartheid left out.³⁸¹

The third, and possibly the most important, similarity between the two confessions lies in their common faith position, or confessional viewpoint, according to Smit. That is *inter alia* that they regard the historic situation in which they find themselves, not as the primary problem but a symptom of deeper problems in society against which they want to proclaim another gospel and the Triune God.³⁸²

5.4 DRC reactions

In the context of ongoing development in many churches of the Reformed tradition world-wide it could have been fairly natural for the DRC to acknowledge the Belhar Confession as being in line with what happened elsewhere but that was not the case.

In discussions I have had with informants in South Africa I have often heard that a steadfast adherence to the confessions of the reformation—the three Formulations of unity—has been a major reason why a true Reformed church cannot easily—if at all—adopt another

³⁸⁰ (D. Smit 2006, p. 292)

³⁸¹ (Cloete and Smit 1984, p. 4)

³⁸² (D. Smit 2006, p. 292)

confession. The subtext for the assertion of those sharing that notion could be that the DRMC/URCSA ought to drop the idea about adding the Belhar Confession as a fourth since it is against a basic Reformed understanding of the confessional basis for the church and thereby contrary to the unity of the church.³⁸³ Whether this was a correct way of describing the situation, as they understood it, or merely a way of shunning the difficult discussion that inevitably would emerge if a discussion on the *content* of the Belhar Confession would take place is not of primary concern to assess here.

While discussing this matter with Jane Dempsey Douglass³⁸⁴, she told me that reactions she had received from theologians from within the DRC on the question of Belhar was that on the one hand it contained “perfectly acceptable theology” but that “we cannot admit a modern confession alongside our sixteenth century heritage and confessional documents of our church”. She understood this as “the excuse, that the big hang-up that was keeping them from moving further in the reunification process was the requirement that the Belhar would have to be confessional document”.³⁸⁵

This corresponds well with what the DRC wrote in 1986 in its first edition of the Church and Society-document. There they stated that the faith of a true believer—“as the true maintenance of the confession is of vital importance”—should be expressed in “true confession [as that] is the expression of obedience to the word of God” and from that follows that “major differences in the articles of faith are detrimental to the church’s mutual fellowship”.³⁸⁶ According to my understanding this line of argument has its roots in a need by the DRC to move away from earlier standpoints on the concept of ‘people’ realizing that only the confession of faith now can constitute adherence to the people of God. It is no longer possible to argue that black and white are to be kept apart in church in line with the earlier DRC understanding of the OT argumentation on blood-tie.³⁸⁷ But it does not mean that the DRC is

³⁸³ See i.e. (Gospel Defence League 2005)

³⁸⁴ President of the WARC 1990-1997.

³⁸⁵ (Douglass, Interview in Los Angeles 2007, Part 1 /M 52-54)

³⁸⁶ (DRC 1987, p. 10-1 - §§ 60-64)

³⁸⁷ (DRC, Human Relation in South Africa 1966, p. 1-2)

open to a discussion on what a true confession is. The old formulas are the only ones accepted, and by the above mentioned notion the Belhar Confession—although not mentioned by name—is declared schismatic and should therefore be abolished.

In this restrained attitude, still present in the mid-nineties, the DRC was becoming more and more isolated. All over the world Reformed churches and groups had begun to formulate their belief afresh in a world where the ‘otherness’ of some was beginning to be dismissed to the benefit of an increased sense of ‘sameness’—a post-colonial development in a globalised world where also ‘mission in return’ had begun to be catchword.

While the DRC did nothing, others, not least the black churches in South Africa began to make themselves heard in new ways.

5.5 Acid test – or not?

Time and again the little phrase ‘acid test’ has come up in discussions I have had with South Africans as well as people related to the WARC. An acceptance and adoption of the Belhar Confession would prove whether the DRC really has changed at heart, it has been argued, and thereby function as an acid test.

The Scriba (Secretary) of the URCSA, Leonardo Appies described in 1995, in a report at a European Reformed Consultation in the Netherlands, the situation relating to the ongoing unity discussions as such: “[T]hough we can compromise ... there are also issues not negotiable like Belhar”. Without using the key phrase he is saying the same thing.³⁸⁸ The former President of the WARC, Jane Dempsey Douglass mentioned the acid test issue as a problematic one. WARC General Secretary Milan Opočenský uses the phrase in his speech at the DRC Synod in 1998.

Already in 1993 is the phrase ‘acid test’ used by the DRC(!)—albeit picked up from someone else—while participating in the WARC Johannesburg Consultation in March that year. They are responding to the criticism that has been conveyed at the consultation and assures the

³⁸⁸ (WARC 1995)

other delegates that they are “committed to the unity of the DRC family” and furthermore that they “agree with the statement that this is the acid test whether the DRC has finally distanced itself from the racism of *apartheid*”.³⁸⁹

The question is to what extent the understanding of this phrase has been divergent.

Dirkie Smit argues “the DRMC did not expect of any other church, including the members of the DRC-family, but also more widely in the ecumenical church to accept Belhar as their own confessional document”.³⁹⁰ This seems to be in total contradiction to what others maintain, but it is difficult to oppose as he and Russel Botman are said to be the main authors of the Confession.³⁹¹ The somewhat impertinent question then arises regarding what has happened in the reflection on the Confession over the more than 27 years that has passed by since the creation of it, the 11 years since the re-admittance of the DRC into the Reformed fellowship again, and as a result of the overwhelming amount of discussions, analyses and debates that has taken place in local churches, between representatives of different denominations and at the Academy, as well as in numerous articles in journals. It would not be unlikely that various positions—even by the same person—could be expressed given the time frame, and not least the altering experience of the correspondence between word and deed in the abolition of apartheid and the changing views and expectations of the possibility of a speedy unification.

At the time of the 1994 DRC synod—sometimes referred to as the *Synod of Reconciliation* by the DRC themselves—comprehensive discussions on a future unity took place between the different churches in the Family. Those discussions regarding the issue of unity are given in a report that is taken as a resolution in the Synod. Regarding the question of the Belhar Confession they say that “[t]he DRC is requested to consider whether it too would accept in principle that the Belhar Confes-

³⁸⁹ (DRC 1994b, p. 75-7); This response was later endorsed by the DRC synod the following year. (DRC 1994c, p. 32, 442)

³⁹⁰ (D. Smit 2006, p. 298)

³⁹¹ (McGarrahan 2008, p. 5)

sion should be the article of faith of a unified church”. In an annexure the URCSA declares itself “concerned over the failure/unwillingness of the General Synod ... to declare its position with regard to the status of the Belhar Confession as an article of faith” and that it might “constitute an obstruction to our discussions on unity”.³⁹² Is the URCSA disillusionment at this a result of diverging understanding between the two churches or is their “impression that the DRC is playing for time” correct?³⁹³ One indication of the second is that the DRC in these discussions over again presented models of unity that had been rejected already several years earlier. The proposals were inter alia about a federal church where the old churches (General Synods) along racial lines still exist.³⁹⁴

Acid test or not. That the phrase has been used in relation to the question around the adoption of the Belhar Confession as a confessional document is obvious. This might have been against the will of those who drafted it. The intention by the DRMC by accepting it as part of its confessional base might have been in line with Smit’s argumentation, but it is likewise obvious that representatives of the leadership in the URCSA have been thinking of the Belhar Confession as a means of deciding the standing of the DRC. It might have been that the explicit purpose with Belhar, according to Smit—“to find words to express what they already believed and on the basis of which they were already convinced that apartheid was sin and its theological justification false”, and “not to write a new theological document informing believers what they should believe”—became obscured in the continuing difficulties to find substantial repudiation by the DRC from apartheid.³⁹⁵

What Smit then pin-points as more important is easy to accept: namely that the *content* was the superior thing, the embodiment of the

³⁹² (DRC 1994); The original Afrikaans text is to be found in (DRC 1994c, p. 354-6)

³⁹³ (WARC 1995, p. 3)

³⁹⁴ See Fig. 1, p. 138; This model can be dated back to 1988 and present an solution in line with point 5.3 in the resolution: “Church councils, presbyteries, synods and general synods can elect to continue functioning as they do currently”. (DRC 1994)

³⁹⁵ (D. Smit 2005, p. 366)

confession—in church structures and church orders, including the financial structures, in the ministries and the church services, in public witness through word and deed and in the mission and proclamation.³⁹⁶

5.6 Closing reflections

It is interesting to read the Belhar Confession and the situation in which it was developed in light of Lukas Vischer's analysis of the accumulated 'modern' confessions in the Reformed community. He found five motives for the creation of a confession.³⁹⁷

- 1) An update or re-definition of earlier statements or confessions
- 2) For catechetical purposes or so as to make the Christian belief more accessible to members of the church
- 3) To re-state the Reformed heritage in a new or changed context
- 4) As a part of a reflection on the Christian answer in a critical political situation and as a way as to make church members aware of the implications of the faith in Jesus Christ
- 5) The need to rethink their faith in a situation of unity talks with other churches.

Belhar corresponds to all of them. It has clearly been stated that it is not a new confession telling believers what to think, but expressing 'what they already believe'. Secondly, its very being, as a 'perfectly acceptable theology'—by way of a brief and modern language—is a way of making the content of the old traditions/confessions accessible to new generations. The third, contextual, reason—about the need to re-state a true Reformed faith and a sound message in a changing and challenging world—is obvious. That goes also for the fourth motive: The critical situation when the centre of faith is at stake and about to corrupt the church. Even the fifth argument, to make way for a new united church corresponds well with the creation of the Belhar Confession.

The Belhar Confession accordingly fits in well with the overall development in the world-wide family of Reformed churches.

³⁹⁶ (D. Smit 2006, p. 298)

³⁹⁷ (Vischer 1982, p. 7)

This ought to have made it perfectly fit to pave way for the Calvinian *Pia conspiratio*.

Nonetheless, a reasonable mutual recognition is missing and the DRC General Synod 1994 obviously did not dare—despite the Belhar Confession’s “perfectly acceptable theology”—to take a deep breath and take the leap. The conflictive aspects that are inherent in every confession seem to prevail over the possibility of using it as a hermeneutical tool for expressing unity still in 1997/1998. Whether the WARC Executive Council did the best thing by proposing the re-instatement of the DRC is a question that still lingers. I will in a way come back to that in chapter 10.

ERSTE FÄRE-MODELL NGKA.

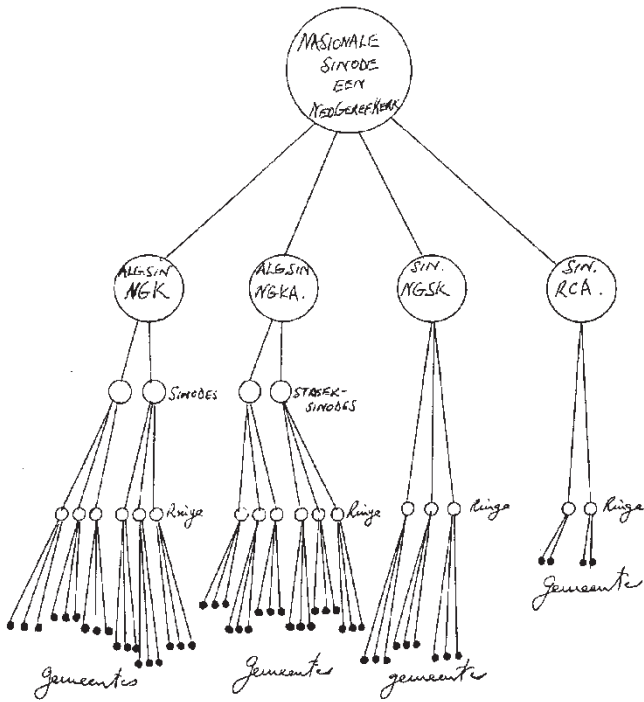


Fig. 1 Federal model for a new church

6 On Liberation and Reconciliation. Transforming worldviews – Paradigm shift or change of Perspectives

To deal with a place, a time and a situation as the South African society under apartheid and during its first transforming years towards a democratic, non-racial society makes it inescapable to touch upon issues on contextualisation.

There are numerous expressions for theologies dealing with the South African situation and/or what it is to be black in South Africa. There are also those who argue that paramount changes that take place in South Africa in the 90s provide reasons to talk about a paradigm shift also for the theological reflection, that theology for the struggle for justice and liberation is superseded by theology(-ies) for reconciliation.

There is, despite that, no reason to enter into any lengthy description on Contextual theologies, Local theologies, African Theologies, Black Theology or Christian-National Theology et. al. as such. In this chapter I will just sketch some views that I find interesting in relation to my overall aim, the study on the conflict between the DRC and the WARC. Despite that this chapter will not provide much, if anything, directly related to these two. Instead it will function as a back-drop for subsequent considerations.

6.1 Liberation Theology or Theology of Reconciliation

6.1.1 Some views on contextual theologies in South Africa

When the story this dissertation deals with is about to be finalised, in 1997 and 1998, there is one phrase hovering in South Africa and in the international community with interest in South Africa that has taken

over most of the discussion and has become the catch word of the day—Truth and Reconciliation. The commission³⁹⁸ had begun working in January 1996 and the processes within the different committees were running high. On many societal levels things are happening in this spirit—not least the new government in which Nelson Mandela also gave space for the previous enemy; de Klerk became one of two deputy presidents.

Does that mean that the question about Liberation theology is obsolete? Does the dichotomy between good and evil of the foregone decades now only belong to the past, while reconciliation is the future? Is a paradigm shift taking place—here understood as follows: when one perspective comes to the fore it is totally replacing the other, declaring it inapplicable—or can it rather be seen as (only) a change of perspectives. To this I will try to give a tentative answer in this chapter.

I will start by giving some South African examples from a volume with different essays under the heading *Doing Theology in Context* edited by John de Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio edited in 1994.

Villa-Vicencio himself was the author of an article about *Liberation Theology*³⁹⁹ in a part of the book with the sub-heading *Theologies in South Africa*. Despite this heading he mainly deals with the Latin-American context and references are given to e.g. Boff & Boff, Gutiérrez, Bonino and Segundo. As a means to give a kind of general background this is of course rather natural.⁴⁰⁰ The definition of how to understand what Liberation Theology is, he collects from Leonardo and Clovis Boff:

“Reflecting on the basis of practice, within the ambit of the vast efforts made by the poor and their allies, seeking inspiration of faith and the gospel for the commitment to fight against poverty and for the integral liberation of all

³⁹⁸ More on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in section 6.2 below

³⁹⁹ (Villa-Vicencio 1994)

⁴⁰⁰ That no women are mentioned among the Latin American liberation theologians is not natural, but typical.

persons and the whole person - that is what liberation theology means.”⁴⁰¹

He is then developing the two special features he distinguishes in Liberation Theology—the Preferential option for the poor, and secondly, the focus on critical reflection on Christian praxis. Thereafter he elaborates some themes: Liberation as Integral in Salvation: Jesus and Liberation; The Church and its Mission; A spirituality for Liberation.

In two respects he relates more directly to the South African context: By mentioning the *Kairos Document* in relation the question of the role of the poor, secondly by articulating the critique that the South-American theologians have failed to reflect on the possibility for other reasons for repression than socio-economic, such as for instance race and gender.⁴⁰²

There are other writers in this volume who deal with other views. So has Luke Lungile Pato, dealt with *African Theologies* and noted how “[m]issionary theologies made African Christians invisible and inaudible ... [and] made Christianity in Africa ... burdened by European structures and European mind-sets”.⁴⁰³ Now this is challenged and many varying African Theologies have emerged dealing with, inter alia, the legacy of colonialism, the increasing disillusionment with traditional Western approaches to theology, and revival of African culture. He further notes that since the “Black theology movement” came to the fore in the 70s a debate has been ongoing as to how they relate to each other. As the latter was seen as sharper in its dealing with the challenges of apartheid and “the concerns of black people ... African theology has been regarded as reactionary” due to its focus on tradition and culture. Nevertheless, he assesses that Black theologians have become aware of

⁴⁰¹ (Villa-Vicencio 1994, p. 187) Quoted from Boff, L, and Boff, C, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 1987

⁴⁰² The gender question is a major problem throughout the whole story I am covering. Not only that none of the Reformed churches dealt with, white and non-whites, until late have had any women clergy, but also in the way that although it often has been women who have been radical, played important roles locally and involved themselves in e.g. defiance campaigns and other resistance activities their presence have been very weak at the top levels in all organisations.

⁴⁰³ (Pato 1994, p. 153)

the African heritage and believes that a “process of identifying integral connections between political struggle and culture [will end in] a more liberating theological reflection”. With the notion that the future for the church in Africa “lies with black people” he is concluding his article.⁴⁰⁴

Barney Pityana starts his article on Black Theology more or less where Pato is ending.⁴⁰⁵ He gives a short description on its origin in the Black Conscious Movement. Students from South Africa had been in the United States in 1968 and got inspired not least by the student movement and the civil rights movement there. It arose as a situational theology, Pityana says, “out of reflection and action from the black situation”.⁴⁰⁶

While James Cone, the prime proponent for Black Theology in the US, talked about the need to make use of Bultmann’s demythologising method to rip the Bible of the ideological unsound overcoat—a “divine revelation [that] camouflage[d] God’s identification with the human fight for justice”—Allan Boesak spoke about proclaiming “the gospel according to its original intention: as the gospel of the poor”. Black theology was for Boesak “a theology of liberation”. Others, such as Itumeleng Mosala, took up the Cone/Bultmann perspective and made their understanding of Black Theology more of a class analysis than a criticism of race and culture.⁴⁰⁷

With reference to Simon Maimela, Pityana questions whether the more confrontative views have any opportunity to play a constructive role for the future, especially as they mainly seem to be rooted in a traditional theological method. If new issues, e.g. womanist theology, a new understanding of a globalised world, etc., shall be able to find a space, old ideas must find new methods to deal with this.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁴ (Pato 1994, p. 156, 160)

⁴⁰⁵ (Pityana 1994)

⁴⁰⁶ (Pityana 1994, p. 174)

⁴⁰⁷ (Pityana 1994, p. 176-7)

⁴⁰⁸ (Pityana 1994, p. 181)

The only South African theologian Villa-Vicencio is referring to in his chapter on Liberation theology in South Africa is the Dominican pater Albert Nolan who himself also is providing a chapter in this *Doing Theology in Context* collection of essays. Nolan is dealing with *Kairos Theology* and provides some interesting information about the dawn of the *Kairos Document*. I have already in chapter 4 given an account of the KD and will not reiterate it here.

I will just share his views on what the Kairos theology really is. First Nolan notes that as “[c]ontextual theology is the kind of theology which reflects, explicitly and consciously, upon its context in the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ ... and especially in a context of oppression and suffering” the KD is “vividly and dramatically contextual ... out of the flames of the townships”.⁴⁰⁹ Secondly it has much in common with liberation theology—“In fact it can be described as a species or type of liberation theology”—as it makes use of social analysis and is driven by Christian faith to struggle for the liberation of the oppressed.⁴¹⁰ Finally Nolan describes Kairos theology as prophetic theology as it makes its social analysis of a certain time and interprets “the times [also] from God’s point of view”. Therefore he can resume by maintaining that Kairos theology “is really just another name for prophetic theology”.⁴¹¹

In his book on *God in South Africa* Nolan seems to see a process of contextualizing from African theology over Black theology to the Kairos theology in which an increasing awareness about the need to relate black experiences to the present socio-politico-economical situation is developing.⁴¹²

When summarizing his reflections he is coming to rather disillusioned conclusions. Today, he says, [which must be understood as 1993-1994] South Africa is facing even more serious crises than it did in 1985, but he can’t find much theological reflection on what could be called a present *Kairos*. Therefore he is sceptical of the impact of Kairos

⁴⁰⁹ (Nolan 1994, p. 213)

⁴¹⁰ (Nolan 1994, p. 215)

⁴¹¹ (Nolan 1994, p. 216)

⁴¹² (Nolan 1988, p. 42)

theology on the thinking and acting by Christians in the present situation. “Perhaps that in itself is part of our present crises.”⁴¹³

This hesitant feeling is shared by Molefe Tsele⁴¹⁴, who describes that he at the Second International Kairos Conference, in 1995, was having a feeling “of sadness that the reality of our visions of liberation fell far short of our expectations”.⁴¹⁵ What he sees in the South African society—at that time—a year after the inauguration of Nelson Mandela is rather disappointing: “Forget about the vote, what matters is the shares”. But affirmation of the Kairos calls for a jubilee, he says, referring to Leviticus 25:9-10. From thereon he distinguishes four processes, initiated by the new government that might function as realisations “of the Jubilee spirit of our time”: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), Affirmative Action Programme (AA), and the Nation Building Project.⁴¹⁶

A less well known variant of liberation theology is what is called *Confessing Church Theology*. The inspiration for that is to be found in Bonhoeffer, Barth and the Confessing church in Germany in the 30s. This perspective was explicitly taken up by Beyers Naudé and the ring of people active at the Christian Institute. We can recall it also in the theological reflection in the *Belydende Kring* (BK), the ABRECSA and in the development in the DRMC. The question about stating a *Status confessionis* is deeply rooted in this tradition.⁴¹⁷

6.1.2 Time and out?

Nelson Mandela is president. The ANC is in the lead in the government. Governmental programs as the RDP, receiving international govern-

⁴¹³ (Nolan 1994, p. 218)

⁴¹⁴ Molefe Tsele was by then director for a program at the South African Council of Churches dealing with economic and ethical analysis

⁴¹⁵ (Tsele 1996, p. 70)

⁴¹⁶ (Tsele 1996, p. 72-5)

⁴¹⁷ About BK, the ABRECSA and *status confessionis* see other parts of this study; Cf. (De Gruchy 1994)

mental support, are substituting the earlier local community-based development programmes that were supported from anti-apartheid movements abroad. Politically conscious—or street-smart—ministers of religion swap to politics instead. The gravy train begins to move faster and faster.

How do you distinguish between good and evil, justice and injustice, oppressor and oppressed, God and Devil, in that situation? When those ten local ministers, hampered in their lives due to the repression of a State of Emergency, met in Soweto a Saturday morning in July in 1985 the picture seemed to be clear—the need of action for change was so obvious. The enemy was clearly discernible to everyone. Now the picture has been severely blurred. Or maybe it is clear, but looks quite different and is therefore difficult to relate to. Tsele's analysis singles out the “dominant feature of our time ... a system that has gained universal appeal as the only ‘rational’ alternative, namely, the neo-liberal free market system” as the overall picture/state of things that has to be challenged today.⁴¹⁸

If Kairos theology meant to have as one of its inherent features to distinguish between oppressors and oppressed—as irreconcilable causes or interests—it runs an obvious risk of being recognised as obsolete. Already the so-called *sunset-clause* indicates this. The *sunset-clause* was a pragmatic acceptance that the revolution against the Pretoria regime could not be taken to its conclusion. It was proposed by Joe Slovo, then Secretary General of the Communist Party, and adopted by both the Communist Party and the ANC. It denoted that negotiations was the correct response to the current situation and challenged thereby the strict exclusive understanding of reconciliation in Kairos theology.⁴¹⁹ Is thereby Kairos theology dead and gone? As mentioned above, Tsele argues—despite the frustration among some Kairos theologians—that there are new challenges that can be met as long as this theology dynamically can adapt to changing societal circumstances.

Nonetheless, the question about reconciliation is raised in a new way. Botman wonders whether it can be understood as ‘a liberating me-

⁴¹⁸ (Tsele 1996, p. 71)

⁴¹⁹ (Botman 1996, p. 41)

taphorical device'.⁴²⁰ In that case there is no need to think that Theology of Reconciliation has replaced Theology of Liberation, or even, more specifically, Kairos Theology, but has become the tool for doing Kairos theology in a new context.

6.2 Truth and Reconciliation

6.2.1 On Reconciliation

“The Christian Church has naturally been in the business of truth and reconciliation, and guilt and forgiveness from its beginnings. This is our job ... This is the reason for our existence.”⁴²¹

To Dirkie Smit reconciliation was *the* basic theme. Not surprisingly it has been dealt with time and again. The Cottesloe declaration ended with a saying whereby the delegates “dedicated [themselves] afresh to the ministry of reconciliation” and thereafter it has been prevalent in many discussions, the pronouncement of many documents, and the theme for many deliberations in church and society.

It is not surprising, though, that the understanding of what the concept of reconciliation contains is varying. Wolfram Kistner listed in a study the variety of views a Biblical understanding of reconciliation challenged him with: Removal of hostility; Restoration of fellowship and peace; Restoration of community and communications between enemies; Jubilee; Radical universalism; Clear stand against irreconcilability; Re-integrating sinners; Give Hope.⁴²²

Quite a task to undertake and this was in the main what the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was expected to accomplish. However, it should not be a task just for the TRC, but for the churches as well. The then General Secretary of the SACC, Brigalia Bam, said in an interview about the TRC in Swedish television that “[w]e, as churches, need to talk

⁴²⁰ (Botman 1996, p. 40-3)

⁴²¹ (D. Smit 1995, p. 3)

⁴²² (Kistner 1996)

about reconciliation in relation to how it affects people's lives in our country, not just as a theological idea."⁴²³

6.2.2 The theology of the Commission

When the new parliament passed the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Bill, 1995, it was a follow-up of what had been discussed and agreed on already during the preparatory talks at the prospect of the power change. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, chaired by Desmond Tutu, was established to facilitate the ambitions of the bill.

The purpose was to bring about unity and reconciliation. The Commission should provide for investigations that could give "as complete a picture as possible of the nature, causes and extent of gross violations of human rights" between 1 March 1960 and 10 May 1994. It should also facilitate the granting of amnesty for those making full disclosure of their deeds. Furthermore it should work for restoration of human and civil dignity for victims and give recommendations to the president about restitutions for them. There was a hope that this would lead to national healing. To achieve the goals the commission used three committees: the Committee on Human Rights Violations, the Committee on Amnesty, and the Committee on Reparation and Rehabilitation.

The commissions held hearings to establish facts on what really happened to many people during the apartheid years. People who disclosed their deeds could apply for amnesty. The question of restoration was dealt with. For many this was a means of bringing the past with all its atrocities to an end and to begin to look for a future instead.

Not only individuals made submissions but also political parties, churches and organisations did so.⁴²⁴

⁴²³ Interview in Swedish television 6 March, 1997. Quotation is from a note taken by myself directly from the TV

⁴²⁴ Official material on the TRC, its background, the process and the results can be found on the internet—<http://www.gov.za>—, in the huge report in five volumes that came 1998—*Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, vol 1-5*, and at the special CD-rom that was edited in 1998—*Truth And Reconciliation Commissions Website*, November 1998.

Besides that, there are numerous books and articles analysing the TRC process and its results. Cf. for instance Botman/Petersen, *To Remember and to Heal*

Cont. next page

The central element in the proceedings by the TRC was to allow people to tell their story, victims as well as perpetrators. In this way truth might be able to be established, but maybe, furthermore, to take seriously the view that there is no liberation without remembrance.

Although the commission is a legal and societal instrument for reconciliation it comes close to a theological attitude by this. Dirkie Smit says that in

“the Christian tradition remembering is a fundamental form of loving. The Christian service or cult is rooted in remembering: God urges us to remember, to commemorate, and the congregation is reminded and exhorted to remember, to celebrate and to change”.⁴²⁵

James Cone puts it even stronger according to Smit: “Telling one another about memories, stories and experiences is the only way in which ideological gulfs between people, groups and communities can be bridged and done away with.” He then quotes Cone:

“Indeed, when I understand truth as story, I am more likely to be open to other people's truth stories. As I listen to other stories, I am invited to move out of the subjectivity of my own story into another realm of thinking and acting. The same is true for others when I tell my story. ... Indeed, it is only when I refuse to listen to another story that our own story becomes ideological, that is, a closed system incapable of hearing the truth.”⁴²⁶

In 1996 the SACC gathered churches in South Africa to a conference on *Reconciliation and Healing*.⁴²⁷ The main question was about the con-

(1996); Boraïne. *A Country unmasked* (2000); Cochrane/De Gruchy/Martin, *Facing the Truth* (1999); Jeffery, *The Truth about the Truth Commission* (1999); Krog, *Country of My Skull* (1998); Meiring, *Chronicle of the Truth Commission* (1999); Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (1999), and Several issues of *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*

⁴²⁵ (D. Smit 1995, p. 4)

⁴²⁶ (D. Smit 1995, p. 4) Quotation from Cone: *God of the oppressed*, 1975, p 103-4

⁴²⁷ (SACC 1996)

tinuation of the reconciliatory process. Among the proposal for future work is mentioned programs supporting victims of apartheid and their families, supporting local community work aimed at strengthening the fellowship at that place, give advice and support for those working with land-redistribution as well as to continue to develop the theological reflection on truth and reconciliation.

This list can be understood as a collection of elements in a reconciliation theology on South African ground. In that case it is possible to discern several links to expectations on what would come out from the ongoing reconstruction work of the government.

Roots to this can also be found in, for instance, Villa-Vicencio's writings. During the transition period—that is from the release of Mandela up to the first democratic election in 1994—he wrote for example about a *Theology of reconstruction* that to him is a kind of reconciliation theology:

“Reconciliation with God involves accepting the claim of God on one’s life. But this can be little more than homiletical appeal if it is not translated into cultural and structural controls and incentives designed to order our lives. At best, under the continuing challenges of the gospel, these structures can become part of the process of renewing, transforming and redirecting personal and social goals.⁴²⁸

He is in this book more or less making use of all the above mentioned contextual theologies and is also talking about the “*urgent* need to seize the moment” [Kairos]; “post-exilic theology ... [as a] *different kind of liberation theology*” [italics in orig.]. In the urgent need to seize the moment lies the view that liberation theology now—after having primarily said NO to oppression—also needs to say a prophetic YES to “the unfolding process of what could culminate in a democratic, just and kinder social order”.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁸ (Villa-Vicencio 1992, p. 162)

⁴²⁹ (Villa-Vicencio 1992, p. 2, 7-8)

Four years later he seems to tone down these high expectations somewhat. It is not surprising as it soon became obvious that the great plans of the RDP—the program that among other things should provide housing for millions in almost no time—failed. The high theological ideals—“God’s impending reign”—always judge the societal achievements, but it is “necessary to begin a journey of renewal somewhere” and although all three words truth, reconciliation and justice need to dominate the actual and future political scene “[r]econciliation needs to be the goal of the process”.⁴³⁰

Russel Botman agrees with Villa-Vicencio that what is needed is more than a theology of resistance, a theology of NO, but he turns down the traces in his thinking that too much assume the likeness of social engineering. He is quoting Mamphela Ramphele and Francis Wilson:

“While it is helpful and encouraging to think of rebuilding or reconstructing a new South Africa we believe it is important not to lose sight of the extent to which society is an organism that grows rather than a structure that can be dismantled and reassembled”.⁴³¹

Instead of these metaphors of transformation Botman in his reflection on reconciliation is asking for personal ones and is landing in a more traditional African metaphor: The concept of Ubuntu—this “You become what you are in the community with others”-idea that is so difficult to fully comprehend.⁴³² On his way towards Ubuntufication he begins by leaning against Bonhoeffer’s thinking on community building in Christ that includes suffering and being for others. The journey then incorporates Latin American experiences from which we learn that

“[t]he disciple understands one thing very well: the truest answer to poverty is not economic growth, but

⁴³⁰ (Villa-Vicencio 1996, p. 139)

⁴³¹ (Botman 1997, p. 32) The Quotation Botman use is from Ramphele/Wilson, *Uprooting Poverty: The South African Challenge*, p 5, 1989, Cape Town, David Philips.

⁴³² Tsele describes it as “self-esteem, human dignity, identity, culture, religion”. This is also what Jubilee is about—“the reclamation of ubuntu both individually and communally”. (Tsele 1996, p. 74)

rather community, participation and solidarity. The global economy, on the other hand, has invented or produced almost everything – except justice, solidarity, humanness and community. Community is its enemy.”⁴³³

He concludes that “[f]or our common future we are thrown back on Jesus Christ existing as community and on our African resources of Ubuntu”.⁴³⁴

It sounds to me as a post-exilic vision of future post colonialism.

6.3 Paradigm shift or change of Perspectives

As seen above, the catch words truth, justice and reconciliation, are coming back everywhere. Villa-Vicencio maintains that truth is the base, justice is the way and the reconciliation is the goal. Others might let justice and reconciliation change places.⁴³⁵

At the beginning of this chapter I posed the question whether there is a paradigm shift taking place whereby Theology of liberation is superseded by a Theology of Reconciliation. An article by Robin Petersen—*Soweto to the Millennium: Changing Paradigms of South African Prophetic Theology*—seems to argue for that.⁴³⁶

There are at least two objections against that. The first is more of a technical kind. He does not provide an explicit information on, or definition of, his use of the concept ‘paradigm’. Thomas S Kuhn—inventor of the concept—argued himself that the concept was only to be limited to natural sciences. He in addition is said to have several different versions of it but one major distinctive feature is that two paradigms are incommensurable. When David Bosch despite confessing it to be a “slippery concept” all the same makes use of it he tries at least to wrig-

⁴³³ (Botman 1997, p. 37)

⁴³⁴ (Botman 1997, p. 37-8)

⁴³⁵ In the SACC conference 1996 Desmond Tutu seems to hold that view that Justice is the result of Reconciliation. (SACC 1996)

⁴³⁶ (Petersen 1996)

gle himself out of this predicament by arguing that he is using it only “as a kind of working hypothesis”. Furthermore he says that he adheres to Küng’s definition: Models of interpretation.⁴³⁷ If this is what Petersen does then it is fine, but then it is becoming difficult to answer the question.

The second objection is that what Petersen defines as a paradigm shift is one specific occasion: The Soweto uprising in 1976. It will according to Petersen “be a symbol demarcation a space and a time” and a “kairos which ... shaped the theological agenda.” An ethical-political norm emerged that functioned as a horizon against which all theology was evaluated. This included the view that everything that furthered the struggle for liberation was normative. This has since “significantly shaped the face of South African theologies”.⁴³⁸

After having evaluated the changes (paradigm shifts?) within some of the different theologies his biggest concern is that a “postmodern rush to adopt newer, trendier, tools” will take over the theological scene totally and eradicate the older theologies. To prevent this he wants to keep their advantages together with newer, necessary perspectives such as interreligious dialogue, the church in a market oriented world, eco-theology, feminist theology etc.⁴³⁹

6.4 Closing comment

Coming to the end of this chapter I must confess that the question on paradigm shift or changes of perspectives has in my view become rather irrelevant. It is rather a linguistic or a semantic question.

Another indistinctness has emerged in the above: the demarcation line between different contextual theologies I have dealt with—if it at all is something that is meaningful to look for—is very vague. It is possible to see that certain perspectives that developed at one time/situation later deepen, broaden, and find new allies with which they can merge. They

⁴³⁷ (Bosch 1994 (1991), p. 184-5)

⁴³⁸ (Petersen 1996, p. 76-8)

⁴³⁹ (Petersen 1996, p. 80-1)

are—just because they are contextual theologies—changing from time to time. They cannot be seen as paradigms in a ‘classic’ sense in which they are incommensurable. On the contrary they adjust to new realities in the urgent need to seize the moment.

Another question arises instead. While all this is going on, why are there so few traces of the DRC involvement in the ongoing processes?

One obvious reason is that the DRC stood outside all the theological reflection that took place within the SACC since they left its predecessor the Christian Council of South Africa some 60 years ago. As late as in the mid-seventies they saw it as a betrayal and to side with the enemy when the DRCA joined the SACC. It took until this millennium before the reflection had reached a point that made it possible for the DRC to apply for, and the SACC to accept a membership. This happened in 2004 when they, after two years as observers, became fully involved in the council again.

Other potential answers to my question will be dealt with in later chapters.

7 Challenged by blackness: The WARC and the Status Confessionis

By the following I will come closer to the core of the conflict between the WARC and the DRC. During the sixties and the seventies the WARC had lifted the issue of racism and ‘separate development’ in South Africa several times. Yet, well formulated appeals from not only the WARC but also from the wider ecumenical movement to the white member churches had in reality been left aside without much recognition—and sometimes accused of being too liberal, of bearing the stamp of communism etc. The bonds between church and state had been too strong; the laager was too tight.

With the *Status confessionis* issue the heat in the debate is elevated to a new and much higher level for many reasons. It is a severe accusation of the DRC not in reality being a Christian church anymore. This is a result of a new and strong self-esteem among ‘the daughters’ that is threatening the whole system of the DRC family of churches. It is in addition a sign of a new role among those ‘others’ who had not until late taken a seat on their own in the ecumenical movement.

This chapter will present the dealings with the *Status confessionis* issue mainly from the WARC perspective. Nevertheless, this cannot be done without references to the DRC and to others who directly are influenced by it.

7.1 Status confessionis

”God in Jesus Christ has affirmed human dignity [and] has reconciled people to God and to themselves”. With those words, the General

Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), gathered in Ottawa in 1982, established the basic point of departure for a resolution on Racism and South Africa.⁴⁴⁰ With reference to the wording in Eph 4:5f about Jesus as the "Lord of His church who has brought us together in the one Lord, one faith, one baptism" the churches demanded of themselves a confrontation on racism, even a struggle against it. As a result, the situation in South Africa is brought forward to be discussed at the meeting. This is not the first time the Alliance has dealt with this issue. It has been an issue for the staff and the Executive of the WARC at least since the mid 50s. Furthermore, at every General Council from the 60s and onwards, something had been said on the importance of rejecting racism. It has e.g. been characterized as a betrayal of the gospel and as idolatry.

In this chapter I will deal with the concrete situation of conflict between the DRC and the WARC, the Ottawa General Council of the WARC in 1982 and its main component—the declaration of a *Status confessionis*—, the process thereafter, and at the end the final development of the conflict. I will also take note of other voices that, besides the two main players, have important roles in the outcome both in Ottawa and later.

To do this I will firstly give a brief outline of the South African situation around 1980, present a background to the situation in which the WARC found themselves at the beginning of the 1980s and thereafter describe The Ottawa General Council and the *Status confessionis*-issue as such.

Secondly, I will give an overview over the processes that followed, in the WARC as a follow up, and in the DRC as responses to the suspension that went together with the expression of the *Status confessionis*, as its logical practical emanation.

7.1.1 The SA situation

To give a backdrop to the processes in the WARC and the DRC I will give a short description of some major features in and around South Africa

⁴⁴⁰ (WARC 1982, p. 176)

at the end of the seventies and beginning of the eighties in as far as it has some importance to the story I am telling.

The end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies was a period during which the policy of harsh suppression, initiated by Prime Minister John Vorster, and prepared for by him in his earlier capacity as minister of Police, was relatively successful if one with that means a reduced level of open rebellion.⁴⁴¹ Many in the leadership of the ANC and other freedom movements were either in detention or banned. The remaining leaders were mainly abroad. This period, therefore seemingly peaceful and relatively calm, came to an end in the mid-seventies. "Dramatic changes were taking place" according to de Gruchy, and Terreblanche describes it as the time of the coming crisis of "the white hegemonic order's survival". The period had served to "gestate new radical ideas and nurture a new generation of revolutionary leaders".⁴⁴²

Among the signs of this dramatic change the emergence of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) is of great importance. Inspired by, among other things, the processes of decolonization and independence in other parts of Africa, and by the fight for civil rights in the United States black South Africans recaptured a new sense of pride and confidence in themselves—a belief in an African renaissance; "Black man, you're on your own".⁴⁴³

One important perspective in the BCM thinking is that the blackness could comprehend any non-white persons. Blackness has less to do with the colour of your skin than your socio-economic situation and feeling of being exploited and deprived of your humanity.

Added to the inspiration received from other parts of Africa and the rest of the world, and maybe even more important, were features in this South African version of liberative ideology that had its roots from

⁴⁴¹ (Terreblanche 2002, p. 307); De Gruchy writes that "The protests in South Africa died down ... due largely to the growing strength of state internal security". (De Gruchy and De Gruchy 2004, p. 144)

⁴⁴² (De Gruchy and De Gruchy 2004, p. 132); (Terreblanche 2002, p. 349)

⁴⁴³ (De Gruchy and De Gruchy 2004, p. 145). See also p. 144-64 in (De Gruchy and De Gruchy 2004); An early but thorough description of the emergence and development of the BMC, as well as its standpoints, can be found in (Motkhabi 1984, p. 106-53). Allan Boesak's doctoral dissertation from 1976, "*Farewell to Innocence*" is in full a study on black theology and black power.

within South Africa. The Black Consciousness was a spiritual reawakening that, as much of the liberation movement in South America, was based on an earnest will to grasp the teaching of the Bible, albeit with fresh eyes and preparedness for a new hermeneutic. In doing so they relied also on a renewed understanding of what African culture could bring into this examination.

Although described as 'a' Movement as if it was a single organisation it must be clearly stated that it was a multitude of organisations that together formed a multi-structured movement—a movement in its true sense. Among the more prominent organisations were South Africa Students Organisation (SASO) and Black People's Convention (BPC). Through them, and others, the understanding of Black Consciousness as the "awareness of black people that their humanity is constituted by their blackness" became an essential factor in the rising tide of protest.⁴⁴⁴

In the surrounding world Steve Biko, a leading student leader and founder of BPC and one of the main advocates for Black Consciousness Movement, was regarded as the leader of the movement. His appalling death while in police custody in 1977 underpinned for the world the importance of the movement and how serious a threat the apartheid regime considered it to be.

When the government proclaimed that Afrikaans should be used as teaching language in the secondary schools, it sparked off huge protests in Soweto among those young people who regarded it as the language of the oppressor. With the student uprising in Soweto in June 1976 a new era of protests and unrest began. What happened in Soweto was fuelling new spirit among not least young people. However, as the protests quickly spread all over South Africa they embraced not only young persons but all groups of peoples.⁴⁴⁵

The reaction from Government was fierce and the police hit back with unprecedented strength and brutality. The shooting in Soweto 16

⁴⁴⁴ (Boesak 1976, p. 9)

⁴⁴⁵ (Maylam 1986 (1970), p. 193-4)

June 1976, that killed about 600⁴⁴⁶ persons received shocked recognition world-wide.

The economy that had been blooming in the sixties and beginning of the seventies began to decline. To administer apartheid began to be too costly. There was a shortage of skilled labour force and the whites began to leave South Africa in great numbers. South African whites had become more of white-collar workers than *boers*, and family economy was for many becoming more important than Afrikaner nationalist ideals. Some also began to realise that the apartheid system was immoral and/or counterproductive. Still, there were those who stuck to old ideals and feared changes. In an attempt to respond to these divergent views, different cosmetic changes took place in the South African society during the eighties; petty apartheid was removed and a tri-chamber parliament, where coloured and Indians also had seats besides the whites, was instituted. The black population was however kept outside and the main organisations on the non-white side—including the more politically orientated leaders among the coloured population—boycotted this Parliament.⁴⁴⁷ Out of these groups rose the United Democratic Front (UDF)—one of the most important anti-apartheid organisations of the 1980s comprising some six hundred churches, civic organisation, unions and more.⁴⁴⁸

The earlier relatively weak international opposition began to wake up to an awareness of what was going on in South Africa and its size and importance increased. The UN Security Council, for instance, took a decision about a mandatory arms embargo.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁶ The numbers are slightly shaky and difficult to get confirmed. If one count all who died during the following unrest all over South Africa the death toll rises much higher.

⁴⁴⁷ (Thompson 1995, p. 221-8)

⁴⁴⁸ UDF became an important platform for persons like Albertina Sisulu, Frank Chikane, Trevor Manuel, Allan Boesak and Desmond Tutu.

⁴⁴⁹ (Thompson 1995, p. 214)

7.1.2 The WARC on the DRC and Apartheid before Ottawa

As a church that had so strong links to Europe, although in Africa, established by and for Europeans, the DRC had always been a church of a certain magnitude, held in esteem especially in the worldwide community of churches in the Reformed tradition. Also in other international ecumenical contexts, not least related to mission they had held a high profile.

As I have showed earlier, inter alia in section 3.3.3, the WARC began to deal with the South African situation, not surprisingly, first after WWII, and in reality only in the sixties. What was presented there I will not repeat here but only give some minor add-ons.

According to normal principles, 1977 would have been a year with a General Council of the WARC but financial problems made them inhibit that. Instead, the Alliance decided just to have a minor meeting to celebrate its centenary. Notwithstanding, they exchanged the Executive Council and at the Executive Council meeting in Scotland, in August 1977, both outgoing members who had been elected at the GC 1970 and newly elected members participated. It gave the General Secretary, Dr. Perret, a possibility to summarize the past seven years and to indicate actions for the coming ones. When it comes to geographical areas of some special interest he highlights two as especially problematic: Latin America and South Africa.

His main concern related to South Africa is that the defective cooperation between the South African member churches "in spite of all our efforts ... has not improved greatly". The cooperation is not seen as sufficient or even as non-existent. Furthermore, he states, that "our expectations of our regional group (founded in 1973) did not materialize".⁴⁵⁰ Once again, he realizes that "public statements [regarding the Soweto unrest] which were considered by us to be fraternal words of concern and warning ... were not received as such by all our member churches". An extensive communication with the churches concerned had shown that

⁴⁵⁰ (WARC 1977, p. 8)

“there is a significant tension over the question of uniting the so-called ‘mother’ and ‘daughter’ churches, a proposal just made by the ‘daughter’ churches; but the ‘mother’ church has not accepted the proposal”.⁴⁵¹

One important conclusion that can be drawn is that the black, coloured, and Indian churches in the ‘DRC family’ are beginning to play an increasingly important role among the churches in South Africa and especially within the reformed family both nationally and internationally. Dr. Perret is talking of them as holding a “key position”.⁴⁵² The WARC itself has over the time strengthened its own internal reflexion on the situation in South Africa. Besides, it has been more outspoken in publicly addressed messages to South African addresses, be it messages to the government, the churches, or other stakeholders. WARC was in other words being radicalized. During this EC meeting, the issue of a general boycott was also discussed. A proposal on asking the EC to “call upon the member Churches to urge their governments to join the general boycott of South Africa on levels of arms trade, economic and financial support” was carried.⁴⁵³

Around 1978 the question on church/state-relations became an issue reflected more deeply upon in the WARC.⁴⁵⁴ However, the discussion on church/state revolved mostly around the specific South African situation regarding the relation between the DRC and the apartheid state, less on church and society on a more general level.

Related to the South African situation they noted that

“theologically articulate black voices are fortunately now increasing in that unhappy situation [of apartheid] and they are urgently pointing to the radical dimensions of the church/state problem imbedded in the conflict. The issue is quite starkly described as an option between a genu-

⁴⁵¹ (WARC 1977, p. 9)

⁴⁵² (WARC 1977, p. 9)

⁴⁵³ (WARC 1977, p. 13)

⁴⁵⁴ This seems to be the first time the question of the special relation DRC has to the government is expressed as a church/state-issue. Later on this develops into a common phrase.

ine theology grounded in the Gospel of Jesus Christ or an ideology masquerading as Reformed Theology".⁴⁵⁵

The WARC added that the principal problem—to make a necessary distinction between theology and ideology that claims to be theology—is something that every church has to deal with. The WARC holds the view that the situation in South Africa is deteriorating. For that reason representatives of the WARC arranged a—since long awaited and the first ever—consultation with the member churches in South Africa. The theme was "The Church and Social Responsibility". Among issues dealt with was *labour and economy* especially regarding the problem with the migratory situation; the *mixed marriage* situation; *racial discrimination*; and not least all laws hampering *personal relationships, especially the Group Areas Act, The Pass law, The Race Classifications Act*.⁴⁵⁶

In his report to the Executive Council the theological secretary Dr. Smith saddened informs that "in the Dutch Reformed Churches the theology of apartheid not to speak of the practice is certainly in evidence". But as there, to his knowledge, are a growing number of ministers and faculty staff who are in doubt when it comes to how the church is handling the situation he sums up the dangerous situation by saying that "there are 'Bonhoeffers' in all the churches, who are radically questioning the theology implicit in the present church/state relationship not to speak of the hermeneutics underlying the traditional theological support for apartheid policies ". Therefore, Dr. Smith adds that "inevitably the question thrusts itself upon the minds: Is there time left?".⁴⁵⁷

When the Executive Council meets in 1980 the South African situation had become an issue that was dealt with thoroughly. The committee notes that still a number of churches have not officially responded to the findings of the 'Church and Social Responsibility-consultation'. Due to the "underlying gravity of theological disagreement between various member churches in the RSA and the inner life of some of these churches" the Executive Council "urges upon all parties"

⁴⁵⁵ (WARC 1978, n. p.) (Part of the report from Theology Secretary to the EC)

⁴⁵⁶ (RPS 1979, p. 1-5)

⁴⁵⁷ (WARC 1979, p. 144)

to do whatever they can to solve the problems.⁴⁵⁸ The reply from the DRC was that no answer could be given until after next Synod two years later.⁴⁵⁹ This is one of all situations where it is easy to share the view, often expressed by the black churches, that the DRC by referring to its church law and formal principles consciously acts in a delaying way, avoids dealing with important issues and thereby misses one opportunity after the other to take important steps towards reconciliation and unity with the other churches.

Besides this, the Executive Council took note of the growing tensions developing between the DRC and the daughter churches, fearing an open breach, and expressed its solidarity with the suffering peoples in South Africa and appealed “to the member churches in WARC to engage themselves in the struggle for justice and freedom for the oppressed”.⁴⁶⁰

Although apartheid is once again on the agenda at the EC meeting in 1981 not much new is said. Nonetheless, the stage is set for the coming General Council, and the mindset is in many ways prepared for taking new steps forward in dealing with the situation in South Africa.

7.1.3 Ottawa

At the Ottawa General Council in 1982 the message is utterly clear that Apartheid was a contradiction to confessional doctrines of the Reformed traditions. As such, apartheid constituted a *Status confessionis*—this somewhat vague and multifaceted term—for the Reformed churches. The main point is that apartheid thereby was declared a sin and the theological justification of it a theological heresy.

The General Council expressed a “profound disappointment” with the fact that the South African member churches in WARC, “despite earlier appeals” had not “found the courage to realize that apartheid ...

⁴⁵⁸ (WARC 1980, p. 25-6 (Appendix XIV))

⁴⁵⁹ (WARC 1980, p. 86 (Appendix IV))

⁴⁶⁰ (WARC 1980, p. 40 (Appendix XV B))

contradicts the very nature of the Church and obscures the Gospel from before the world”.⁴⁶¹

As shown above there are several processes that had been advocating new and stronger measures by the General Council in relation to the situation in South Africa and the DRC. Another very strong thrust in that direction, only some weeks ahead of the Council, came from Beyers Naudé who in a long letter to James McCord, president of the WARC, emphasized the “the great significance” this meeting had. He accuses the WARC for having “been too hesitant in challenging and denouncing unequivocally the longstanding injustices of the policy of apartheid and has thus allowed the white NGK to absolve itself or to evade its obligation towards the Gospel and towards the other churches of the Reformed faith”. He therefore expresses an intense hope that the WARC make use of this opportunity, this “moment of truth”, and in “obedience to Christ and his demands for justice and liberation voice its conviction in a way which will unmistakably make clear where it stands and avoids all false compromise” especially as “misplaced sympathy” also is “a disservice to the NGK”.⁴⁶² What is needed according to Naudé is that the WARC takes a decision on *Status confessionis* and calls “upon the member churches to confirm this resolution thereby aligning themselves ... with Reformed churches around the world”.⁴⁶³

That things were on the move can also be discerned when one looks at the representation from the DRMC at the Ottawa GC. Allan Boesak, as a prophetic Reformed voice in South Africa, was co-author of the ‘*Study Guide for Delegates*’ with a contribution on racism, and was initially invited as guest at the Council. His own church had two seats at the Council but refrained initially from filling more than one—with David Botha, the white moderator. They were referring to financial reasons, but in reality they considered Allan Boesak, who was vice moderator, too ‘political’. When Allan pushed the issue, referring to his costs being covered anyhow, the leadership, with great hesitation, ac-

⁴⁶¹ (WARC 1982, p. 178)

⁴⁶² (Naudé 1982a, p. 1-5)

⁴⁶³ (Naudé 1982a, p. 4)

cepted to appoint him a delegate.⁴⁶⁴ Thereby it became possible for him to play the major role de Gruchy assigns to him when it comes to the question of *Status confessionis* and the decision to suspend the DRC. To be a formally elected representative from his or her church was also the necessary prerequisite to be eligible for any office in the WARC, and consequently for the election of him as president of the WARC.⁴⁶⁵

That the WARC staff, or Executive, beforehand did not have any more explicit plans regarding the South African/DRC situation becomes obvious in a letter exchange in May— only a few months before the Council, and before the letter from Beyers Naudé—between the Presbyterian Church in the United States and Gen. Secr. Perret at the WARC office. The Americans want to know more about what is planned so as to be able to prepare their delegates accordingly. The response, dated less than three months before the General Council, is that

“I am sure that the General Council will have to deal with some proposals (for statements and maybe for specific actions) although at the moment I have received no information concerning specific proposals. The General Council, as the Supreme Court of the Alliance, is entirely free to decide as to how it is going to deal with the problems related to apartheid/racism”.⁴⁶⁶

It is obvious that the ‘external’ processes were instrumental in getting the dealings in Ottawa in motion. After the Ottawa meeting Gen. Secr. Perret is writing a letter to the DRC and the HNK to inform them formally about the decision. There he is saying that it, at the beginning of the meeting, “rapidly [became] obvious ... that the question of apartheid (separate development) would be raised in different sections and committees.” Therefore a special open hearing was quickly organised, whereupon an ad hoc group with the mandate to propose a statement on “*Racism and South Africa*” was constituted.⁴⁶⁷ Obviously, what

⁴⁶⁴ (D. Botha 2003, m. 4-20); David Botha was moderator of the DRMC between 1974 and 1982.

⁴⁶⁵ (De Gruchy and De Gruchy 2004, p.193) ; (D. Botha 2003)

⁴⁶⁶ (Perret 1982)

⁴⁶⁷ (RPS 1982, p. 7)

became one of the strongest and most far-reaching decisions by the WARC was not planned by the WARC itself but grew out of the developing dissatisfaction with the conditions in church and society among the black and coloured church members in South Africa—and their preparedness to do something about it.

When WARC takes up the question of declaring something as *Status confessionis* they are dealing with a phenomenon that has been important for the church throughout its history.

With reference to the teaching of Luther, Duchrow concludes that

“[a]s soon as the faith, praxis, or organizational structure of a church flagrantly contradict the marks of the true Church, or other principles are substituted for them and this church is consequently striving against the true Church, we are called to struggle against that church as a false church” .⁴⁶⁸

This happened during the 30s and 40s when an ‘Aryan’ paragraph was introduced into the church of Nazi Germany.⁴⁶⁹ Such a situation is a ‘*Casus confessionis*’ which calls for a ‘*Status confessionis*’.

Status confessionis means literally a situation of confessing. Every confession is inherently also denying something. It puts limitations to what the faith in Christ can incorporate. For instance, in the Lutheran Formula of Concord the expression deals with the question of what a Christian, or a Church, can avoid of traditions and faith expressions to avoid persecution in a situation of external pressure. The answer is that a church that—by deeds or by refraining of acting—is denying God’s

⁴⁶⁸ (Duchrow 1981, p.19)

⁴⁶⁹ The ‘Aryan’ paragraph forbade the appointment of Jews as civil servants. The “German Christians” Church Party—which wanted a unified, centralized German national church and which dominated the new national church government and almost all the provincial church bodies after July 1933—sought to have the Aryan paragraph introduced in church legislation. The consequence was the exclusion of Christian Jews as members and active in the ministry of many the German churches. This was fiercely objected by Martin Niemöller, Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and many more in the *Pfarrernotbund* (Pastors’ Emergency League) as being counter to the faith. Cf. (Karl Barth-Archives 1998) and (D. Smit 1984, p. 7 ff)

reconciliation through the crucified Christ ceases to be a Church.⁴⁷⁰ Smit gives a comprehensive definition:

“Strictly speaking, one could say that the expression *Status confessionis* means that a Christian, a group of Christians, a church, or a group of churches are of the opinion that a situation has developed, a moment of truth has dawned, in which nothing less than the gospel itself, their most fundamental confession concerning the Christian gospel itself, is at stake, so that they feel compelled to witness and act over against this threat.”⁴⁷¹

Without going into any longer interpretation I will only point to some consequences. A *Status confessionis* is not about any less important question on moral or dogma. It has to do with the heart of the gospel. Not to deal with a question of that magnitude is to deny the gospel itself—there is no neutral position. Those expressing the need for repentance and a new confession are not creating a schism; the schism is already inherent in the situation and those who are acting for change are urging a real unity.⁴⁷²

In 1977 at its Dar-es-Salaam Assembly also the Lutheran World Federation took up this issue due to the situation in the Lutheran community in South Africa. They declared the situation to be a *Status confessionis* which in that case meant that “on the basis of faith and in order to manifest the unity of the Church, churches would publicly and unequivocally reject the existing apartheid system”.⁴⁷³

Nonetheless, the decision at the LWF assembly seems not to have played an important role for the dealings in Ottawa. There are no explicit references in the minutes and Jane Dempsey Douglass can't recall that it was discussed or had any direct influence on the decision.⁴⁷⁴ One

⁴⁷⁰ (Blei 1994, p.19-21)

⁴⁷¹ (D. Smit 1984, p.16)

⁴⁷² For a thorough discussion on Status Confessionis with reference to the DRC see (Blei 1994) and (D. Smit 1984).

⁴⁷³ (Duchrow 1981, p. 75)

⁴⁷⁴ (Douglass 2007)

reason might be that besides the declaration of a *Status confessionis* the LWF didn't undertake any actions against their South African member churches to underscore the severity of the decision until next Assembly, in 1984, when they realised that not much had changed. However, there is a strong and clearly visible Bonhoeffer-influence in the DRMC. This is also discernable in the theological reflection in ABRECSA⁴⁷⁵ that in a statement in 1981 spoke about the necessity to reformulate the Reformed confession as the present situation with the DRC defending apartheid was a betrayal of Reformed faith, a sin and a heresy.⁴⁷⁶ It is also possible to trace another origin for the reflections at the Ottawa General Council—to the theological department at the former so-called coloured university, University of Western Cape in Belville at the outskirts of Cape Town. Botman gives an account of how he and the other theology students in 1978 during the teaching of Professor Durand had to reflect over how to understand apartheid and to deal with it in the life of the Church. Their reflections ended up in this formulation: “Apartheid, being a system of oppression and injustice, is sinful and antithetical to the gospel because it is based on the fundamental irreconcilability of human beings, thus rendering ineffective the reconciling and uniting power of our Lord Jesus Christ”.⁴⁷⁷ That work of Professor Durand and his students, and the views they expressed, were taken up by the Dutch Reformed Mission church, closely related to the theological department. Their continuous work on the issue resulted in a deeper understanding that what really was at stake was the centre of the Gospel—reconciliation. It was threatened by an adversarial pseudo-gospel.

This was the message they brought with them to Ottawa, and that Allan Boesak delivered. It came to its sharpest expression when eleven black/coloured members of the DRCA and the DRMC in a written message concluded that as long as they cannot share the Lord's Table with DRC members at home it cannot be done at the WARC General Council either. Even more, it is contrary to and a violation of a correct use of the Holy Communion. Representatives from the DRC daughter

⁴⁷⁵ See section 5.2.2

⁴⁷⁶ (D. Smit 1984, p. 14)

⁴⁷⁷ (Botman 2000, p. 110)

churches are among the signatories but the white DRMC minister did not follow his black comrades in this ‘action’.⁴⁷⁸

Therefore, this situation,

“for the Reformed churches ... should constitute a ‘status confessions. This means that Churches should recognize that apartheid is a heresy, contrary to the Gospel and inconsistent with the Reformed tradition, and consequently reject it as such’.”⁴⁷⁹

Based on this assertion a motion was raised that DRC and Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk ought to be suspended from participation in the life and deed of the WARC until a substantial change had taken place. This suspension should be valid until the Executive Council of WARC had “determined that these two Churches in their utterances and practice have given evidence of a change of heart”.⁴⁸⁰

To be able to determine when these changes had taken place three conditions were to be complied with. They were that a) Black Christians shouldn’t be excluded from Church services, [in the DRC and the NHK churches] b) Concrete support in word and deed was to be given to those who suffer under the system of apartheid, c) Unequivocal synod resolutions should be made which reject apartheid and commit the Church to dismantle it in both church and politics.

The motion was adopted with an overwhelming majority—220 delegates in favour, 20 against and 12 who abstained from voting.

In the debate preceding the decision to suspend the DRC one of the DRC delegates, Dr. Pierre Rossouw, then ecumenical officer of the church, called in question the constitutionality of that kind of measure by the WARC. Another SA delegate, Professor Heyns, argued that the situation in SA is a “choice ... between war or reform, bloodshed and peace” and meant that “reconciliation rather than polarization” was called for. It

⁴⁷⁸ See Fig. 2, p. 195 - facsimile of the memorandum by the black delegates (Black delegates at Ottawa GC 1982). The text in the memo—but not the names—can be found (with a minimal change in word order) in the minutes of the Ottawa GC. Cf. (WARC 1982, p. 55)

⁴⁷⁹ (Boesak 1983, p. 8); Cf. (Botman 1994, p. 42)

⁴⁸⁰ (WARC 1982, p. 179)

could be understood as not too subtle a hint that the WARC by this proposal was seen to promote war rather than peace. Rev. Potgieter, Moderator of the General Synod of the DRC, indicated—somewhat paternalistically—that the delegates of the General Council, as they did not live in such a multi-racial context as the South African, did not understand the difficulties that are inherent in the South African society, and meant that “Church media had distorted the position of the South African churches”.⁴⁸¹

As the suspension—as a method for a kind of church discipline in an organisation that was not, and should not be, a church but a community of churches—was called in question the measure as such was voted upon. The support for suspension as a possible and correct proceeding was extensive in the meeting, as was the support for the Statement that was proposed. Against this Dr. Rossouw questioned the preparedness by the churches that supported this to acknowledge their own heretical traits. “Was suspension the way of the future [for the WARC]?”⁴⁸²

Though protesting against the possibility to suspend a church on these grounds and against the Statement on Racism and South Africa as such, the four DRC delegates did not formulate any reservation that is attached to the protocol.

7.1.3.1 Reaction from the DRC

Almost directly after the Ottawa meeting the DRC held its General Synod in Pretoria—12th to 22th October. The WARC decision was felt like a “lightning”, and was experienced as an “Allan Boesak thing”. Not surprisingly the sentiments were high. The main question was whether the DRC should leave the WARC—“let’s leave – it’s a synagogue of Satan”—or not.⁴⁸³

⁴⁸¹ (WARC 1982, p. 32-33)

⁴⁸² (WARC 1982, p. 35)

⁴⁸³ (W. Botha 2003, m. 1-5); Willy Botha was ecumenical officer in the DRC between 1997 and 2004. Then the title changed to General Secretary, indicating that this the one in charge of the church office. This is a full time position, contrary to those within the moderamen (moderator, assessor, scriba)

The four delegates gave a report of the dealings; they were given thanks for having served their church well at the General Council—despite the present circumstances. The refusal by the eleven black delegates from South Africa to participate in the Lord’s Supper the first day of the General Council was described as something that had evoked great dismay. The document declaring the grounds for this step was presented in extenso. The DRC delegates presented a statement on their reaction and understanding of this. Among other things they pointed out that it was clear that the standpoints presented in the document were just personal positions by these eleven; that the conduct was regrettable, inappropriate and shocking; that their description of positions by the DRC was unjust.⁴⁸⁴

The decision of the WARC General Council is presented and debated. Thereafter two different proposals on how to continue are presented and put to a vote.

The first of these is called the *meerderheidsverslag* [majority proposal]. It takes, with regret, note of the the events at the General Council and the decision taken. It means that the picture of the DRC given in Ottawa was onesided; that the shocking judgements given were not possible to contradict given the circumstances; that the decision did not conform with the WARC constitution; that the idea behind the decision is rooted in liberation theology that is contrary to the Bible and Reformed Theology. The consequence for the DRC is therefore to declare that the DRC is not content with this suspension; that the DRC no longer can regard itself a full member of the WARC; that it will withhold its financial support; and that if this situation endures the following General Synod of the DRC has to take final decisions regarding the belonging to the WARC.⁴⁸⁵

My understanding of this last saying is that those proposing it held the expectation that the WARC executive might change the decision taken at Ottawa before the next General Council.

The other proposal—the *minderheidsverslag*—is initially quite similar to the other. However, it ends in a much more indignant tone. It proposes “[t]hat the DRC not only oppose the obscure decision and

⁴⁸⁴ (DRC 1982, p. 1007-26)

⁴⁸⁵ (DRC 1982, p. 1024-5)

the conditions set for continued membership, but even more the WARC's commitment to liberation theology and to the [views of the] World Council of Churches, as well as its own deformation of the obvious confessional foundation" and therefore concludes "that the DRC after long engagement, with regret has to withdraw from the WARC".⁴⁸⁶

When the voting took place the minority proposal received 234 votes and the majority proposal got 230. Nonetheless, as two-thirds majority was demanded at issues like this the minority proposal fell anyway.⁴⁸⁷ Then some minor amendments and adjustments were proposed and seconded to the winning proposal but besides an additional clause, where the DRC admits that it is not without faults, but, that it in deep humility to God always tried to apply itself to the justice and dignity of people, despite the difficulties due to the situation in South Africa, they did not alter the essential meaning of the initial proposal.⁴⁸⁸

7.1.3.2 *The continuation*

The DRC Africa News September to December issue presented the complete decision by the Synod.⁴⁸⁹ Despite what must be understood as a rather curious hope that the WARC should change its decision quickly the DRC seems not to devote itself to working for it. Half a year after the Synod they still have not even given an official reply to the WARC. When the WARC executive meet in Kappel am Albis, near Zürich, in March the following year the Gen. Secr. has to report that despite telephone conversation in December with the Ecumenical officer, Dr. Rossouw, who gave the information that the WARC would get a reply, still nothing has come, besides what everybody could read in the DRC Africa News.

When the Executive Committee three years later at their meeting in New Delhi in October 1985, for the first time since Ottawa, more substantially discuss South Africa matters still no formal reply has arrived. The discussion is now partly concerning the worsening situation in South Africa with the state of emergency, tens of thousands of de-

⁴⁸⁶ (DRC 1982, p. 1026) [My translation]

⁴⁸⁷ (DRC 1982, p. 1370)

⁴⁸⁸ (DRC 1982, p. 1373)

⁴⁸⁹ (DRC Africa News 1982, p. 2)

tainees—among them the president of the WARC, Allan Boesak—and the need for financial support for prisoners and their families, partly about the Kairos document.⁴⁹⁰

At the following Executive Committee meeting, in Buckow, Germany, in October 1986, the situation regarding reply is unchanged and the focus in the discussion is on a report that the intended visits to South Africa for support to churches and individuals had not been possible to accomplish due to the severe situation. A comprehensive documentation at the meeting is about the follow-up of the Ottawa decision by different member churches. The situation in South Africa as such is described in dark colours: “There are no signs for a real change in the ‘lager’”. And about the DRC (and the NHK) the view is likewise depressing: “[T]here is apparently no move in the two churches suspended from privileges in the WARC”.⁴⁹¹

After another year the committee meets in Geneva. It discusses, among other things, the sanctions issue.⁴⁹² In the meantime the DRC has held its Synod (October 1986) and in June 1987 the *Church and Society* policy document that was adopted at the Synod is sent to the WARC. It is said that “a lot of the people [that] are busy with the study [of the CS 86 in the church] wants to go back” to the WARC, but that about the same amount do not want to.⁴⁹³ In an accompanying letter the DRC makes clear that this is their answer to the decision in Ottawa, and that the Synod “decided to forward Kerk en Samelewing [Church and Society] and other relevant resolutions as our answer to the resolution of the WARC at its meeting in Ottawa”—almost 5 years earlier. The resolutions in the appendices dealt with “The Authority and use of Scripture” and the DRC’s critical view on the Kairos document—“not even an impressive rendering of Liberation Theology ... [rather] an alarming stimulus for continued and uncompromising polarisation and violence”.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹⁰ (WARC 1985, p. 21, 27, 176-8, 191-4); About the Kairos document see section 6.3

⁴⁹¹ (WARC 1986, p. 147)

⁴⁹² (WARC 1987, p. 20, 56, 62-74, 159-61)

⁴⁹³ (Swanepoel 2003, m. 7); Freek Swanepoel was moderator for the DRC 1994-1998

⁴⁹⁴ (WARC 1987, p. 68) About *Church and Society*, see section 8.1.1

In 1989 the WARC met again for a General Council; this time in Seoul. Those gathered adopted a statement regarding the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa.⁴⁹⁵ It noted the following: Strong support was given by member churches for the decision taken in Ottawa; The DRC as the only church in the ‘family’ had turned down the Vereeniging decision early 1989⁴⁹⁶; The “[w]hite DRC have not moved further forward than the position adopted at its Synod on the basis of its ‘Church and Society’ document”—a document that “at its best, may indicate that the church is ready to consider so-called reforms”. Consequently the WARC maintains its suspension of the DRC.

7.1.3.3 Reaction from the Broederkring

In a letter to Dr. James McCord, president at the Princeton Theological Seminary, who a month earlier had finalized his term as president of the WARC, Beyers Naudé presents an information and study document from the Broederkring⁴⁹⁷ about the implications of the Ottawa decision. Without doubt Beyers Naudé had had his requests for the General Council granted. He states in the letter that the implications of the decision are “wide-ranging”.⁴⁹⁸ My suspicion—that neither can be refuted, nor affirmed—is that neither the WARC executive nor the delegates at the General Council could anticipate all possible consequences of the decision. The document Beyers Naudé provided McCord with indicates that the WARC leadership needed help to comprehend its full meaning.

The attached document comprises 15 pages, starting with the text of the decision.⁴⁹⁹ Thereafter it is divided into 8 sections covering different aspects of what the Ottawa decision signifies for different addressees.

The first section demonstrates that the addressees are many more than the two churches especially named in the decision, the DRC (NGK)

⁴⁹⁵ (WARC 1989, p. 51, 279-81) All quotes are from these pages

⁴⁹⁶ On Vereeniging see section 8.2

⁴⁹⁷ For information on the Broederkring, see chapter 5.2.1

⁴⁹⁸ (Naudé 1982b)

⁴⁹⁹ (Broederkring 1982c)

and the NHK. First, they have to deal with the question of what this means for their relation to their own constituency and to other member churches of the WARC. It also has consequences for DRC's future relation to the three black DRC churches in South Africa. Furthermore it also exerts an influence on all other churches in South Africa regarding their future relation to the white DRC and the NHK. Fourthly all Reformed churches outside South Africa have to consider how to respond to the Ottawa decision, to accept or to reject, and to find ways to deal with the consequences of that decision. Lastly the decision has consequences for the political reflection within South Africa, not least regarding the new constitutional proposals by the Botha government—the tri-chamber parliament, among other things.⁵⁰⁰

For all Reformed churches the task now lies ahead to determine their response to the Ottawa decision. One can do as the NHK who directly terminated its membership with the WARC. The DRC is expected to follow “the pattern of the past years of its well-known strategy of delaying controversial decisions”. Whatever the response will be from that church or any of the other Reformed churches, one thing, according to the Broederkring, is clear—“there is no longer any neutrality possible for any of these member churches [of the WARC] on this crucial issue”.⁵⁰¹

The Broederkring can see that the DRC is caught between some hard choices: To endorse the Ottawa decision and by that lose members and its role as the proponent and guarantor of Afrikanerdom, or to lose all credibility and the remainder of relation to the black churches and to move into even greater isolation in South Africa and throughout the world.⁵⁰²

For the Black churches several precarious decisions have to be made. First of all they have to develop an understanding of what heresy is and in what way it affects their relation to the DRC. Thereafter they have to deal with how that should be implemented on different levels in their relation to the DRC. It has for instance to do with theological training of ministers—can they allow their coming ministers to be trained

⁵⁰⁰ (Broederkring 1982c, p. 4-5)

⁵⁰¹ (Broederkring 1982c, p. 6)

⁵⁰² (Broederkring 1982c, p. 6)

by a heretical church? An even trickier question is how to handle the rather huge financial dependency that especially the DRCA has towards the DRC for their minister's stipend. A third question that is raised in this document is how to respond to invitations for inter-church meetings with churches who have not endorsed the Ottawa decision, and whether a minister from such a church can be invited to preach in services in the black churches—unless he has publically affirmed the Ottawa resolution.⁵⁰³

On another level the outcome of Ottawa challenges the black churches to speed up their unification process and to remove discriminatory practices in their own lives. It also places a demand on them to be more outspoken and act more actively and resolutely towards the apartheid government.⁵⁰⁴

A conclusion drawn by the Broederkring for itself is to “develop more fully the concept of the theology of liberation as a theology of reform and renewal”.⁵⁰⁵

For Reformed churches abroad the view is that there can be “no further official relationship including dialogue about apartheid ... except if the NGK and the NHK have first renounced their present stand and accepted the Ottawa resolution”. This study document also expresses an expectation that overseas Reformed churches will be challenged to give larger concrete support to the black churches, not least due to the expected decreasing financial support from the DRC.⁵⁰⁶

7.2 WARC after 1982

This section will deal with the situation that emerges in the latter end of the eighties, after the Ottawa meeting. The decision there functions as the springboard for the further dealings between the DRC and the WARC and between the DRC and other churches in South Africa. The DRC has presented the 1986 Church and Society document as a means to give a

⁵⁰³ (Broederkring 1982c, p. 7-8a)

⁵⁰⁴ (Broederkring 1982c, p. 9)

⁵⁰⁵ (Broederkring 1982c, p. 12)

⁵⁰⁶ (Broederkring 1982c, p. 12-3)

tenable reply to the demands raised in 1982—to no avail if they thought this document would help them getting in from the cold.

The main demand by the so-called daughter churches, by the international fellowship of Reformed churches as well as among ‘dissident voices’ within the DRC, was to find a much more far-reaching response by the DRC; they wanted to see them formulating a totally new ecclesiology.

After the decision to suspend the DRC (and the NHK) from the fellowship of Reformed churches gathered in the WARC had been taken the time had come to handle the follow-up in different aspects. One important question was, for instance, what the decision meant to other member churches. That the support for the decision was overwhelming did not mean that all the other churches had a lily-white conscience when it came to issues such as racism and justice. The WARC theological secretary was rather hesitant and meant that

“many of our churches and individual church members who may be satisfied with the decision taken by the Alliance on the apartheid question may not yet have realised the quite tremendous ecclesiological implications of the action taken in Ottawa”.⁵⁰⁷

The reflections by the Broederkring on what the decision meant, in principle and in a specific setting, could—as proposed by Beyers Naudé—be a good starting point for a thorough reflection for the WARC and its member churches.⁵⁰⁸

As I demonstrated in section 7.1.3.1 the DRC was deeply divided on whether to withdraw from the WARC or not. Finally, they remained despite a majority vote against it; the necessary two-thirds majority was not reached. Besides the rather short reaction presented in the DRC News not much happened in the relation between the DRC and the WARC as the DRC decided not to present any argumentation against the suspension before the Church and Society document was ratified at the upcoming synod, in 1986. Therefore the worries of the above men-

⁵⁰⁷ (WARC 1983, p. 15 (in Appendix V))

⁵⁰⁸ See section 7.1.3.3

tioned secretary on what would happen with the possibility to uphold mutual “recognition of ministries and sacraments” if the DRC not in “a few years ... comply with the stated requests” had to be pushed into the future.⁵⁰⁹

That the Ottawa decision was disturbing the South African government is obvious. One way for the government to try to counter-act was to create daily life difficulties for the main representative of the international criticism—also the president of the WARC—Allan Boesak. For long periods he was jailed without any (tenable) charge. This idea and the expectation that this would silence him and hamper the international criticism was presumably a great miscalculation by President Botha. Not only the WARC office but churches world-wide addressed him time and again with the demand to free Allan Boesak and all other political detainees. The WARC also challenged the member churches to push their “governments ... to communicate to the government of South Africa their concern for the situation”.⁵¹⁰

By this time, the WARC itself did not produce much material that could be of help within the Reformed Church fellowship of churches in dealing with the theological reflection on the situation in South Africa. Instead important help came from black South Africans. In 1985 some hundred ministers, theologians and lay persons jointly published the Kairos Document (KD). The WARC Executive committee studied it and decided to distribute it to all member churches for study and, furthermore, for action.⁵¹¹ The member churches were specifically invited to reflect on the themes ‘reconciliation’ and ‘non-violence’. In the KD a perspective called Church Theology is explored and rejected. One feature associated with Church Theology is the eagerness to use the word reconciliation. KD does not reject reconciliation but stipulates what the conditions must be like before any reconciliation can take place in the South African context and turns down what could be called cheap rec-

⁵⁰⁹ (WARC 1983, p. 17-8 (in Appendix V))

⁵¹⁰ (WARC 1985, p. 27, 176)

⁵¹¹ (WARC 1985, p. 176) The KD is discussed in section 4.3

conciliation; it argues that the present injustice must be removed first. On the issue on violence it is said that the reflection must go much deeper than to just argue for non-violence as the only solution. By doing that one overlooks the violence carried forth by the authorities.⁵¹²

When the WARC executive met in 1986 in Buckow, the German Democratic Republic, they initially note that the intention to send observers to Allan Boesak's trial had turned out to be impossible as dates were changed all the time. Neither had it been possible to send a delegation to meet with the churches. The state of emergency raised huge problems.⁵¹³

One of the staff members, Peter Kromminga, presented an extensive report, "*Report on South Africa: The present crises and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches*".⁵¹⁴ Its general conclusion is that that the crisis rapidly was increasing and that it more than anything else "is a crisis of the Apartheid system and its government". Furthermore, it says that "[t]here are no signs for a real change in the 'lager'".⁵¹⁵

In South Africa "the 'normal' face of Apartheid has not changed". All significant apartheid legislation is still in place and puts heavy restraints on people: The Homeland policy, the Population Registration Act, The Group Areas Act, divisions in educational and health system etc.⁵¹⁶

The Kromminga report deals with the relation between the Ottawa decision and the Kairos document and points to the change in perspectives that have taken place. Racism is not perceived "as the cause of the present injustice, it is seen as the result of social injustice". The report continues with the view that "[l]iberation and justice and as a result peace are the theological terms to face the present situation".⁵¹⁷ For this reason the report suggests a study on "theological argumenta-

⁵¹² (WARC 1985, p. 176-8)

⁵¹³ (WARC 1986, p. 44-5)

⁵¹⁴ (This report is called Document 9. It seems not to be listed in the Table of Content. I will mark references as follows: Doc 9:xx, where x stands for page)

⁵¹⁵ (WARC 1986, Doc 9:2)

⁵¹⁶ (WARC 1986, Doc 9:3)

⁵¹⁷ (WARC 1986, Doc 9:5)

tion and sociological analysis in South Africa, to reinitiate theological thinking and give a basis for appropriate actions”.⁵¹⁸

Another important issue with its base in Ottawa is the follow up of the suspension. At the time of the meeting with the WARC Executive the DRC Synod has not yet taken place and no official reaction to the Ottawa decision has emerged. The tone in the document is somewhat disillusioned as it reports that the General Secretary has made huge efforts to communicate with the DRC, and still “there is no hope of change in this church”.⁵¹⁹

Each Executive meeting contains a glance back on what has happened since the previous meeting. At the meeting in 1987 it is reported that Allan Boesak, without explanation and court proceedings, has been released from jail. The study on “theological argumentation and sociological analysis”, decided on the previous year, had not started yet, but was now said to be carried out by a group of WARC member Churches in South Africa.⁵²⁰

Finally, the first substantial response to the Ottawa decision has arrived—the *Church and Society 1986 document*. In a brief letter to the Rev. Dr. Pierre Rossouw, moderator of the General Synod of DRC, the WARC Gen. Secr. gives a short answer on how the Church and Society (1986) document has been received by member churches. Some points made by them seem to be in accord with each other and among them are:

- “1. Your document seems to be more concerned about the implementation of policy of apartheid than with the policy itself
2. Your document stops short of declaring the policy of apartheid sinful and its theological defence heretical.
3. The document seems to differentiate between ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ apartheid.

⁵¹⁸ (WARC 1986, Doc 9:7)

⁵¹⁹ (WARC 1986, Doc 9:5)

⁵²⁰ (WARC 1987, p. 55-6)

4. The document does not provide support for the victims of apartheid or advocate the dismantling of its implementing mechanisms.

5. Your church has not yet proposed the working out of Christian unity within one Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa.”⁵²¹

Despite these critical points, the letter also contains positive recognition on the “significant differences between your earlier document, ‘*Human Relations in the Light of the Scripture*’⁵²², and the present one”. The Gen. Sec. continues by noting that the coming steps by the DRC—in giving “the nation guidance, to admonish and to summon to repentance, and to combat national sin”, as they state in CS 86 §117—will be carefully taken note of. Especially as the DRC has been silent “the past two years ...when no less than 30000 people have been jailed for political reasons, at least 40 percent of them children, and many hundred have been killed”.⁵²³

The critical stance by the WARC executive continued at its subsequent meeting in 1988 and meant that they were “unconvinced that the white Dutch Reformed Church ... has repented on its participation in fostering racial separation...Rather [that it] continues to play a vital role in giving credibility and ideological legitimacy to the South African regime”.⁵²⁴ Therefore the Executive council reaffirms its recommendation “in spite of the NGK’s ‘Church and Society’ statement, that the membership of that church remains suspended”.⁵²⁵

In its communication to the DRC it is also stated that WARC notes that the DRC has not as yet rejected “apartheid as a legitimate political system”, neither have they participated in programs toward real unification of the Dutch Reformed family in South Africa. Furthermore, the executive is of the opinion that the DRC “is blinded by ideology of apartheid to such an extent that she is not even aware of her bondage.

⁵²¹ (WARC 1987, p. 159)

⁵²² Its full name is *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the light of Scripture*. I sometimes refer to it as the 1974 document.

⁵²³ (WARC 1987, p. 160)

⁵²⁴ (WARC 1988, p. 132)

⁵²⁵ (WARC 1988, p. 133)

The world will have reason to hold the NGK ... co-responsible with the regime for the disaster now occurring".⁵²⁶

A letter to all member churches is also issued at the meeting. It deals with the situation which is called "grave at best" with e.g. a new round of banning of organisations and the detention of tens of thousands of citizens. The Executive also mentions that there are those who are afraid that WARC "will be misled into thinking that the recent 'Church and Society' document of the Dutch Reformed Church indicates a significant revision of earlier position". This letter dismisses such a view and continues by saying that "[t]he best that can be said about the document is that the church seems ready to consider so-called reforms of the apartheid-system, which, however, do not alter the present situation".⁵²⁷

At the 22nd General Council of the WARC, in Seoul, in August 1989, the situation in South Africa was discussed mainly in one of the Policy Reference Committees. One of the speakers—Dr. Van der Merwe, from Zambia—argues that "[t]he DRC is clearly no longer the National Party at Prayer and confesses its guilt for apartheid", but that it, nonetheless, "still [is] not free of the white Afrikaner interest and it still sees the government as legitimate".⁵²⁸

Another speaker in the plenary was Rev Russel Botman, DRMC, who argued that as the "black churches have confessed their guilt", and are asking for the end of the state of emergency and "for negotiations with the real leaders of the majority people" the relationship to the DRC "is strained since 'Church and Society' is the only answer of the DRC".⁵²⁹

From the floor voices rose, saying that the overall situation in South Africa needed to be addressed by the churches and that it was "important to make clear that the government of South Africa was illegitimate and so legitimise black resistance".⁵³⁰

⁵²⁶ (WARC 1988, p. 133)

⁵²⁷ (WARC 1988, p. 44)

⁵²⁸ (WARC 1989, p.15-6)

⁵²⁹ (WARC 1989, p.16)

⁵³⁰ (WARC 1989, p.17)

The report of the Policy Reference Committee, accepted by the GC, states among other things that “By its own admission⁵³¹ the white DRC have not moved further forward than the position adopted at its Synod on the basis of its ‘Church and Society’ document”.⁵³²

Accordingly the GC announces, that “the WARC consequently maintains the suspension of the DRC, pending its respect at its Synod in 1990 and mandates the Executive Committee to act accordingly”.⁵³³

Thus far, the DRC had not got much appreciation for its attempts to overcome the suspension of Ottawa. Concurrently some internal pressure arose from conservative groups who threatened to leave the Church. One of these groups formulated a document called *Faith and Protest* that expressed among other things that they “believe[d] it to be Biblical that people join those of their own ethnic group (volksgenote), and thus exclude others” and that peoples (volkere) in Southern Africa are each entitled to their own soil and their own boundaries”. It also contravenes several proposals of the CS 86.⁵³⁴ This group finally left to join the Afrikaanse Protestantse Kerk (APK) that was established in 1987 by some thirty thousand former DRC members.⁵³⁵ An alleged tendency towards a more liberal theology is but one argument for those leaving or threatening to leave, but the *Church and Society* document seems to be the main reason—“the main thing is apartheid-if we open up it is the end”.⁵³⁶

In this difficult passage between the Scylla, materialised in the Ottawa requirements, and the Charybdis, embodied by the APK, the DRC is now on the verge of finalizing an update of the 1986 document. What-

⁵³¹ Behind that statement is an analysis of the standpoints taken by the DRC leadership in relation to the so-called Vereeniging Declaration that was taken in March 1989 by the churches in the DRC family. In short: The DRC leadership refused to sign it. Cf. (WARC, GC 1989, p. 279). A thorough description about the Vereeniging meeting is to be found in section 8.2

⁵³² (WARC 1989, p. 279-80)

⁵³³ (WARC 1989, p. 279-81)

⁵³⁴ (NG Kerk - Amtlige webblad van die NG Kerk 2009)

⁵³⁵ (Strauss 2002, 391-2); Those who left for the APK were less than 2 % of the membership

⁵³⁶ (W. Botha 2003, m. 33)

ever they do those who already left for the APK are lost; the question is how many more will leave. On the other hand the WARC is, according to what they gave expression for at the Seoul GC, eagerly awaiting something new and more promising for the future.

When the Executive committee of the WARC met in August 1991 the Gen. Secr. Milan Opočenský informed the Executive that representatives of the DRC have requested a meeting to present this new version—in a preliminary version—of the document, now called *Church and Society 1990* (CS 90). Still, at the time of this Executive meeting, almost a year after the DRC Synod, no printed version had arrived. Instead the Executive had to rely on two other accounts.

The first came from the SAARC which according to Opočenský, had been working on the document earlier in the year. They argue that “The DRC’s clear rejection of the negative effects of apartheid does not constitute an unequivocal rejection on the very essence of apartheid”. Therefore, Opočenský suggests that “the WARC attitude remain unchanged with regard to the DRC”. Besides that he is of the opinion that a small group who can work closely to the Uniting Reformed Church and other South African churches could be of help for the executive in evaluating future steps in this matter.⁵³⁷

The second aide for the decision is a two-person group the Department of Cooperation and Witness at the WARC has had on location in South Africa. Their reflections are presented for the Executive in a brief report. It takes up the overall political situation; the situation related to Human development; the world-wide sanctions; and finally the Church scene. They maintain the view that the leadership in the DRC “believes that statements in this document [CS 90: my insertion] concerning apartheid meet the requirements of the status confessionis ... [and] believe that they should be welcomed back in the full membership in the WARC”.⁵³⁸ Meetings they had with SAARC have clarified that there is “significant disagreement within the Reformed family in South Africa concerning DRC actions and the status of apartheid in South Africa after the repeal of the apartheid acts”. However, the conclusion of

⁵³⁷ (WARC 1991, p. 42)

⁵³⁸ (WARC 1991, p. 91, 291-3)

their findings is that “it would be counterproductive for the WARC to change its relationship with the DRC at this time”.⁵³⁹

On the way to some kind of finalisation of this conflict the WARC arranged a consultation in March 2003 in Johannesburg. Invited were all churches belonging to the ‘family’ and the aim was to review church relations and to obtain first-hand information on the unification process between DRMC and DRCA. The consultation discussed *Status confessionis*, scrutinized the follow-up of the three requirements from Ottawa in the DRC. Several papers were read—by Karel Blei, Russel Botman, Pieter Holtrop, Jaap Durand and Beyers Naudé—and the delegation from the DRC provided both a pre-written contribution and a response to the papers presented.⁵⁴⁰

Many obstacles and doubts are clearly expressed and I will not go into many details but pinpoint a few.

Jaap Durand is dealing specifically with the unity issue and is highlighting the impossibility in the DRC proposal for a unification—that at the same time includes the possibility for those church councils, circuits and synods, who do not want to join to remain what they were: “if they so choose, continue to function as before, retaining their present names, church orders, ordinances and rules”.⁵⁴¹

Beyers Naudé addresses the second requirement of the Ottawa decision—Support in word and deed. He starts by taking up the basic problem with lack of trust in the dealings of the DRC and mentions the huge clerical belonging to the Afrikaner Broederbond as specifically problematic. Then, as the main problem, he lifts up the fact that the DRC has to “acknowledge that its theological justification and practical support of *apartheid* has largely contributed to the situation of unequal, unjust distribution of economic resources”. Only then can real support and deed be carried forth.⁵⁴²

⁵³⁹ (WARC 1991, p. 293)

⁵⁴⁰ (Reamonn 1994)

⁵⁴¹ (Durand 1994, p. 64)

⁵⁴² (Naudé 1994, p. 69)

In the open letter Jane Dempsey Douglass and Milan Opočenský sent to WARC member churches in South Africa they acknowledged that many “urgent tasks [lay] ahead”; The need for people to be “liberated from the colonial heritage and the *apartheid* mentality”, to introduce “a just economic system”, to provide for “just participation for women in church and society” and more. In this the unity question should have a high priority.

Still it was an open question whether the DRC fulfilled the obligations given in Ottawa.

7.3 Debrecen and the DRC response

One part of the story of conflict between the WARC and the DRC came to an end at the WARC General Council in Debrecen in 1997.

In the proceedings from the meeting the South Africa question can be found in a short passage in the minutes plus on few pages in what is Appendix 23.⁵⁴³ The appendix contains two documents and a short text proposing the GC to readmit the DRC into the fellowship, “restoring the right to full participation”—given that the 1998 DRC Synod adopts a joint declaration which is enclosed. Together with this joint declaration goes a pastoral letter to the leadership and the members of the DRC.⁵⁴⁴

The Joint resolution expresses a “desire to lift the suspension imposed by the 21st General Council in Ottawa and to see the Dutch Reformed Church welcomed back into active membership with full privileges”.

As a starting-point and as a background for this the WARC “reaffirms its repudiation of any theological justification of ‘apartheid’ as a matter of ‘status confessionis’” and the theological justification thereof as “a theological heresy”. The second point in this resolution is that the DRC at its Synod in 1998 “assures the churches of the Alliance that it rejects ‘apartheid’ as wrong and sinful not simply in its effects and operations but also in its fundamental nature”. A third point declares that

⁵⁴³ (WARC 1997)

⁵⁴⁴ (WARC 1997, p. 25-6, 246-48)

the WARC will continue to work pastorally with the DRC and other churches in Southern Africa “in the process of unity and reconciliation”. The fourth and last point declares that on the assumption that both the WARC GC meeting in Debrecen and the DRC Synod next year approves of this the suspension will be lifted.⁵⁴⁵

In the pastoral letter some explanation is given as to why it has taken such a time to reach this point. Of the three requirements laid down in Ottawa the DRC is said to having lived up to two; to open up for membership for anyone irrespectively of lineage, ethnicity and colour in all DRC churches, and secondly, the supporting of victims of apartheid—in words and deeds.

Fulfilment of the third and, at least historically, most demanding requirement, an unequivocal rejection of apartheid, is still missing. “Even recent statements, including ‘Journey with Apartheid’ of May 1997, suggest that the errors and sinful actions of ‘apartheid’ reside more in the implementation ... than in its fundamental nature”. Therefore, only the adoption of this statement will meet the last requirement.⁵⁴⁶

The decision to propose this resolution was taken by the Executive Committee only the day before the start of the GC. The proposal was “put to the meeting and approved” on the conditions mentioned above.⁵⁴⁷ The process had been long and intricate. Obviously the question whether to re-admit the DRC or not was raised over and over again in 1996 and 1997. The question about the Belhar Confession is one of the major issues—maybe one could say, *the* important issue—in these deliberations. Was it plausible that the DRC would accept the confession of Belhar? Or was the connection between the *Status confessionis* and the Belhar Confession too tough for the DRC to accept? Was it possible for the URCSA to abandon its view that adopting the Belhar Confession was an absolute prerequisite—a non-negotiable issue—for a united church?

⁵⁴⁵ (WARC 1997, p. 246-7)

⁵⁴⁶ (WARC 1997, p. 247-8)

⁵⁴⁷ (WARC 1997, p. 25-6)

This discussion is not visible in the GC minutes and only to an extremely limited extent in the EC minutes.⁵⁴⁸ On the other hand several memos, letters, reports and other types of documents can be found among the heaps of documents in the archives of the WARC in Geneva that deal with the issue.

So is the President of the WARC, Jane Dempsey Douglas, in a lengthy letter to General Secretary Milan Opočenský, 3rd of July 1996 expressing hesitation to the ‘Belhar’ question, but ends by saying that “With all my scepticism, I find that more and more I lean to the position that we should receive the DRC back in August” [the following year: my insertion].⁵⁴⁹

A special monitoring group⁵⁵⁰ reported to the WARC Executive Council, 10th of August 1996 that

“[w]e are of the opinion that the DRC wants to be allowed back ... but through a process that is abstracted from the fundamental reason of their suspension [the status confessionis]... hence their opposition to the idea that ‘Belhar’ be given confessional status”.⁵⁵¹

Russel Botman wrote in a letter to the Gen. Secr. Milan Opočenský, 15th of August, 1996, on the re-admission matter that

“[a] proper silence and a compassionate commitment to the continuing process of unification may be the most correct response at this time. The coming synods [of DRC] (1998) will clarify the issues and will make it possible for WARC to welcome the DRC back in such a way that it is experienced as liberating, a celebration rather than as an action that set the unity process back many years ... Saying ‘yes’ prematurely would put the DRC in a position to say ‘no’ to the true unity and will lead to an escalation in the

⁵⁴⁸ (WARC 1996, p. 4, 25, 42, 208) No debate or decisions of any substantial kind.

⁵⁴⁹ (Douglass 1996)

⁵⁵⁰ A result of the previous consultation between the WARC and the member churches in South Africa, in 1993—the first meeting to be held between the WARC and the DRC since 1982.

⁵⁵¹ SAARC 1996

oppositional relationship between the DRC and the URCSA”.⁵⁵²

Another hesitant voice came from the first director of the WCC *Program to Combat Racism* (PCR), Baldwin Sjollema that had been invited by Milan Opočenský to comment on the re-admission recommendation. According to him certain conditions, including DRC fully accepting the Belhar Confession ought to be lived up to. As he did not see that they complied with this his view was that

“it would not only be unwise but dangerous to make the recommendation for re-admission [at the WARC General Council]. Furthermore, as the DRC had refrained from making any admission to the TRC it “could be interpreted as obstructing the efforts by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission”.⁵⁵³

The question of incorporating the Belhar Confession in the continuous deliberations on whether to re-admit the DRC or not was problematic and at the same time it was for many seen as an ‘acid test’. In May 1997 the meaning of this confession as the decisive factor to whether the DRC wanted unity or not was dealt with in a mail from Karin Sporre, Swedish member of the executive committee to Milan Opočenský:

“Here comes the re-drafted sentence: ‘However in this particular situation, full acceptance of the Belhar Confession would testify to the unequivocal theological rejection of apartheid, as participation in the unification process also is a testimony to the rejection of apartheid’. ...Milan, I think this sentence says (in its context), that we (WARC) do not demand the completion of the conditions we formulated in Ottawa. We can accept the church back, earlier, given that the direction is clear as to which the goals are.”⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵² (Botman 1996)

⁵⁵³ (Sjollema 1997)

⁵⁵⁴ (Sporre 1997)

If the Belhar issue constituted a severe problem for the WARC, its analysis of the standpoints of the DRC—if a change of heart⁵⁵⁵ had really taken place—was another. I will in the following just mention a few examples of that.

Jane Dempsey Douglass was but one who expressed scepticism. When the former DRC minister, now URCSA member Nico J. Smith realised that the DRC—just like the National Party—decided not to submit any testimony to the TRC and, in addition, accused it of being one-sided, he, in cooperation with Beyers Naudé, issued an open letter aimed at being a submission to the TRC—a kind of substitute for what the DRC ought to have done. Ministers from all possible denominations were invited to become signatories' and to confess their shortcomings and sins of neglectance during the apartheid years⁵⁵⁶ According to him, the DRC exhorted its ministers not to sign this letter. Therefore he “cannot but doubt the seriousness of the DRC in confessing its guilt of what happened in our country under the apartheid-regime”.⁵⁵⁷ He also wondered whether the DRC had retracted from and apologized for the rather insolent expressions given at the Ottawa meeting and afterwards in the Synodal writings.⁵⁵⁸

A delegation comprising members from both the WARC and the SAARC leadership concludes that some in the leadership (moderamen) of the DRC “seem to have changed little” since the previous visit in 1993.⁵⁵⁹

Milan Opočenský seems to be a bit shilly-shallying himself while on the one hand making a note in his report about “disquieting signs”, and on the other hand, nonetheless, seems to be willing to trust a saying from the DRC that “the Belhar Confession is not a hindrance to the unification process but ... may be accepted as an optional creed”—forgetting that seeing the Belhar Confession as an *option* was the last thing the URCSA could think of.⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵⁵ See p. 168

⁵⁵⁶ (Naudé and Smith 1997)

⁵⁵⁷ (N. Smith 1997)

⁵⁵⁸ Cf. for instance the ‘miderheidsverslag’ on page 186

⁵⁵⁹ (WARC 1997 b)

⁵⁶⁰ (WARC 1996, p. 42)

In addition to the above, the accompanying pastoral letter to the DRC also points to the importance of the Belhar Confession for the continuing unification work by the DRC. Notwithstanding that, hoping that the processes among the family of DRC now would gain momentum the WARC refrained from moving the goalposts—something Gen. Secr. Milan Opočenský pointed out specifically in his welcome back-speech to the DRC synod 13 October, 1998 in Pretoria.⁵⁶¹

The WARC had taken its stand, but still, the response from the DRC must come before any formal change could take place.

At the Synod in Pretoria in 1998 the DRC received and discussed the joint resolution, but not without some rather problematic proposals by the General Synodical commission. First of all, that the text about “repudiation of any theological justification of apartheid as a matter of a status confessionis” should not be taken by the Synod, and secondly that the word ‘apartheid’ should be qualified as “*forced* separation ...”. These and a few more proposals were turned down and the declaration from Debrecen was taken.⁵⁶² Present at the time for the discussion of this matter was the moderator of the URCSA, James Buys, and he expressed in interview critical views regarding the WARC handling of the re-admittance issue. Some churches were too eager to get the DRC back even if it did not “met the objectives of church union, church unity”, he says, and the decision in Debrecen was “too hasty”. He further maintains that the complete text of the Joint resolution was not presented in a thorough way t the synod, but “key portions of paragraphs from the original Debrecen decision [were excluded]”.⁵⁶³ Yet, the minutes from the DRC synod and the WARC General Council regarding this are in accordance with each other.⁵⁶⁴ It is not within my scope to validate this information but is corresponds to views that have been conveyed to me also by others.

⁵⁶¹ (Opočenský 1998, p. 1); With the phrase “moving goalposts” is meant nothing but refraining from pushing the Belhar question onto the DRC.

⁵⁶² (DRC 1998, p. 42, 412-4, 509)

⁵⁶³ Buys is minister of the URCSA. He was moderator of the DRMC 1990-1994 and the URCSA 1997-2001; (Buys 2007, m. 6-9)

⁵⁶⁴ (DRC 1998, p. 41-2), (WARC 1997, p.246-8)

In that sense the other part of the story of the conflict between the DRC and the WARC was over. In the discussion in the plenary Rev Swanepoel, moderator of the DRC, expressed his thanks for the resolution and the letter as a door-opener back for the DRC and was convinced that the decision in the Synod will be in the positive. He also “acknowledged and appreciated the role of WARC in the DRC’s change of heart regarding the sinful justification of ‘apartheid’ biblically”.⁵⁶⁵

In the press communiqué after the DRC decision to adopt the joint declaration the WARC general secretary Milan Opočenský noted that “With the approval of the Joint Resolution by both our General Council and the NGK General Synod, the suspension of the church is now at an end”. The fellowship has accepted that the DRC now had abandoned apartheid. But he added that “[t]here is still a great deal to do, to reintegrate the racially-divided Dutch Reformed family of churches and to build a South Africa which allows for the free flourishing of its entire people”.⁵⁶⁶

On 19 October, 1998, a press release told the world that “[a]partheid is sin, says the General Synod—Suspension of Dutch Reformed Church is lifted”.⁵⁶⁷ Nonetheless, at the end of 2009, eleven years later, ‘the family’ still remains unchanged. The URCSA, the DRC, the RCA and those congregations from DRCA who never joined the URCSA are still separate and the Belhar Confession-issue is still unsolved.

7.4 Closing reflections

That the WARC, as a community of Reformed churches, already early in its history has held the opposition against racism high is unmistakable. Declarations in the 1960s and 1970s, and even long before that, are clearly articulating this. This goes also for the specific situation in South Africa. Nonetheless, it is not until late that this attitude began to be

⁵⁶⁵ (WARC 1997, p. 26)

⁵⁶⁶ (WARC 1998, p. 2)

⁵⁶⁷ (WARC 1998)

transformed into real action. The Ottawa General Council is this very moment, its Rubicon as shown in this chapter.

A suspicion one might have is that the WARC, albeit being well-inclined towards lifting these issues, and verbally criticizing erroneous conduct by member churches, has been hampered by the composition of its leadership—European, middle-aged (or older) church leaders or theologians. In 1964 the non-western churches made up less than a third of the member churches, and much less of the representation at the General Council. All five in the staff were Europeans or Americans. At the next GC, in 1970, the picture has changed a little but not substantially—merely five of thirty in the Executive Councils are not from the US, Canada, Australia or Europe.⁵⁶⁸ The colonial mission epoch is still casting a shadow upon the ecumenical movement. When Jane Dempsey Douglass, from the Presbyterian Church USA, participated in her first GC which happened to be the Ottawa GC she felt that the WARC was very Eurocentric and dominated by older male clergy.⁵⁶⁹ When this is related to the South African situation one feels apt to wonder whether the conformity with the DRC leadership in reality held the WARC back; if not a colonial mind-set still was present.

The Ottawa GC became the first occasion where the old world was challenged to take bolder steps. As I have shown in this chapter there are several indirect and direct proposals for that. We find a more theologically and politically conscious and proud black population, and stronger and black churches that are better disposed to act for change. There are persons like Beyers Naudé who despite white skin is well on the ‘black track’. I have not been able to find any material that indicates that what happened in Ottawa would have happened without the active involvement by the black representatives. Especially the DRMC and persons with that background played an instrumental role—in Ottawa and afterwards. Those who with a term that is central to Said are called *the other* had now come to the fore.

⁵⁶⁸ (WARC 1964), (WARC 1970)

⁵⁶⁹ (Douglass, Interview in Los Angeles 2007) ; In her Presidential report at the WARC Executive meeting in 1996 she commented with delight that the previous GC, in Seoul in 1989, provided “worship services [that] were no longer identically western European” and noted furthermore that “our staff and our elected leaders were no longer overwhelmingly white and male as before”. (Douglass 1996, p. 33)

To hear the GC pronounce a *Status confessionis*—a judgment over its church's life and theology—must have been a severe blow to the DRC delegation. To say that the pronouncement of *Status confessionis* was very rare and special is an understatement; it was extremely far-reaching; besides it was DRC's own (former) mission churches that now declared the 'mother' to be heretic.

No surprise that the DRC delegates tried to dismiss the proposal first as in conflict with the by-laws of the WARC and then maintained that the persons present in the GC did not understand the difficulties that were inherent in the South African society, and, furthermore, meant that media had distorted the position of the South African churches.

Claiming that it was the time of a *Status confessionis* was to say that there was no space for negotiations. It was a time of all or nothing. A new confession was demanded, and as we see this is one of the main stumble-blocks. When the former mission churches draw the consequences of what is said in Ottawa and finalise the work of the Belhar Confession the DRC seems totally incapable of handling the situation and has still not found it possible to adopt it.

Time and again there have been documents reiterating the three conditions from Ottawa. The WARC acted well in line with what one formally would ask of them. What makes it somewhat difficult to deal with is that South Africa was not the same in 1982 and 1997/8. For that reason the much debated third requirement did not mean the same either. It could be compared with the repayment by instalments on my house loan. It is becoming cheaper over time due to inflation although the nominal amount is the same every month.

No goalpost was moved—but the question remains: Had the old goalposts lost their value? Maybe the real match by then was played on another arena.

And related to that and maybe more important: Had the DRC really given up apartheid—not only as such—but as something fundamentally wrong. Also by those to whom it had been perceived as part and parcel of Afrikaner identity and not (only) as a political ideology.

The other question, whether this was the result of an impossible and insoluble conflict between correctness/church politics on the side of the WARC and a strong calling from the dispossessed—articulated by the black churches—, is likewise difficult to answer.

There is no reason to doubt that the WARC did what they thought would promote the unification—or as it rather ought to be described: re-unification—process best. But it is easy to get the feeling that the WARC had lost something of its theological and socio-political radicalism between Ottawa and Debrecen. The question why it took so long—up to 1982—before they more clearly took note of the black voices is also a very problematic one.

That we still, in 2009 do not see that the re-unification process is functioning in the way Milan Opočenský hoped for is another thing. This re-unification, as an “acid test whether the DRC has finally distanced itself from the racism och *apartheid*”—that also the DRC delegation saw it to be in the 2003 consultation with the WARC and the other churches in the family—is still to be fulfilled.⁵⁷⁰

That, I will comment in chapter 10.

⁵⁷⁰ (DRC 1994b, p. 77); The delegation—consisting of Frits Gaum, Johan Heyns, Piet Meiring and Pieter Potgieter—presented the response containing this saying at the DRC synod the following year where it was endorsed.

A Journey with a Status Confessionis

DEAR SISTERS AND BROTHERS!

There are some South Africans who have participated with pain up to this point in the Service, and who now feel constrained not to take part in the Lord's Supper, which is the essence of christian fellowship. (Matt. 5.23-24). The reasons for this refusal are threefold.

1. In our country, Black people are not permitted by custom and by church decision which are defended theologically, to partake of the Lord's Supper in the N.G.K. and the N.H.K.
2. The theological heresy which undergirds apartheid racism finds its origin in separate communion. Our refusal to participate is a choice for righteousness and a refusal to re-affirm the christian roots of our oppression. These churches, which are members of the WARC have consistently refused to have genuine reconciliation with us Black christians, through a confrontation with the evil of apartheid and by participating in the search for justice and peace and true humanity. To share communion with those who represent this disobedience to the Gospel would mean eating and drinking judgement upon ourselves. "For if he does not recognise the meaning of the Lord's body when he eats the bread and drinks from the cup, he brings judgement upon himself as he eats and drinks." (1Cor. II.29)
3. Our refusal to participate, anticipates the day of our freedom when we shall all - Black and White - drink from one cup and eat from one loaf.

DR: MA Soma

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Fig. 2 The letter from the black and colored South African delegates at the Ottawa General Council

8 Dutch Reformed Church – promoting change without changing?

As mentioned earlier, this is one of the main chapters as it deals with one of the two main actors. The Ottawa decision challenged the DRC in a new way—not only because the decision declared the church being heretical but that also because its former daughter churches were the ones that proposed it. A new response was needed.

In the following I will depict some documents, deliberations and other reactions/responses that can be comprehended as the way of the DRC to answer its critics. Some—the *Church and Society* documents and the *Journey with apartheid* document—are provided for directly by the DRC while others are results of dealings that the DRC was a part of in one way or other. The order in which I present the material in this chapter is mainly chronological and gives thereby a possibility to assess a possible development over time.

The different *sitz im leben* for the different material does however not mean that they have different value as sources. They all deal in reality with the same question—to provide a tenable answer on whether the DRC has abandoned apartheid at heart or not, and secondly: whether it has fulfilled the requirements of Ottawa.

In a way the different sections hereafter is an expression of an ongoing discussion with different voices about the same theme.

8.1 The Church and Society document – A semantic play for time?

As a means to present its views on the situation in church and society for overseas groups, churches and organisations the Ecumenical Affairs department of the DRC during many years produced a leaflet called DRC Africa News. Number 7-8 of Vol. 7 (July-August 1982) is headed by the almost triumphant caption “The expected new Political Order in the SA”. Referring to some unnamed articles in church magazines the upcoming, still not decided, changes in the South African constitution is expected to create a “South Africa [that] will never be the same”.⁵⁷¹

This new South Africa will be based on what has been going on for a while; the president has gathered representatives of different population groups including coloureds and Asians—but no black people—to investigate possible changes in the government structures of the state. The question for the DRC is how to relate to this. By referring to decisions in the 1974 Synod and the Human Relations document⁵⁷² that was produced as a result of decisions taken there, they can at the same time refrain from taking any stand and give the government *carte blanche* to handle this in the manner they want to. In practice this is, obviously, to support the government.

The policy the DRC relies on is formulated as follows:

“Disapprovement of the horizontalism ... Refusal of the hermeneutics of the Political Theology; Recognition of the fact that all authorities are institutions of God and have competency in their own sphere ... The prophetic calling of the church towards the state ... All these acts are to be approached in the light of reformed hermeneutics ... (i.e. The way of salvation in Christ and the coming of the Kingdom of God. Not Politics). Thus, it is not the task of the church to express its opinion on a fundamental constitution of the state”.⁵⁷³

⁵⁷¹ (DRC Africa News 1982, p. 1) This leaflet or small journal changed name to DRC News in 1985.

⁵⁷² See chapter 3.2.3.3

⁵⁷³ (DRC Africa News 1982, p. 1)

This method of non-involvement is an easy way of stealing away from taking the liability one—on the contrary—has reasons to expect from a church of the Reformed tradition.

Obviously, the prophetic calling does still not extend as far as to acknowledge the need of change of what for a long time has been an unjust situation, and what is on its way to become established in an even more flagrant way in a new constitution—that the black population in South Africa is excluded from all normal democratic participation in the governing bodies of the country. On the contrary this article furthermore, despite this supportive non-involvement, is asserting that “[t]he church and all political parties, however, more or less support the following principles proposed for the new order: ... Elimination of discrimination – Equal opportunities and justice...”. That the DRC not even themselves believe that the coming constitutional changes will live up to that is obvious as they later in the article warns “against illusionary expectations”.⁵⁷⁴

Finally their views on the relation between church and society ends up by hoping for tensions to be “defused”, and “*as far as possible*, unity in belief and prayer” [my italicizing] be established. That means, to me, that problems according to the DRC rather should be defused than solved, and unity—understood in a spiritual (or as it often is said: essential) way—is more important than justice. It is a victory for orthodoxy over orthopraxy.

At the DRC Synod in 1982—after the suspension in Ottawa—a decision was taken that the 1974 *Human relations* document with the above noted consequences still, in addition to other decisions at the Synod, was valid as the official view of the DRC.⁵⁷⁵ At the same time they initiated the work towards a new policy document—what was to become the Church and Society 86.

⁵⁷⁴ (DRC Africa News 1982, p. 1-2)

⁵⁷⁵ (DRC Africa News 1982, p. 3)

8.1.1 The 1986 Church and Society document

The first more substantial attempt by the DRC to make a reply or a statement as a means to answer the rather harsh requirements of Ottawa came, as already mentioned, in 1986.⁵⁷⁶ Nonetheless, no direct allusion to the decisions at the WARC GC is given. The 1986 synod approved this document called '*Church and Society*'⁵⁷⁷ which consists of some 60 pages text, divided into three major parts with almost 400 sections of varying length. The document must be seen as an attempt to formulate a new (mission) policy, but is in its foreword called a programme and a testimony

The first part is called 'background', and gives arguments for why it is necessary to produce this document. Obviously, one major predicament the DRC has to face is that it is losing ground numerically. Other population groups than the Afrikaners have a higher growth rate and other churches beyond the reformed tradition also seem to be more attractive, not least among black people. The background might also function as a means of telling the reader about the complex and difficult situation in which the DRC felt they as a church have to work in. It mentions things such as the migration situation and social unrest in today's South Africa.

Part two is providing a relatively thorough theological exploration in areas that according to the DRC are applicable to the issue of 'church and society'.

That is the major part of the document and after that follows the third and last part dealing with some practical consequences of the theological considerations. This last part is divided into two subparts: DRC and the ecclesiastical situation in South Africa, respectively DRC and other social structures such as the government and society at large.

⁵⁷⁶ Although the preparations had been on its way for some time – in reality since 1982 – the Kairos document that came in 1985 did also cast a shadow over the work and to some extent, despite nothing is said about it, the document also can be read as a response to that. More of the Kairos document at section 4.3

⁵⁷⁷ *Church and Society – A Testimony approved by the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church.* (Original: *Kerk en Samelewing: 'n Getuienis van die Ned Geref Kerk – soos aanvaar deur die Algemene Sinode van die Ned Geref Kerk*) I use the abbreviation CS 86 when referring to it in the continuing text.

That the DRC is faithful to its Calvinistic heritage is obvious in the last part of the theological section of the document. There they state that although it is not the “task of the organized church to take over the activities and responsibilities of other social structures” or to “prescribe a political program for the state”, the Kingdom of God “extends much further than the organized church and includes all social structures”. The church’s calling in this respect is to be carried out by its members. Therefore, the church shall “equip its members for their ministry in every sphere of life”. Despite what is said above on ‘political program’ the text continues by saying that “Marxism, racism and all other unchristian ideologies ... must be firmly rejected”. Furthermore, the “church must refrain from taking any measures of a political or unchurchlike nature”.⁵⁷⁸ In all its appearance, “the church must be a living display window of what God in his grace accomplishes; how he renews relationships”. The church must “break through all dividing barriers”, “oppose all possible social structures which have a detrimental effect on people’s lives, and must work positively to replace them with better structures”, and “negotiate with the authorities at every level”.⁵⁷⁹

When the DRC dealt with these issues in a similar document in 1966⁵⁸⁰ references to Calvin was given on how state and church was to relate to each other. This was dropped in 1974 and later but the views remains the same; now only referred to as a result of “obediently adhering to scripture”.⁵⁸¹

One can find several possible intentions behind the CS 86: a sheer reply trying to fulfil the Ottawa requirements, or as a means to find ways to strengthen the church as to be able to meet the difficulties mentioned in the background chapter, or—described slightly obscurely—to replace some not so good structures (in church and/or society) with new better ones. What these better structures would be is, however, not self-evident, especially as the ultra-rightwing minister Carel Boshoff found the document “responsible, well-contemplated and justifiable” and the

⁵⁷⁸ (DRC 1987, p. 33-34 - §§ 216-218)

⁵⁷⁹ (DRC 1987, p. 35-36 - §§ 223-230)

⁵⁸⁰ (DRC 1966)

⁵⁸¹ (DRC 1987, Foreword - no p.)

chair person of the committee that produced the document, Dominee Kobus Potgieter, at the same time defended it against critics claiming the document to be too liberal with the assertion that “nothing has changed”.⁵⁸² It seems to be both bird and fish—and something in-between.

Nonetheless, it is also described as “like a tsunami in the DRC” where it got widely studied at the local level: “It touched the heart of many.”⁵⁸³

In the following I will briefly take up some of the—for this dissertation—central perspectives in the CS 86.

The Church

As the church is a unique creation of God according to the *Human relations in South Africa* document in 1966 and as such above all “the people of God” it must never be “assessed ... in terms of the thought patterns of this old, passing world, or confuse it with the institutions of the present, sinful reality”.⁵⁸⁴ Therefore it is of special interest to examine how the concept of peoples is dealt with. In 1974 and earlier the concept of people was associated with the understanding of blood-tie, understood in an Old Testament fashion, and was seen as an extremely important part of DRC’s comprehension of the situation in South Africa. It was a cornerstone in the Afrikaners self-understanding as a chosen people.⁵⁸⁵ That blood-tie discussion is merely abandoned in the 1986 *Church and Society* document. Nonetheless, the DRC can argue, that there is a historical and “intimate bond between the Dutch Reformed Church and the ‘Afrikaner people’”.⁵⁸⁶ The widespread notion

⁵⁸² (Cloete 1986, p. 64)

⁵⁸³ (Gerber 2007, m. 22-23)

⁵⁸⁴ (DRC 1987, p. 8-9 - §§ 45-47)

⁵⁸⁵ (DRC 1966, p. 1) In the recommendations (Recommendation 2, p. 5) following the first chapter, it is expressed thus: “Although the Bible does not use the word ‘race’, it does take account of the biological factor in the composition of groups of people. The *concept* of race is thus not entirely lacking in Scripture”. In (DRC 1974) it is discussed at p. 8

⁵⁸⁶ (DRC 1987, p. 46 - §§ 296-298)

of the DRC as the ‘National Party in prayer’⁵⁸⁷ is vindicated in this expression of intimacy.

In 1974 the DRC posed the question whether the “diversity of peoples [are in accord] with the will of God [and his] intention, from the outset, to differentiate the human race in this way”⁵⁸⁸. Their answer is that it is a “fact ... that diversity was implied in the fact of Creation” and from that follows the conclusion that the question as to whether Gen. 11:1-9 can serve as a Scriptural basis for a policy of autogenous⁵⁸⁹ development can be answered by “a qualified yes. The diversity of races and peoples ... is an aspect of reality which God obviously intended for this dispensation”.⁵⁹⁰ Thereby “autogenous or separate development” is biblically justified.⁵⁹¹ The consequence of that, then, is that when the document draws conclusions for its mission work they find that the existence of “separate Dutch reformed Church affiliations for various population groups ... [is] in accordance with the plurality of the church affiliation described in the Bible”.⁵⁹² In what way the different Church affiliations for non-whites can be said to have been established ‘independently of external influence’, or have evolved ‘from within’ is from my perspective difficult to see. (See note 589 for a short discussion on the meaning of *autogenous*)

In my view, the argumentation only serves the purpose of denying the responsibility of the DRC for the situation with the argument that

⁵⁸⁷ Although one, naturally, cannot put a sign of equality between the NP and the Afrikaner people the connection is beyond dispute. It was not until 1982 another major Afrikaner party was formed: The Conservative Party, led by the former DRC minister Andries Treurnicht. Cf. also all examples in section 4.2.3 on the Broederbond.

⁵⁸⁸ (DRC 1974, p.14)

⁵⁸⁹ *Autogenous* is the word used in the official English translation. The word used in the Afrikaans text is: eiesoortige. In a major Afrikaans-English dictionary it is translated as follows: “peculiar to itself (oneself); distinctive, separate, particular, special, specific; autogenous”. Merriam-Websters On-Line dictionary describes ‘autogenous’ as “produced independently of external influence or aid”. Other similar understandings of ‘autogenous’ is “to proceed from within”; “self-generating”.

⁵⁹⁰ (DRC 1974, p. 17-8)

⁵⁹¹ (DRC 1974, p. 71)

⁵⁹² (DRC 1974, p. 82)

this is what has been inherent in God's purpose with the different peoples of South Africa. Understood from this perspective the creation of the DRMC 1881 (and the other so-called daughter churches) was in reality not a result of 'the weakness of some'. Those whites' hesitance to attend the communion together with non-whites was on the contrary a sound expression of God's demand on them. The text furthermore appreciates the daughter churches and their history as something that has served "the interests of the church in South Africa ...well". As the so-called daughter churches were established under the auspices of the mother church there seems to be an essential unity between them. It should, however, be remembered that according to this document the fellowship of believers must not be rooted in one institutional structure but in the common fellowship in Christ.⁵⁹³

In 1986 the earlier special liking for words like *diversity*, *pluriformity* and *separateness* gave way for a more open discussion on what the Bible meant with a universal church. The conclusion is that the church "as the one universal people of God may not be restricted exclusively to one nation or group, nor may it exclude anyone on the basis of origin, national allegiance, language or culture".⁵⁹⁴ Although the document does not explicitly say that this also is valid for the DRC it later points out that the unity that is rooted in the Triune God makes the "unity of and within the church ... deeper, higher, wider and more glorious than any earthly form of unity" and that this is something the country, the church—which here must be understood as the DRC—and its people must be made "more intensely aware of" and furthermore make visible.⁵⁹⁵

One area with bearing on relations where the DRC has played an immensely important societal role is in its argumentation for a race based family legislation. Already before the National Party came into power this was a cornerstone in its views on race relations. It is possible to trace these views at least back to the first half of the nineteenth cen-

⁵⁹³ (DRC 1974, p. 82-3)

⁵⁹⁴ (DRC 1987, p.12 §§ 73-76)

⁵⁹⁵ (DRC 1987, p.14 ff §§ 85-86, 90)

tury.⁵⁹⁶ If you conceive yourself as a chosen people the mixing of blood is the major threat—something the DRC saw as underlined in the testimony of the Old Testament. They formulated this strongly as a danger “by which the white civilization is threatened with extinction”.⁵⁹⁷ The Mixed Marriage Act (1949) was one of the first proposals that were enacted by the new government, but the DRC had raised the issue long before that. Already in 1936 an urge for action in this direction was directed towards the government. It was followed up in coming years by new requests not only in this matter but also on separating residential areas and schools for white and coloured.⁵⁹⁸ This led to the Group Areas Act, the cornerstone in the apartheid policy.

Interpersonal relations

While autogenous development and its ‘natural’ consequences, in the 1974 document was seen as in accordance with a God-willed development, the *Church and Society 1986*–document nullifies this. It states that “In the New Testament the concept of ‘race’ plays no part whatsoever”, which leads to the notion that there is a “fundamental unity of the human race”.⁵⁹⁹ Also the earlier concepts of ‘people’ and ‘nation’ are re-defined and the Bible passages such as Gen. 10 and 11:1-9, Deuteronomy 32:8 and Acts 17:26 that not long ago were used as blueprints or proof texts for the social structure of apartheid supported and striven for by the DRC are either declared obsolete or explained in another way.

There is still, according to the DRC, an important, and close, relation between the church and the nation as the task of the church is to be carried forth within a nation. But as the Bible is said not to have any “direct prescriptive formulas” for how to act and what to say within society the church has to look for new biblical guidelines for interpersonal behaviour and from them deduce its importance for group relations. The document points to five such areas: Christian love for

⁵⁹⁶ Cf. the discussion on “gelykstelling” in the section 3.1.3.

⁵⁹⁷ (DRC Africa News 1980, p. 2)

⁵⁹⁸ (DRC Africa News 1980, p. 1-3)

⁵⁹⁹ (DRC 1987, p.17-8, §§ 100-101, 104)

one's neighbour; righteousness and justice; compassion; truth; respect for God-given dignity of man.⁶⁰⁰

In the 1966 Human relations document the DRC declares that an individual cannot be “isolated [from the] social, religious and civil ties” of the society from which he or she comes. Therefore, the two who go into the holy matrimony must have a “similarity of decent, language, culture, colour, nationality and religion”.⁶⁰¹

While the 1974 Human Relations-document stated that “Scripture neither directly prescribes nor prohibits racially mixed marriages”⁶⁰² it could nevertheless simultaneously argue that a mixed marriage was in “conflict with the Biblical precepts for a true marriage”.⁶⁰³ This, which from a logical point of view could not have been said even in 1974, is done away with now and the Church and Society 1986 states that mixed marriages “according to the Bible ... are permissible”.⁶⁰⁴ On their way to that decision the General Synod in October 1978 stated that although mixed marriage could not be regarded as “impermissible” according to Biblical norms they were regarded as “highly undesirable in our South African context”⁶⁰⁵. This must be seen as an obvious example of how the DRC all the same tried to interfere in areas that according to reformed policy ought to be the responsibility of the government.

As pointed out above the Church and Society-document argues that the task of the church is not to “take over the activities and responsibilities of other social structures” and therefore it is withdrawing—in principle—from earlier views in this matter to the “primary task ... to proclaim God's word and equip its members for their ministry in every sphere of life”.⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰⁰ (DRC 1987, p. 22, §§ 121-126, 104)

⁶⁰¹ (DRC 1966, p. 6)

⁶⁰² (DRC 1974, p. 95)

⁶⁰³ (DRC 1974, p. 93)

⁶⁰⁴ (DRC 1987, p. 32, § 213)

⁶⁰⁵ (DRC Africa News 1980, p. 1)

⁶⁰⁶ (DRC 1987, p. 33-4, § 216-220)

8.1.2 Some South African reactions

8.1.2.1 *Broederkring/Belydende Kring*

Broederkring (BK), later Belydende Kring, this a group of reformed Christians, mainly from the so-called daughter churches express total rejection of the DRC *Church and Society* 1986 document and regard it only as “deceptive and misleading ... designed to perpetuate the apartheid state and to maintain status quo of exploitation and oppression”.⁶⁰⁷

One of the basic considerations for that conclusion is a scrutiny of the basic social analysis of the CS 86 where it is stressed that “race, ethnic and cultural categories are fundamental ... and should determine society”.⁶⁰⁸ The claim that the Bible is the sole norm is only a way of masking this. In relation to this BK takes a look at the way the document makes use of Romans 5:12-21. While CS 86 argues that humanity is an *essential* unity the BK stresses that “God created not one ‘essence’, not a united humanity but one humanity”.⁶⁰⁹

The BK points out that according to CS 86 racism can be condemned as sin without the necessity to criticise or condemn the apartheid state. The Broederkring compares that with condemning the *way* someone killed another person, not the killing itself.

Finally the BK record that while the Belhar Confession, adopted the same year, totally rejects apartheid the CS 86 nowhere rejects apartheid categorically as sin and nowhere does the DRC proclaim theological support for the view that apartheid is a heresy.⁶¹⁰

8.1.2.2 *SACC*

Also the SACC took a closer look at the Church and Society document. Different sub-groups dealt with different aspects or topics: Historical background; the use of the Bible; the concept of the Church; the rela-

⁶⁰⁷ (Moatshe 1987, p. 1) In the following I refer to this document only as BK. About BK see also section 4.5.2.1

⁶⁰⁸ (Moatshe 1987, p. 1); The BK is here referring especially to page 1, 4 and 5 in the Afrikaans edition of the CS 86.

⁶⁰⁹ (Moatshe 1987, p. 2-3)

⁶¹⁰ (Moatshe 1987, p. 24)

tionship between the DRC and other churches within the DRC ‘family’; and more. I will in the following give a brief account of four views that are highlighted by them.⁶¹¹

Historical background for the Church and Society document

This part of the analysis by the SACC group starts from the outset of the Dutch establishment on Southern African soil. Special relevance is given to the beginning of the 20th century and the so called “poor white” situation in the wake of the Anglo-Boer war, World War I and the world wide economic crisis at the end of the 1920s. Hundreds of thousands of whites had to leave farms and a huge white proletariat arose in the big cities. Here the DRC found an important task to implement—to help the Afrikaner community to rise from these disturbing conditions, to sustain and again to manifest that “the white race is the ruling race”.⁶¹² As a way of dealing with this the DRC formulated its ‘Federale Sendingbeleid’⁶¹³ that paved way for numerous proposals to the government about legislation supporting the poor whites and as a consequence depriving the black community of its possibilities.⁶¹⁴ That the socio-economic difficulties afflicted the black communities even more did not bring about the same concern. In 1950 the DRC, organized by

⁶¹¹ I found the different documents of this section in Wolfram Kistner’s remarkable archive. Dr. Kistner, who was director of the Division of Justice and Reconciliation of the South African Council of Churches 1976 to 1988, died in December 2006. He became one of the most prominent Lutheran theologians in South Africa to call for the abolition of apartheid. For many years he collected and hid sensitive material which his wife Adelaide later organised in their home and put into a database. This work was particularly important as the SACC office at Khotso house in Johannesburg several times got raided by the security police and even bombed and thereby lost loads of important material. During some very pleasing visits to them I have had the possibility to acquaint myself with the material. These archives, “The Kistner collection” are now deposited at the library of the Lutheran Theological Institute in Pietermaritzburg.

⁶¹² (SACC 1988a, p. 18) A quotation from a 1921 DRC publication, “The DRC and the native problem”

⁶¹³ “General (or: Federal) Mission policy”

⁶¹⁴ E.g. through “The Native (Urban Areas) Act, 1923 – about segregation in urban areas; and the “Mines and Works amendment act”, 1926 – prohibiting the employment of Africans in skilled work in mines and elsewhere.

its mission council 'Federale Sending Raad', held a congress on "Die Naturellevraagstuk" [The Native question] during which the whole complex of relations between 'races' and "die totale maatskaplike *struktuur* van Suid-Afrika"⁶¹⁵ were penetrated. A 'complete' policy of apartheid was taken: On education, church service, social life, economy and political foundation.⁶¹⁶ According to the unknown author(s) of the SACC document discussed here, the following 36 years thereafter—that is up to when the CS 86 is produced—"can be described as concentration on more and more sophisticating of the formulation of apartheid".⁶¹⁷ The author therefore continues by asking: Has the Church and Society 1986 document abandoned this, its paradigm of apartheid-theology? Or is it only an adaption to the present day 'reformed apartheid' a la P W Botha? The question is thereafter put in concrete form: Is the statement "eager to promote equal right, socially, economically, politically, and last but not least ecclesiastically, for all people—not peoples—living in South Africa?"⁶¹⁸ Will it now rather promote unity within the church at the cost of the disintegration with the state instead of the opposite that has been the pattern up till now?

The use of the Bible in the Church and Society document

One can say that the time, or the situation, in which the document is presented is one part(ner) of the ongoing discourse. The actual South African situation contains a duality where some are powerful and some without power, some are rich and some possess almost nothing. Given that, the perspective of the Church and Society document has not changed in any fundamental way since the 1974 document. It lacks all understanding of the Bible as a story of God's solidarity with the poor, and stands instead firm on an attitude that, in accordance with the analysis in the Kairos document, could be called status quo.⁶¹⁹ This is a

⁶¹⁵ ["The whole South African social structure": My transl.], (Kinghorn 1986, p. 99)

⁶¹⁶ (Kinghorn 1986, p. 98-100)

⁶¹⁷ (SACC 1988, p. 20)

⁶¹⁸ (SACC 1988, p. 20-1)

⁶¹⁹ (SACC 1988a, p. 1)

consequence of the perspective on the Bible as “exclusively a religious book” and therefore it may not “be used as a manual for solving social, economic, or political problems”. Or to put it as explicit as the authors of this analysis: “The Document does not listen to what the Bible should say to specific situations ... [or] the role of the Bible in a situation of suffering and oppression”.⁶²⁰

When the Church and Society describes the mission of the church, it refrains from using missionary Bible texts referring to the poor, such as Matt 18:25-31 and Lk 2:4. Mission is described in an “individualistic tone” and the documents omit any reference to changing or transforming society or changing of structures as a result of or reason for the proclamation of the message of the Kingdom. As a result the question of reconciliation is only described as “an act of not confronting, not accusing, listening, avoiding exclusion of the other and the candid and ongoing discussion”. Besides this any reference to repentance and restitution as part of the reconciliation process is avoided.⁶²¹

The analysis ends with the rather harsh conclusion that “the use of the Bible in the document ‘Church and Society’ is highly biased by the intentions and obvious necessities the DRC regards itself obliged to” and that the use of the Bible thereby “facilitates a heresy of silence”.⁶²²

The concept of the Church in the Church and Society document

In the discussion under the above heading the question is raised how Christology—as “the most fundamental theological consideration” in a discussion of the unity and uniting of the four Dutch reformed Churches—shall be expressed as one of the involved churches, the DRC, finds it acceptable to “consult with heretic structures”, i.e. the present government. Special reference in this regard is made to paragraph 308 in the CS 86 where the DRC “declares that it is prepared to co-operate in the Spirit of Christ to seek a solution which will enable every sector of the South African society to attain the highest possible level of well-being”. This is by the critics seen as support for what is called P.W.

⁶²⁰ (SACC 1988a, p. 3-4); Cf. also (DRC 1987, p. 7-8, § 39-44)

⁶²¹ (SACC 1988a, p. 5-6); Cf. also (DRC 1987, p. 11-3, § 65-80)

⁶²² (SACC 1988a, p. 8)

Botha's "window dressing"—the removal of so-called petty apartheid, the tri-chamber government etc.⁶²³

The Dutch Reformed Family is a major concept that has been prevalent in the thinking of the DRC mission, especially since the establishment of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in 1881. Albeit the DRC declare that this family, consisting of the former DRMC and DRCA (which later joined in the URCSA) together with the RCA makes up the inner-most circle or relationship they at the same time declare that there is a special bond to the Afrikaner people. Despite talks of change, not much of change is seen and the conclusion here is that the DRC "hold fast to its policy of ecclesiastical apartheid". The authors of this critical analysis note that there is some kind of "mythical posture of change within the DRC ... [where] the actors change from time to time while the scenes being enacted are predictably the same ... [and that it therefore] changes without – changing".⁶²⁴

In a memorandum by the Algemeine Synodale Komissie (ASK)⁶²⁵ in April 1988 this is obvious to everyone. After having noted the principal unity in Jesus Christ it contains a discussion about 'Unity *over* diversity' [verskeidenheid – can also be translated into: 'manifoldness'; 'variety'], 'Unity *in* diversity', and 'Unity *with* diversity' with numerous references to the *Church and Society* document. Finally the guiding principles, among others, are that⁶²⁶ a) the different churches within the family shall remain as of today; b) they shall keep their present characteristics, but open up for the reception of members from other churches in the family. Besides that they are also to try to implement new 'ecumenical' structures for churches in the family. This is an obvious example of how the DRC tries to adjust without really changing. A sketch from the memorandum appendix gives a hint of the 'magnitude' of the change proposed.⁶²⁷ According to this analysis this can be seen as

⁶²³ (SACC 1988b, p. 1-2); Cf. (DRC 1987, p. 47-8, § 304-308)

⁶²⁴ (SACC 1988b, p. 2-3)

⁶²⁵ Algemeine Synodale Komissie is the most central working group related to the General Synod

⁶²⁶ The emphasis is mine.

⁶²⁷ See Figure 3 p. 249, (DRC ASK ed. 1988, p. 7-17) The text between the different circles says: 'Independent churches'. The text along the dotted border line

part of a delaying policy. The huge financial dependency from especially the black church—some 80% of its need is covered by the DRC—works in the same direction, keeping that church down in a situation of dependency.

This third analysis of the CS 86 ends with a note on the DRC and its Mission. The DRC has done an extensive missionary outreach work in several countries in Africa and that can be seen as “a tremendous record of its Missionary work ...[but]comes into crisis when you come [to the question of] ‘Missio Dei’; What is God doing in the world?” There the answer from the DRC is: We stick to the “present characteristics” so that we can continue to have “separate church formations for the different population groups”.⁶²⁸

The DRC Policy statement and a Confession of Guilt

The fourth document from the working groups of the SACC is dealing with the question of how or if the DRC expresses any guilt for its support of apartheid. The conviction behind this exploration is that a) “the DRC cannot abandon its traditional course of supporting and theologically justifying the apartheid system unless it repents and confesses its guilt”, which b) “requires mentioning the sin or evil which one asks God for forgiveness for and the spelling out in concrete terms of the actions through which the evil is to be redressed”.⁶²⁹

The *Church and Society* document deals in one large section with the question of ‘Church and group relations’ (§§100-234). One part therein is about the concept of ‘nation’ and ‘people’ and takes up the racism issue. The authors of this, the SACC exploration of the CS 86, observe that the discussion is objectified (“whoever”) and tends to exclude the DRC in their own view from having committed racial misdeeds or expressed racial views even though they note that racism tends to “take on collective and structural forms” (§ 112). This is a way of refraining from having to confess guilt and to repent. The analysis continues by pointing at the unwillingness to accept a view that the separateness of

says: ‘Essential unity’; The small text beneath the second group of circles says: ‘membership [in the NGK (DRC) for non-whites: my insertion] possible’.

⁶²⁸ (SACC 1988b, p. 7)

⁶²⁹ (SACC 1988c, p.1)

the churches is a sin; that they promote interceding but not intervening on behalf of the wronged; that they will bring information to the authorities about injustices and needs but is incapable of seeing that it is the authorities who are the perpetrators of injustices.⁶³⁰ One main critical point the authors of the analysis put forward is that the DRC describes the situation as something that “evolved in the course of history ... and had as its purpose the optimum development of all groups” (§ 304), as if it just happened to happen and had a good cause. That view is seen as incompatible with a position declaring apartheid sin and something to confess guilt for.

8.2 Vereeniging – Junction without unification

As noted above and earlier the discussion was rather high-spirited, sometimes fierce. Many acknowledged the difference between the 1974 and the 1986 documents but still most people who evaluated *Church and Society* had a feeling that it was too little, too late.⁶³¹

A sequel was on its way, but there were also other circumstances/situations in the actual South African setting that played an important role for the continued reflection on apartheid and church/state issues for the DRC and for all other stakeholders in the conflict. One such occasion is the conference in Vereeniging.

8.2.1 The Vereeniging Conference

There are situations or events that—at least in retrospect—are described as a situation of severe misjudgement or of a lost opportunity. De Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio talk about the Cottesloe Consultation in that way.⁶³² The Vereeniging Conference at the beginning of March

⁶³⁰ (SACC 1988c, p. 3-4)

⁶³¹ One such reaction—besides all that is mentioned above—came from Pieter Potgieter who was moderator for the DRC general synod 1990-1994. On a question from me about big mistakes in the DRC history he said that “the CS 86 should have come 10 years earlier – we waited too long”. (Potgieter 2007, part II, m. 30)

⁶³² (De Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio 1983, p. 144)

1989 has the same posthumous reputation; but while it took some time before that became the saying about the Cottesloe Consultation this was seen immediately this time. According to Nico Smit the DRC also this time “failed [to grab at an opportunity], as the leaders of this church failed many years ago at the Cottesloe Consultation”.⁶³³

This consultation is of utmost importance as the outcome would have the possibility to influence, or even determine, the decision of the WARC General council that was to meet in August; there the follow-up of the Ottawa decision—and a possible reinstatement of the DRC in the WARC fellowship—was on the agenda.

8.2.1.1 *The Conference*

The Vereeniging Conference⁶³⁴ was in reality a follow-up itself. The smaller and—compared to the WARC—more conservative international Reformed community called the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) was convening the meeting. The preceding year they had invited all churches belonging to the DRC family to a meeting in Harare. It ended in a deep crisis where two issues were the most burning ones; the attitude of the Church towards apartheid, and, secondly, a proposal for structural union of the churches. This had now to be taken account of at the Vereeniging Conference.⁶³⁵

⁶³³ (N. Smith 1989)

⁶³⁴ The words ‘Consultation’ and ‘Conference’ are used alternating in different sources in naming the event in Vereeniging—which is a small place located some 50 kilometres south of Johannesburg. The original Afrikaans word is ‘Beraad’ which also could be translated to ‘deliberation’. I will follow the pattern in DRCA material to make use of the word ‘Conference’.

⁶³⁵ I have in my possession a number of documents relating to this event. Several are without any stating of originator. Presumably they are based in memos or notes taken during the proceedings. Most of them are from Wolfram Kistner’s Collection which makes them reliable as sources albeit difficult to use.

Besides them I have three, partly overlapping, documents with obvious sender: The Presbyterian minister Douglas Bax gives an extensive account in JTSA No. 68 (Bax 1989); The Dutch Reformed Church in Africa tells “*The Saga of Vereeniging*” (Dutch Reformed Church in Africa 1989) in their Supplement to DRC Action; the WARC have included the testimony in *Farewell to Apartheid?* (WARC 1994b, p. 91-4);

My description of the conference as such is based mainly on the account given by Douglas Bax (Bax 1989, p. 61-66)

The conference was remarkable in many ways. I will come back to that more in detail under the heading “The Outcome”. Nevertheless, one interesting thing is that this was the first time all nine churches in the ‘family’ of Dutch Reformed Churches met to grapple with the difficult issue of apartheid in a substantial way.⁶³⁶ Another is the process and development during the conference as such, which I will describe in some detail as it is an important backdrop to the aftermath—as in the Cottesloe case.

One of the first things that happened was that
“the delegations from the black Churches, especially the NGSK and the NGKA, very frankly expressed their feelings about the NGK's failure to open its eyes to discrimination in South Africa and the way in which it had taught its members to think of apartheid as God's will”.

To their great surprise—and rather moved—they then witnessed how

“[o]ne after another [the members of the DRC delegation] stood up and acknowledged with humility and sorrow that the NGK had supported the policy of apartheid and confessed that it had sinned in doing so; they pleaded for forgiveness and for the other Churches to work for a new South Africa together with the NGK”.

Maybe even more than the delegates from the other Churches had dared to hope for seemed about to materialize. The consultation decided to draw up a formal statement expressing its mind on the Church and the situation in South Africa on the basis of what had been said. Only that what was said by the DRC group in camera suddenly was inappropriate for the public. So—when presented the following day—the statement by the DRC delegation, shied away considerably according to the black representatives. Instead of an outright rejection of apartheid,

⁶³⁶ The nine were, besides the DRC, DRCA, DRCM and RCA with their base in the South Africa, those established by the DRC in surrounding countries; Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana, Mozambique (Dutch Reformed Church in Africa 1989b, p. 1)

“discriminatory apartheid” was rejected. They, moreover, made clear that any understanding of the situation must not go beyond what the CS 86 had stated and spoke about political rights of blacks in relation to their “maturity”. Allan Boesak meant that the DRC delegation now “sounded ... like the National Party in toga” (toga = preaching gown of DRC ministers).⁶³⁷

The crisis of the previous year seemed once again to emerge and some black delegates spoke about abandoning the conference—there was no reason to put trust in the words of the DRC delegation anyhow. A small committee—with Beyers Naudé as moderator and including among others Allan Boesak and Johan Heyns [moderator of the DRC General Synod]—met to see if a way forward was possible to find. They found that both the white church delegates and the black church delegates confessed erroneous stands and/or lack of clarity in speaking out against apartheid. The black delegates, furthermore, acknowledged the plea for forgiveness from the side of the whites and therefore wanted to

“respond by reaching out in forgiveness and brotherhood and assure our brothers from the white DRC that, well aware of our own weakness and sin, we do not intend to hold the past against them, but together seek a way forward to find God’s will for all of us”.

The committee therefore recommended the conference to continue its work in order to—as far as possible—

“remove any misunderstanding and to clarify points of difference after which the whole matter could be referred back to the ad hoc committee for formulation if so desired by the Consultation”.⁶³⁸

The cooling down of the situation had worked and the proceedings continued aiming at adopting a statement—later called *The Testimony of Vereeniging*. The DRC delegates then revised what they earlier had said and gave their own *Statement of the DRC Delegation*. While not embracing—but “take note of”—the *Testimony* they nonetheless as-

⁶³⁷ Alan Boesak in the DRMC journal *Die Ligdraer* quoted in (Bax 1989, p. 63)

⁶³⁸ (Dutch Reformed Church in Africa 1989, p. 6-7)

sured the Consultation that they would present it to all the DRC's church meetings for discussion.⁶³⁹

An agreement was finally reached to send the *Testimony* plus three appendices to the local congregations and to other Church bodies. The appendix contained the revised *DRC delegation statement*; a rather comprehensive document by the delegates of the black churches—*The Struggle for Liberation between the Two worlds in South Africa*; and a 1-page statement on *Civil Disobedience*.

8.2.1.2 The Outcome

Although the process is interesting as such, saying something about the mindsets of those participating, the important question remains: What came out of the Conference—short-term and long-term, as far as the latter is possible to trace. Possibly one might say that there is a mid-term answer to this question as well. With short-term I mean the documents that were produced during the Conference. I will here take up central perspectives in the *Testimony* and in the *Statement of the DRC delegation*. Although they are very interesting, I will leave out the other two documents, as they do not have any direct influence over the process I describe.⁶⁴⁰

8.2.1.2.1 The Testimony of Vereeniging

The *Testimony* that finally was formulated and accepted—except by the DRC—had three headings: On Apartheid; On Church Unity; and On the Future.⁶⁴¹

⁶³⁹ A Xerox copy of the original writing is to be found in (Dutch Reformed Church in Africa 1989b, n.p.); It is also rewritten in (Dutch Reformed Church in Africa 1989, p. 8)

⁶⁴⁰ The Report named *The Struggle for Liberation between the Two Worlds in South Africa* is analysing the present South African situation with its "basic division and split [that] covers all aspects of life and society" where "the Blacks are economically exploited and oppressed" under the "refined, adapted and reformed apartheid" called neo-apartheid; and where there on the other hand "is the rich, powerful, luxurious world of the Whites, controlling the situation militarily ...basically supported by the capitalism of the West" (Dutch Reformed Church in Africa 1989, p. 17)

⁶⁴¹ (Dutch Reformed Church in Africa 1989, p. 9-11)

The expressed plea for forgiveness by the DRC delegates and the response of willingness to “seek a way forward to find God’s will for all of us” by the black delegates functions as the platform for the rest of the *Testimony*. This should not, however, as the following paragraph clarifies be seen as a *carte blanche* to continue as if nothing needs to be changed. On the contrary: The delegates say that they “unequivocally ... regard apartheid in all its forms as a sin, as contrary to and irreconcilable with the gospel of Jesus Christ” and that therefore “apartheid in all its forms cannot be reformed, but must be totally eradicated”. The delegates continue by committing themselves to take part in that and demand of the government to abolish the apartheid laws, lift the state of emergency, release the political prisoners, unban apartheid-opposing organisations and to start “genuine negotiations which will lead to a transfer of power to the majority by free and fair elections”.

Under the heading about *Church Unity* there is merely one, but very central thesis: “We pledge ourselves to become one, united, non-racial Reformed church in Southern and Central Africa.”

Under *The Future* headline the starting-point is taken by establishing as a fact that “the people of South Africa are one nation”. Therefore they will commit [themselves] to work towards genuine reconciliation based upon the demands of the gospel for justice for all”; which means they will “work towards an open, non-racial democratic society”.

Although the DRC did not adopt the *Testimony* it was a breakthrough and an expression of strength that all the black Churches had been able to express themselves in this manner. The expression on the willingness to strive for one, united, non-racial Reformed Church went further than any earlier statement and indicated a new pride and belief in their ability to play a role in building a new South Africa. To use the words of Beyers Naudé: “I would say that the importance of what happened there lies much more in what happened within the black NG Churches than what did not happen in the white NG Church.”⁶⁴² Before I come back to that in the next section I will just note that Bax pin-points some more gains of the Conference for the black Churches. It clarifies, he says, that

⁶⁴² Quoted in (Bax 1989, p. 71)

“in the area of Church and society the theological and political initiative in the Dutch Reformed family has actually passed from the white NGK to the black Churches, and that from now on this initiative will keep the white NGK on the defensive until it does finally and unequivocally, in word and in deed, reject apartheid in all its forms.

It was a decisive repudiation by the black Churches of the NGK's illusion that an ambiguous, half-hearted document like Church and Society can let it off the hook of its continuing failure to oppose the Government and its policy of neo-apartheid.”⁶⁴³

To this must be added that the DRC delegation said:

“[W]ith humility and sorrow [we confess] the participation of our church in the introduction and legitimation of the ideology of apartheid and the subsequent suffering of people”; and

“that, since any ideology speaks decisively above and alongside the truth of the Bible, the ideology of apartheid is a political and social system whereby human dignity is adversely affected, and whereby one particular ethnic group is detrimentally oppressed by another, and cannot be accepted on Christian ethical grounds, *because it contravenes the very essence of reconciliation, neighbourly love, and righteousness, the unity, and inevitably the human dignity, of all involved and is therefore a sin.* [My italicising] Any teaching of the church that would defend this ideology would have to be regarded as heretical, that is, in conflict with the teaching of Scripture.”⁶⁴⁴

Thereby for the first time they openly confessed that the statement of the WARC, in Ottawa in 1982, was correct. Those present in Ver-eeniging had walked a long way since the Synodical pronouncements in

⁶⁴³ (Bax 1989, p. 71)

⁶⁴⁴ (Dutch Reformed Church in Africa 1989, p. 8)

October 1982 of shock; when they regarded the Ottawa statement as in conflict with the Bible.

8.2.1.2.2 Aftermath

But it did not stop there. The history of the weakness of some is reiterated. Possible developments were crushed. As they were at the Cotteloe meeting. As they were when *verligte* [enlightened] and outspoken individuals—like Beyers Naudé, Allan Boesak, Ben Marais, Albert Geyser and many more—tried to influence the development of the Church. The well-known lid was put in place—not by open force but firmly and often with severe consequences for the individual.

Only a few days after the Vereeniging Conference the General Synodical Commission (GSC) of the DRC met. This powerful body is dealing with all important matters between the Synods. They now dealt with the documents of the Conference.⁶⁴⁵

The *Testimony* was rejected and the GSC expressed appreciation of how the DRC delegates had handled the situation and for their own declaration. But not completely; the two most important clauses—about the church's involvement in introducing and legitimizing apartheid and, the second, about apartheid as sin—had to be related to the relevant paragraphs in CS 86.⁶⁴⁶ Although these paragraphs have some likeness to the *Statement* of the DRC delegation they are nonetheless relativising or qualifying the meaning of apartheid and therefore in reality stripping it of any new and more 'radical' understanding. As the DRCA puts it (in capital letter): "THIS IN FACT NOW MEANS THAT THE WHITE DR CHURCH AS SUCH DID NOT IDENTIFY WITH THEIR DELEGATES CONFESSING APARTHEID AS A SIN."

On the question on Church unity the DRC delegation had rejected the formulation in the *Testimony* as the church "is not yet ready to say what the structural model of the one-church-to-be will be". This was further developed by the GSC by referring Church unity to the local

⁶⁴⁵ Both the DRCA (Dutch Reformed Church in Africa 1989, p. 13-4) and Bax (Bax 1989, p. 66-70) gives an account of the process within the DRC after the Conference.

⁶⁴⁶ The paragraphs referred to in the cs 86 ought to be 38, 306, 307.

level and to the individual sphere. Therefore this was nothing the Synod(s) at all had to decide about and “‘force upon’ lower courts and congregations”. What was left were some rather vague recommendations to “point out to all the synods the need to create a spirit of unity” and “to continue to reflect on making church unity more visible”.⁶⁴⁷ If *real* unity is too costly, *spirit* of unity, and if possible making it visible, seems to do.

Soon after a debate was evoked in the DRC church magazine *Die Kerkbode* where more conservative forces, like the previous General Synod moderator Kobus Potgieter and the former *dominee*, now Conservative Party leader Dr. Treurnicht, criticised the understanding of apartheid by the delegation. Johan Heyns, who was leader of the delegation, tried to define what they had meant and was according to Bax doing

“an eggdance that very clearly backtracks from the full meaning of the revised Statement of the DRC Delegation at Vereeniging. It does so, firstly, by giving the word ideology in that Statement a peculiar meaning that the other delegations at Vereeniging would obviously not have taken it to have and, secondly, by once more qualifying the rejection of apartheid which had seemed too forthright in the Statement”.

One can almost feel the whining whip and that fear was in the air.

Also other things with a different approach are going on. With its base in the Western Cape Province some 139 white DRC members issued an open letter in support of the *Testimony*. Among them were some well-known theologians such as Willie Jonker, David Bosch, Willem Nicol and others. Beyers Naudé called this the “most significant initiative to come from the NGK for 25 years”. Johan Heyns tried to play it down by saying that the signatories were few and that they already were well known for these views. The debate grew and compelled others to intervene for instance to explain why they hadn’t signed the let-

⁶⁴⁷ (Dutch Reformed Church in Africa 1989, p. 14), (Bax 1989, p. 67)

ter.⁶⁴⁸ Whether Naudé was right or not, it is obvious that the Vereeniging Conference made an important contribution for widening the discussion on apartheid and church/state-issues as such within the DRC.

While waiting for more substantial steps from the DRC one can make use of the words of Nico Smith about the Conference—“A Rubicon the white NGK would not cross”. According to him, the door opened by the black churches was not possible for the white DRC delegation to pass through—even though they wanted to—“knowing the convictions and attitudes of their own constituency”.⁶⁴⁹

In the evaluation of the Conference one can also add in accordance with Bax that the DRC as “far as possible [want to] keep the Church out of politics altogether” and “now seems to want to wash its hands of its political responsibility”.⁶⁵⁰

8.2.1.3 The WARC and the Testimony of Vereeniging

Bax ends his article with the question whether the DRC—in light of the outcome of the Conference—can be said to have fulfilled the obligations laid down in the WARC Ottawa meeting. He notes that the discussions around the *Vereeniging Testimony* clearly show that the

“decision [of Ottawa] has without any doubt dramatically helped to drag the NGK, in spite of its first piqued and angry reaction and however reluctantly, to reconsider its support, for apartheid. Nevertheless in view of what has happened so far, including in particular the official reaction of the NGK to the Vereeniging Consultation to date, the NGK can, sadly, not be said to have fulfilled all three of these conditions”.⁶⁵¹

When the WARC General Council met in Seoul in August, less than half a year after the Vereeniging Conference, they among other things noted the outcome of that conference. The conclusion is that DRC posi-

⁶⁴⁸ (Bax 1989, p. 69-70)

⁶⁴⁹ (N. Smith 1989, p. 29)

⁶⁵⁰ (Bax 1989, p. 72)

⁶⁵¹ (Bax 1989, p. 73)

tion has not “moved beyond the official position expressed in ‘Church and Society’ as well as in the 1986 Synodical decisions”. Therefore this conference is one more element in the analysis leading up to the recommendation—and decision—to maintain the suspension of the DRC.⁶⁵²

A conclusion on the outcome can be that the mid-term outcome—which to me is the consequence of the clamping down by the GCS on the openings provided by the DRC delegation—is that the DRC is again rejoining the Afrikaner *laager*. The maintaining of the suspension by the WARC is a consistent reaction.

On the long run the *Testimony* has set processes in motion that provides for a change also in the DRC; the only question is whether or not the political change that is to take place soon—the exchange of Botha to De Klerk and the subsequent releases of freedom fighters, unbanning of organisations etc.—in reality played a more decisive role. Its importance for the unification processes among the black churches should not be forgotten.

8.3 The Church and society 1990

In 1990 the DRC synod adopts a revision of the earlier *Church and Society* document. It is significant that they nonetheless keep the old name and just alter date—we now get the *Church and Society* 1990.

8.3.1 The document

According to the Dutch Reformed Church the *Church and Society* 1990 document (CS 90) offers “a sign of its integrity, as guidelines for its members to follow and [provides] an invitation to dialogue with the ecumenical community”.⁶⁵³ It is said to be “a result of further reflection ... at a time which is loaded with new challenges”.

That South Africa in 1990 provides lot of new challenges is not an exaggeration. The Botha regime is gone—at least nominally; Nelson

⁶⁵² (WARC 1989, p. 279-81)

⁶⁵³ (DRC 1991, Foreword – no pagination)

Mandela has left the Polsmoor prison as a free man; the ANC and other liberation/anti-apartheid movements are un-banned. That makes it even more surprising that one, not only at the first quick glance at the Church and Society 1990 document gets such a strong déjà-vu feeling. Already the similarity of the tables of contents in the two documents, CS 90 and Church and Society 1986 (CS 86), makes it extremely obvious that it is the same document if only in two versions. Looking at the headings, one finds that the content is identical, except for the background part in CS 86 which is almost absent in CS 90, besides 3 short passages in a preface. The overall picture is that the major part is untouched, some paragraphs slightly altered without any significant changes and finally that there are a few sections that have been thoroughly changed—albeit not necessarily with any substantial alteration in the content.

In the following I will give a brief account of some of the more important changes that have taken place between the two documents in as far as they are of importance for my study. The headings are those used in the CS 90 document.

Preface

The preface of CS 90 contains only three short passages. It points, as did the 1986 document, to—what is called—the unique composition of the South African society that provides the church a challenging and demanding task. Nonetheless, the document states that what has been done “in the past, however faulty and full of shortcomings it may have been, Dutch Reformed Church is nevertheless convinced that everything was not without significance, but was of service to the Kingdom of God”.⁶⁵⁴

⁶⁵⁴ (DRC 1991, p. 1, § 3)

Basic scriptural principles

Under the sub-heading *Introductory remarks* there is a reflection on the biblical focus on God's kingdom. In older documents Bible texts such as Gen 2:18, 10:19-20 and others played a crucial role in the justification of 'separate development'. Now the document explicitly denounces the use of "portions of the Bible" such as the above "as a Scriptural basis for political models".⁶⁵⁵

Thereafter follows a section on the *church*. In CS 86 it was maintained that the idea on the effectiveness of the spread of the gospel by using for instance different languages "must, however, never obscure or endanger the unity". In CS 90 the idea of using different languages is more actively expressed as to "enrich the unity of the church and to promote the fellowship of people".⁶⁵⁶

The whole section on diaconal fellowship has been extended and restructured whereas more emphasis has been put on the theological reflection on the theme.

Another section deals with the Church and the Triune God. In Him the believers are one. On this the two documents agree, but while CS 86 exhorts its members to be more aware of this, the CS 90 states that this "must be experienced concretely".⁶⁵⁷ The section continues by strengthening the writings on unity as, "of utmost importance for Christ", and summarises it in that this "means that this unity becomes primarily visible in mutual love".⁶⁵⁸

In the section on *The Church and group relations* one distinctive change can be found under the heading 'The relationship between church, nation and nations'. It is that the concept of 'nation' has almost disappeared. In CS 86 the corresponding passage starts with the declaration that "the church has a close relationship to the nation". In CS 90 it is said that "the church has a close relationship with real human

⁶⁵⁵ (DRC 1991, p. 4, § 22)

⁶⁵⁶ (DRC 1991, p. 6, § 32); Cf. (DRC 1987, § 53)

⁶⁵⁷ (DRC 1991, p. 12 § 78); Cf. (DRC 1987, § 86)

⁶⁵⁸ (DRC 1991, p. 12-3 §§ 82-84); Cf. (DRC 1987, §§ 90-91)

life”.⁶⁵⁹ To this is—contrary to earlier writings—added that “membership of the church is not determined by birthright, lineage and culture; [and] that God does not make his covenant with people on a national basis”.⁶⁶⁰

One societal area in which the views of the Dutch reformed church have been visible since long is the one that deals with personal relations. The legislation about marriage and sexual relations has had a firm root in that church. These issues were dealt with already in the 1986 in a section on *Biblical-ethical guidelines for inter-personal and group relations*.

Under this heading is now also the question of ‘human rights’ scrutinized. In CS 86 it was stressed that the concept of human rights was missing in the Bible, although it brought forward important questions on what essential conditions God has determined man to have to be able to fulfil his true destiny. In CS 90 it is stated that “although the *concept* [my emphasis] of ‘human rights’ appears nowhere in the Bible, the *topic* [my emphasis] is very often found in the Bible”. To me this distinction appears somewhat dim. Besides: If there is a theme present or if the matter of human rights is in any way visible in the text of the Bible, then it is present and asks for some further reflection whether you call it a topic or a concept or something else.

Furthermore, in the list of ‘rights’ discussed in the documents, the issue of political rights has been strengthened—from having political ‘consultation’ with the government to urging for a political ‘say’. In this part has also a section on “freedom of movement and speech” been added.⁶⁶¹

In this section of the document there is also a part called *The Church’s responsibility with regard to group relationships*. In CS 86 every member was instructed, as part of their ministry in this world, to “bring the principles of God’s Kingdom to bear in social and political spheres

⁶⁵⁹ (DRC 1991, p. 17 § 116); Cf. (DRC 1987, § 115)

⁶⁶⁰ (DRC 1991, p. 18 §§ 118-119) There is no analogue to these sections in CS 86

⁶⁶¹ (DRC 1991, p. 26 §§ 184, 199, 201); Cf. (DRC 1987, §§ 179, 194)

(Marxism, racism, and all other unchristian ideologies as well as all forms of injustice must be firmly rejected ...). This is a slightly confusing saying that reminds me of the pronouncement that is ascribed to Henry Ford: The customer could have the car in any colour that he wanted as long as it was black. This is in CS 90 changed into the following two sentences: First that the members were to “bring the principles of God’s Kingdom to bear in social and political spheres, that is, all forms of injustice must be firmly rejected”. Secondly, it was said that this responsibility means, “that the church must testify against Marxism, communism, totalitarianism, racism, integrationism and all other unchristian ideologies”.⁶⁶²

Some practical implications

The main alteration in this section is under the subheading “The Dutch Reformed Church and other spheres of life”.

One main part here is the theme of *The Dutch Reformed Church and the Afrikaner people*. In CS 86 there was a section on the bond between DRC and the Afrikaner people. It stated that “The intimate bond between the Dutch Reformed Church and the ‘Afrikaner people’ is a historical fact”. This is now developed to some length, even though the document warns that the preservation or development of a group’s identity “must ... conform to the demands of God’s Word”. In CS 90 the wording ‘historical fact’ is omitted and instead it points out that DRC does not “consider itself to be a national church”.⁶⁶³

That is then followed by a part on *The Dutch Reformed Church and political models*. It is in this section the more extensive change has taken place. It is obvious already by the enlargement of the section. The more interesting question is, of course, whether there is also a change in substance.⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁶² (DRC 1991, p. 30 §§ 224-225); Cf. (DRC 1987, § 218)

⁶⁶³ (DRC 1991, p. 38 § 271); Cf. (DRC 1987, § 296)

⁶⁶⁴ The whole section in CS 86 is no more than 2 not very voluminous pages, and the section is doubled in CS 90

The text starts by claiming that the evaluation of “political models ... always [contains] a strong subjective factor”. This is said to be due to the different experiences among those who take part in this evaluation, and is a factor in explaining why churches and Christians differ in their analysis.⁶⁶⁵ The document thereafter turns its focus to the issue of apartheid as such. In CS 86 this begins with an explanation of the development of ‘separate development’ as part of “white guardianship” and with the purpose of “optimum development of all groups”. In CS 90 it is noted that while “part of the white population considers it a just way to protect the identity and the best interests of the different population groups ... others perceived it as a racist and oppressive system” condemned worldwide.⁶⁶⁶

This notwithstanding, the document continues by arguing “there were also honest and noble intentions” among those who shaped apartheid and that it therefore would be “unreasonable to brand as wrong and bad everything which took place within the political structures of apartheid and to deny the positive developments achieved”.⁶⁶⁷

On the other hand, DRC “acknowledges that for too long it has adjudged the policy of apartheid ... too abstractly and theoretically, and therefore too uncritically”. For too long has “the church allowed forced separation and division of peoples in its own circles” and been aware that apartheid “wrongfully [was favouring one group] above the others”. Therefore, the document states, that “any system which in practice functions in this way, is unacceptable in the light of the Scripture ... and must be rejected as sinful”.⁶⁶⁸

There were many who found it difficult to conceive this as a substantial step towards a radically new position that could function as a springboard for real non-apartheid church unity with the rest of the churches in the ‘family’.

⁶⁶⁵ (DRC 1991, p. 38 § 275)

⁶⁶⁶ (DRC 1991, p. 38-9 § 278); Cf. (DRC 1987, § 304)

⁶⁶⁷ (DRC 1991, p. 39, §§ 279-280)

⁶⁶⁸ (DRC 1991, p. 39-40, §§ 282-285)

8.3.2 Some more South African Reactions on the Church and Society documents

Johann Kinghorn—Afrikaner and DRC member himself—made a thorough analysis of the CS 86 document in an article in the *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* in its March issue 1990—only six months before the CS 90 would be put before the DRC Synod in the coming October. It is difficult not to read it as an ‘outsider’s’ contribution into the discussion that by then was going on mainly behind closed doors in a small group. As will be seen in the quotation below he does not think that the DRC has the ability to take necessary steps towards a radical change on their own.

His evaluation of the CS 86 is done in relation to views expressed by the DRC over time; to some extent already in the account given in the mission policy in the thirties, in positions held in the forties and after the conference on *Die Naturelle-vraagstuk* [The Native Question] in 1950, but especially in the 1974 policy document—*Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*.

In the concluding section of the article he makes the following assessment of CS 86.

“There has been undeniable and considerable movement. It will not do to play this down. ... Having said this, it must however be stated that the movement described in this article can in no way be seen as a paradigm switch. It is a movement closer to the border of the paradigm within which the DRC has operated in these matters for the past fifty years. But it certainly is not a crossing of the border. The struggle which is occurring within the DRC is the struggle to tear the Church loose from the centre of gravity of the ideology. Therefore, it is still a struggle in the sphere of the ideology. The DRC’s struggle is a struggle with itself, not (yet) with the issues of importance in southern Africa. Compared to its own position some fifty years ago the DRC has indeed moved, but compared to the context within which the DRC finds itself today it still has a considerable distance to go.

In the realm of the SACC, struggle means something completely different. There it is a struggle for justice. It very often is a struggle against the DRC inasmuch as it is a struggle against the ideology seen exemplified in the DRC. It is understandable that they find it difficult to see any "real" change in the DRC's position. This is aggravated by the naïve but understandable attempt by the DRC to find refuge in a theology of non-involvement, a tendency which will most likely be reinforced at the coming synod unless the DRC can be shown a way out of the stalemate position in which it finds itself.

...

The DRC has disentangled itself from the ideology about as much as is logically and humanly possible from within. To break loose, helping hands from the outside are necessary. They can only come in the form of ecumenical involvement – involvement in critical solidarity with every step, slow as it may be, of the DRC toward the borderline of the ideology. To cross that borderline is almost like being born again. Without ecumenical help the baby will be still-born. Or even worse it will not be born at all.”⁶⁶⁹

Albeit not without positive recognition of changes and development in the thinking of the DRC, the main outcome of Kinghorn's analysis must be seen as rather disillusioned. In short I find that he is saying: Yes, they have changed since 1935, but they are still far behind. No, they do not understand the South Africa of today and what is demanded of them, and are in great need of help to adjust.

The *laager* mentality seems still to prevail also in the church. Besides those who left for the APK there was another group who whilst staying, with strong support in the DRC ranks—Kinghorn estimates that

⁶⁶⁹ (Kinghorn 1990, p. 35-6) Dr. Kinghorn taught at the Department of Biblical Studies at the University of Stellenbosch

support to comprise some 40% of the DRC membership—was vowing to nullify the CS 86 in the 1990 synod.⁶⁷⁰

Kinghorn's dual but rather critical evaluation is shared by Dr. G. Daan Cloete who argues that the CS 86, "placed next to its predecessor", shows "some significant shifts". Nonetheless, he says, a closer scrutiny reveals "that the basic structure and point of departure of the older document, namely ethnicity, still remains implicitly intact." Added to that is the presumption that the somewhat progressive moderator just elected—Professor Johan Heyns—is unlikely to bring about any substantial change given the conservative stance by the rest of the *moderation*.⁶⁷¹ The aftermath of the Vereeniging conference—and the eggdance Professor Heyns is said to perform—seems to prove him right.

Apartheid is at the very centre of every aspect of societal and personal life in South Africa. The question of how to relate to this is the main backdrop for the discussion between the DRC and the WARC, and therefore also the very issue in the CS 86. Despite that, no explicit definition is given. As a consequence, people in the DRC, after reading in the CS 86 that "The Dutch Reformed Church is convinced that the application of apartheid as a political and social system by which human dignity is adversely affected, and whereby one particular group is detrimentally suppressed by another, cannot be accepted on Christian-ethical grounds", not surprisingly assert that the DRC has discarded apartheid. This, Kinghorn argues, must be rejected, or at most be seen as only marginally true as no-one knows what that apartheid that is rejected looks like.⁶⁷²

Kinghorn sketches how apartheid theologically rested on four pillars that must be dealt with by anyone who wants to trace a development or change within the DRC.⁶⁷³

⁶⁷⁰ (Kinghorn 1990, p. 21-2)

⁶⁷¹ (Cloete 1986, p. 63-4)

⁶⁷² (Kinghorn 1990, p. 22); (DRC 1987, p. 47, § 306)

⁶⁷³ The following section about the four pillars is based on (Kinghorn 1990, p. 23-6)

The first deals with the question of *segregation as a Biblical imperative*. In writings from 1948 segregation is explicitly said to be deduced from the Scripture. A large number of Bible verses were lumped together without any inherent reason or explanation. As Kinghorn notes: "Merely quoting them was considered 'proof' of the obligatory nature of segregation." As I mentioned in section 3.2.3.3 this was still a strategy used in the 1974 document. The CS 86 states instead that "the conviction has gradually grown that a forced separation and division of peoples cannot be considered a biblical imperative" and that "the attempt to justify such an injunction as derived from the Bible must be recognized as an error and be rejected". Kinghorn's conclusion of that is that "one should not read too much into this statement. It does not mean that the DRC rejects apartheid as such. It (merely) means that the exegetical procedure of earlier times is rejected."

The second pillar has to do with *Race*. In the older documents it is obviously clear that the church "most certainly subscribes to the viewpoint of racial apartheid". The view of Kinghorn is that the DRC in the CS 86 document moves away from "overt racism". But the issue is more complicated than that, and I will come back to that below.

The third pillar has to do with the perspective that the division of humanity in races and nations was a *normative* act by God. Based on texts in Genesis 11 and Acts 17 it was stated that "separate nations are accepted by Jesus and the apostles as a natural phenomenon as a result of God's providence". History and sociology were transformed into normativity. In Afrikaner mythology and in the teaching of the Dutch reformed church the story of Babel is the story of how God divided people in nations. This nationalistic approach is still present—"the kingpin around which everything evolves"—albeit "less doctrinary".

The last, and fourth, pillar has to do with the question about *unity* in the church. The old phrase that emphasizes that "in Christ a higher, spiritual unity comes into being" places the unity anywhere but in the factual situations in which people were living. This is developed into a pronounced need for visible unity in the CS 86.

While the question of separation based on race was prevalent in the 30s and 40s, the concept of the nation to a large extent replaced this from the 50s. Race was a difficult concept to maintain after the WWII experiences. This created an illusion that racism by this had been overcome.

It is in this idea, that every people should have its own sphere, its own nation, where they can develop maximally, that the later more distinct ideas about different homelands for each ethnic group has its roots. Thus, to adopt the idea of separation based on the concept of nation gave an illusion that the policy of apartheid contains a proper morality. Even more, it was seen as God-given. In reality, words as race, nation, language and culture are used synonymously or as tools to indicate the differences between for instance white–non-white, Christian–heathen or whatever dichotomy one could think of—just as in the early openly imperialistic days under VOC rule in the Cape Province.⁶⁷⁴

One obvious, almost over-explicit, example that race continued to play an important role is that the question of prohibiting mixed marriages—and sexual relations between peoples of different ‘race’—still in the 1974 policy document (that was confirmed as valid also in 1982) was an issue to keep a firm stand by.

Only later did this idea—the separation based on race or the concept of nations—give way for a new perspective; [t]he idea that power is the force behind the dividing measures. The CS 86 admits that "the conviction has grown ... that the enforced separation of nations ... was not ... a biblical imperative".⁶⁷⁵ But as Kinghorn notes, it did not lead to the abolition of those laws that were the main instruments in the apartheid legislation—the Population Registration Act and the Group Areas Act.⁶⁷⁶

One major difference between the 1974 and 1986 documents is their very different *sitz im leben*. The rather blunt doctrinal point of view in 1974 is, more or less by necessity, changed into more restrained formulations in a situation where the uprising of Soweto has taken place, international criticism has erupted, sanctions have been imposed and the South African society is in a constant state of emergency. Nonetheless, it is only some effects of apartheid that is scrutinized not apartheid per se. Kinghorn means that it should have been impossible for the authors of the CS 86 not to understand that it was the dismantling of the latter

⁶⁷⁴ See page 45

⁶⁷⁵ (DRC 1987, p. 47, § 305)

⁶⁷⁶ (Kinghorn 1990, p. 27)

that was demanded by critics internally as well as externally. The only way to understand why they did not go further in their analysis and proposed more decisive steps towards the abolition of apartheid thinking in the *Church and Society* document is to assume, he says, that “the DRC was not prepared to question its own fundamental assumptions, nor was it prepared to question the fundamental assumptions of the policy of apartheid”.⁶⁷⁷

The way the two documents arrange their material differs. While the earlier document takes as a starting point cosmological and ontological views CS 86 has ecclesiology as its essential vantage point. One reason for this might be that the DRC tries to leave the societal arena to move into a safer haven. I find it at least fairly easy to read paragraph 309 in CS 86 in that way:

“The Dutch Reformed Church unequivocally dissociates itself from the view that the church is called to prescribe any political model or policy for the government. It proclaims only that the demands of love, justice and human dignity must be embodied in society.”⁶⁷⁸

That such an attempt is futile does not need to be discussed here. One major theme in this ecclesiological discussion is the question on the visible unity of the church. Kinghorn’s analysis of the developed ecclesiology ends up in finding that “a non-theological, non-Christian ‘plus’ is characteristic of the ecclesiology”. He finds that the concepts of race and nation play definite roles in a church that “not [is] the community of faith *per se*, but the community of faith *within* racial and ethnic parameters”.⁶⁷⁹ The church is from now, due to the 1986 synodical decision, open to anyone, at least in principle—which was one of the reasons for the APK-people to break away—but the oneness, and real unity, of the church is still rejected.

In my view the situation can be understood as to follow the pattern of change on the political national level where the tri-chamber parliament from 1983 kept the system and racial division while giving

⁶⁷⁷ (Kinghorn 1990, p. 28)

⁶⁷⁸ (DRC 1987, p. 48, § 309)

⁶⁷⁹ (Kinghorn 1990, p. 31)

some minor possibilities for certain groups. The church followed in the footsteps of the government, but did not dare to take the lead and to raise a prophetic voice—as they according to themselves abstained from being political.

As Kinghorn puts it: “When CS states that the DRC is open for membership to anyone who wants to hear the gospel, CS refers to individuals, not to the structures (neither of society, nor of the Church). ...*racism (at least in theory) is now officially extinct, but in terms of structures, the question has not even been posed*”.⁶⁸⁰ [italics in original text]

John W and Steve de Gruchy, by comparison, describe the CS 86 shortly in the following way:

“[A]t its General Synod in 1986 the NGK finally, if timidly, gave up the attempt to provide biblical and theological justification for apartheid in its report on Church and Society ... History had unfolded in such a way, however, that the new position of the NGK was totally inadequate”.⁶⁸¹

I think this—that the position of the DRC as expressed in the CS 86 was obsolete—could be said even more with the CS 90. By this time Nelson Mandela had been released, the ANC unbanned and the whole idea of apartheid was on the verge of being sent off to the lumber room of history. It is therefore no surprise that the CS 90 did not receive much attention—it had nothing to say to the new dispensation that was about to come. This is one reason for the CS 90 to pass rather unnoticed and without much debate—everything was already said after the CS 86.

The UNISA (University of South Africa, Pretoria) Church historian Christina Landmann gave her critical evaluation of, among other things, the CS documents in an article in 1991 under the heading *The Anthropology of Apartheid According to Official Sources*. She finds that the CS 86 can be summarised in ten concise arguments. Not much, according to her, is new while compared for instance with the 1974

⁶⁸⁰ (Kinghorn 1990, p. 32-3)

⁶⁸¹ (De Gruchy and De Gruchy 2004, p. 195)

document as all new insights are qualified by ‘however’-clauses that more or less nullify the possible renewal.⁶⁸²

About CS 90 she is very brief: “The 1990-version of *Church and Society* is less racist in its formulations of principles and more pietistic in its inclusion of prayers and a Biblical emphasis. It accomplishes this by referring less to people and their actual situation”.⁶⁸³

8.4 Rustenburg

That things were on the move politically became very obvious as we enter the 90s. Although many were sceptical, due to all letdowns in the past, some kind of reform was expected to be announced when F W de Klerk in February 2, 1990, was to give a speech at his first parliamentary session as president. The announcement of the imminent release of Nelson Mandela as well as of hundreds of other freedom fighters and the un-banning of the banned organisations, including the ANC and the Communist Party went far beyond the expectations. A journey towards a drastic change—a negotiated revolution, to use the words of the journalist Allister Sparks—began. To many, it created almost a trauma as they sensed it to destroy all the *volk* ever had stood for. For others it created exhilaration or disbelief. To Sparks this was not a change, de Klerk “transmuted [the country] ... and unleashed forces that within four years would sweep away the old South Africa and establish an altogether new and different country”.⁶⁸⁴

Bearing in mind that this is written with key at hand, in September after the election and inauguration of Nelson Mandela as president, it nonetheless gives a clue to the situation in which the Rustenburg meeting took place: A situation, for some, of anticipation, expectation that

⁶⁸² Some abbreviated examples: If a government is not obedient to God, it must be resisted – however only by orderly ways of reform and not through violence or extremist non-violent ways such as disinvestment; Marriages may be racially mixed – however, serious tensions can be expected in such marriages; The church should be a community open to all races – however, it must be allowed to stay indigenous. (Landman 1991, p. 41-2)

⁶⁸³ (Landman 1991, p. 42)

⁶⁸⁴ (Sparks 1996 (1994), p. 5-9)

real change was plausible and for others of bewilderment and dismay. Also the churches were looking forward towards a new South Africa.

There is also another preamble to the Rustenburg consultation in which de Klerk plays a special role. In his first Christmas speech to the nation he had “appealed to the churches to formulate a strategy conducive to negotiation, reconciliation and change”. The government’s involvement in church affairs was a doubtful thing and it rekindled animosity. The president withdrew and the South African Council of Churches took a lead dealing with the issue and called in January 1990 for a huge meeting at its office in Khotso House in Johannesburg with representatives from a wide variety of churches.⁶⁸⁵

The result became the establishment of the Rustenburg Conference in November the same year.⁶⁸⁶

8.4.1 The Proceedings

The aim of the 230 delegates, representing 97 denominations and several organisations, was to try to make a “genuine attempt by a representative group of the Church leaders at providing God-centred solutions to the problems that are hampering progress in this time of transition” by “addressing the results of apartheid”.⁶⁸⁷

As the conferences gathered so many participants from all spheres of South Africa it came to contain a multiplicity of views on society, apartheid, and the role of the church. Among the themes that were dealt with were: Understanding South African reality; The Church situation and Obstacles to Christian Witness in South Africa; Church Perspectives on the Future of South Africa; Church/State-relations; The Role of the Church in a Changing South Africa.

The five day conference followed a rather classical structure with two speakers who presumably conveyed opposing views on each subject. Thereafter reactions were given by one or two respondents. This

⁶⁸⁵ (Alberts and Chikane 1991, p. 13-6)

⁶⁸⁶ Its formal designation was: The National Conference of Church Leaders in South Africa.

⁶⁸⁷ (Alberts and Chikane 1991, p. 13)

has led to a comprehensive report where all papers and responses could be important points of departure for an analysis. Besides being read and commented, the papers were discussed in groups and a statement was prepared. The rather extensive amount of input created some doubts as to whether they really came down to the important issues. Nico Smit expressed grave doubts about that in a personal statement and meant that the conference “was presented with a wide variety of generalities on the situation, instead of a limited number of constructive statements which would help the inhabitants of the country to realize the seriousness of our situation”. His fear was that the result would be as at the Cottesloe Consultation thirty years earlier, and thereby “fail the Lord of the Church, as well as all the peoples of the country”.⁶⁸⁸

Not only was the input extensive. Also the Declaration⁶⁸⁹ turned out to be a rather lengthy piece divided into the following sections: Context; Confession; Declaration; Affirmation; Restitution and a Commitment to Action; and Conclusion. It is, nonetheless a strong declaration denouncing “apartheid in its intention, its implementation and its consequences as an evil policy” and declaring “[t]he practice and defence of apartheid as though it were biblically and theologically legitimate ... an act of disobedience to God”.⁶⁹⁰ In the *affirmation* it clarifies that “[o]bedience to Christ ... requires that we develop an economic system based on justice, compassion and co-responsibility” to the benefit of those who today are in need.⁶⁹¹ This is followed up in the section on *restitution and a commitment to action* by declaring that “[c]onfession and forgiveness necessarily require restitution”.⁶⁹² The implementation of a new dispensation of justice should incorporate the “exclusion of all racial, gender, class and religious discrimination”.⁶⁹³

⁶⁸⁸ (N. Smith, Statement 1991, p. 265)

⁶⁸⁹ (Alberts and Chikane 1991, p. 275-86)

⁶⁹⁰ (Alberts and Chikane 1991, p. 277)

⁶⁹¹ (Alberts and Chikane 1991, p. 281)

⁶⁹² (Alberts and Chikane 1991, p. 284)

⁶⁹³ (Alberts and Chikane 1991, p. 282)

Not all of the above is directly of interest for my study and consequently I will restrict myself to only one part—the paper given by Professor Willie Jonker and the responses to it.

8.4.1.1 The Jonker/DRC confession

Professor Jonker, a prominent DRC theologian at Stellenbosch University, presented his paper under the heading *Understanding the Church situation and Obstacles to Christian Witness in South Africa*.⁶⁹⁴

A main theme in it is that the divisions within the Church is a result of the socio-political situation and that the white DRC constituency to such a large extent identified with the cause of the overall Afrikaner group that they “neglected the pain and suffering, humiliation and injustice that dominated the experience of the black community”.⁶⁹⁵ The church as such has not provided a lead towards the abolishment of apartheid but excluded itself from a possible positive development by opting out itself: The SACC in the 30s, the Cottesloe 1960, Vereeniging 1989 to mention some occasions.

Having said that, he maintains that the DRC at its last Synod—just before the Rustenburg Consultation—had distanced itself significantly from earlier position: “There need be no doubt that the DRC is sincere in its rejection of apartheid” he says, adding that other churches might be hesitant to accept its bona fides, and therefore this sincerity has to become visible in its deeds.

This belief in the sincere change, at heart, at the Synod gives him the “liberty” to give his own and his church’s confession:

“I confess before you and before the Lord, not only my own sin and guilt, and my personal responsibility for the political, social, economical and structural wrongs that have been done to many of you, and the results of which you and our whole country are still suffering from, but *vicariously* I dare also to do that in the name of the DRC of

⁶⁹⁴ (Jonker 1991)

⁶⁹⁵ (Jonker 1991, p. 90)

which I am a member and for the Afrikaans people as a whole”.⁶⁹⁶

Not surprisingly this stirred up the conference. His own excuse was in line with what had happened the first day at the Vereeniging conference the year before. But how could he talk on behalf of the church?

Desmond Tutu, in his often emotional way of reacting, embraced Willie Jonker and what he had said in every way and said that when a

“confession is made, then those of us who have been wronged must say 'We forgive you', so that together we may move to the reconstruction of our land. That confession is not cheaply made and the response is not cheaply given”.⁶⁹⁷

The delegates from the DRMC and the DRCA were much more hesitant and issued a statement wherein they expressed their position to be “enormously compromised” if the conference should accept the excuse of the DRC—as delivered by Professor Jonker—without any hearing from them. The personal excuse was received and accepted.⁶⁹⁸ Finally, Dr. Pieter Potgieter, moderator of the DRC stepped up and declared that the statement Professor Jonker had made on the position of his church “precisely reiterated the decision made by our General Synod in Bloemfontein recently”.⁶⁹⁹

For those in the DRC leadership who wanted to be able to give proof of its change—for instance as a reply to the demands from the WARC—the confession by Professor Jonker was convenient. Yet, not everybody on the Afrikaner side was happy; there were those in the National Party and the church who “were furious with Jonker’s act of betrayal”.⁷⁰⁰

⁶⁹⁶ (Jonker 1991, p. 92)

⁶⁹⁷ (Tutu 1991, p. 99)

⁶⁹⁸ (DRMC and DRCA 1991, p. 261)

⁶⁹⁹ (Potgieter 1991, p. 100)

⁷⁰⁰ (De Gruchy and De Gruchy 2004, p. 211)

Freek Swanepoel meant that “it took a year or two before it was accepted [in the DRC] not only as Jonker’s personal excuse”.⁷⁰¹

Charles Villa-Vicencio, University of Cape Town, also read a paper on Church/State-relation. Without expressing any doubt concerning Professor Jonker’s personal integrity and honesty he nonetheless questions

“whether this means that the NGK is now ready (indeed, is it able?) to translate its theological rejection of apartheid into a program of action? Is it ready to join the member Churches of the South African Council of Churches in calling for the scrapping of all apartheid laws? Is it ready to prepare the nation for democratic rule? This, ultimately, is the litmus test of true and sincere repentance.”⁷⁰²

8.4.2 Outcome

The main substantial outcome of the consultation is the *Declaration*. It could serve as a source for deliberations on any level in the churches, ecumenical study groups and among anyone who wanted to reflect on the church for the future.

The last but one section urged furthermore those churches and organisations that were present—representing some 90 percent of the Christian community—urgently to work for a new economic order to the benefit of the poor, to support the unemployed, address the hunger issue, to commence affirmative action for women’s rights, to deal with the AIDS question. It also challenged the churches to provide financial means to work for reconstruction and renewal of South African society. This indicates a strong faith that what has begun to happen will continue in the same direction. There should be no looking back.

What Louw Alberts and Frank Chikane especially pin-points as an important outcome is the “spirit of humility and confession” that prevailed, the attempt to work towards a united Christian witness, and that

⁷⁰¹ (Swanepoel 2003, m. 43)

⁷⁰² (Villa-Vicencio 1991, p. 179)

we have, “[f]or the first time ... condemned the system of apartheid together with those who supported it in the past”.⁷⁰³

This last issue is what often is commented on when the Rustenburg Conference is dealt with elsewhere. Also the DRC is making use of this in its argumentation towards the WARC.

8.5 Journey with apartheid

After *Church and Society*, Vereeniging and Rustenburg a new phase began. The ‘negotiated revolution’ was on its way.

Finally, in 1993 a meeting between the WARC and the family of reformed churches could take place. A short description regarding that meeting is provided on page 184. The following year a new synod met. There they endorsed the ‘response’ given by its representatives at that meeting—containing the notion of unity as the ‘acid test’—and declared that they wanted to be able to take up its full position in the WARC. They also abstained from revising CS once more and noted that the situation now demanded other deliberations and therefore that synod did not cause much of a stir.⁷⁰⁴

Due to this fact, and the fact that the CS 90 was rather uninteresting to many, the different pattern of encounters between the DRC, the WARC and other stakeholders makes the 90s look quite different from the 80s. Therefore it can seem as if especially the first half of nineteen ninety was rather ‘quiet’.

In July 1997, some months before the next General Council by the WARC, which was to be held in Debrecen, Hungary, the General Synodal Commission (GSC)⁷⁰⁵ of the DRC presented its *Story of the Dutch Reformed Church’s Journey with Apartheid 1960 – 1994: A testimony and a Confession*.

⁷⁰³ (Alberts and Chikane 1991, p. 9-11)

⁷⁰⁴ (DRC 1994c, p. 443, 500, 578, 597)

⁷⁰⁵ The General Synodal Committee is appointed by the General Synod to deal, among other things, with urgent matters when the Synod is not in session; Cf. DRC 1997, p. ii

This document begins by stating that every church has to fulfil its God-given calling “within the world of its time”. As for the DRC it meant that it had to fulfil its calling “during the time when apartheid in South Africa degenerated into an oppressive system”.

Although the DRC had taken the decision not to respond positively to the request by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to make a submission, there was in the leadership a great “unanimity [that the] story of this church with regard to relations between peoples and races ... should now be told”.⁷⁰⁶

The document declares that it is a time of stock-taking of the apartheid era in South Africa. Therefore, as the DRC was “involved in a particular way”, it is necessary also for the church to look back. The document expresses an awareness that the DRC apartheid story goes far back but declares that the main story that will be told here starts in 1960. The Cottesloe consultation is an important reason for that. The closing year—1994—is due to two things: First of all, that in this year constitutional apartheid was totally dismantled and a government elected by the whole population rose to power, but secondly and mainly, to the notion of the 1994 DRC Synod as “the Synod of Reconciliation”. The hope of the GSC is that the production of this document will make “a modest contribution towards promoting reconciliation”. Therefore the document shall be seen as both a testimony and a confession.⁷⁰⁷

Chapter 2 in this document deals with the period before 1960. Among other thing it mentions that the issue on “‘rasse-apartheid’ (racial separateness)” and that this was “consonant with principles laid down in the holy Scriptures” was discussed and accepted at synods in the early forties.⁷⁰⁸ In the DRC church paper *Die Kerkbode* one could in 1948 find formulations like “[We have] as a church ... striven constantly for the separation of these two national groups (white and black). In this regard one can correctly refer to apartheid as church policy”. Also theologians within DRC who did not regard apartheid as a “Biblical impera-

⁷⁰⁶ (DRC 1997, p. i)

⁷⁰⁷ (DRC 1997, p. 1-2)

⁷⁰⁸ (DRC 1997, p. 5)

tive” is said to have been “prepared to accept it as a practical structural arrangement”.⁷⁰⁹

Furthermore, after 1948 the DRC “urged the government to implement the policy of apartheid”. Some laws, such as the mixed marriages act was “chiefly ... a result of sustained pressure from the Dutch Reformed Church”. Other laws, like the Group Areas Act was approved by the DRC.⁷¹⁰ In doing this, the DRC saw themselves not as battling “*against* people of colour. On the contrary, it was a battle *for* them” as a way to fulfilling the “high calling” of a “white guardianship” in order to convey the “message: the everlasting gospel”.⁷¹¹

The document mentions the Cottesloe meeting as an important event leading to “great tumult in Afrikaner ranks” and to the adoptions of resolutions in many local churches that denounced the statement from Cottesloe. Some prominent figures in the church at that time meant that “all the good things offered to coloured and black people by the policy of separation had not been recognised”.⁷¹²

The next section in the document tells the story that took place between the Cottesloe dealings and 1990. The DRC rejected the Christian Institute (CI) in 1966 as heretical and asked its members to withdraw. The conflict between these two must, according to this document, be seen as a way by the DRC to act against “forces [in the CI] threatening the national policy of apartheid”. While saying that they confessed to having acted erroneously themselves. Nonetheless, they then provide the statement—called shocking by Russel Botman—that “[i]ts ‘Christian’ umbrella covered all manner of things, and the power and influence of outspoken atheists in the organization had the result that virtually all of the Afrikaans theologians who had at one stage been sympathetic towards the aims of the institute distanced themselves from it long before the CI was declared illegal in 1977”.⁷¹³

⁷⁰⁹ (DRC 1997, p. 6 (Die Kerkbode 22 September 1948))

⁷¹⁰ (DRC 1997, p. 7)

⁷¹¹ (DRC 1997, p. 8; The text is spaced out in original)

⁷¹² (DRC 1997, p. 11)

⁷¹³ About the CI – see section 3.3.1.2; (DRC 1997, p. 14); (Botman 1997, p. 27)

When the DRC produced its 1974 policy document (See section 3.2.3.3) the DRC “was convinced that the policy followed by the then government could be ‘scripturally justified’”.⁷¹⁴ The close relation between the DRC and the government is illustrated by the fact that DRC some years in the seventies received money from secret government funds.⁷¹⁵

At the end of the seventies the Dutch Reformed Mission church became much more outspoken and challenged the DRC.⁷¹⁶ Then came 1982 as a “decisive year” with Ottawa General Council and the decision of *Status confessionis*.⁷¹⁷ The document declares that the “General Synod [of the DRC] ... was shaken”. Nonetheless the proposal to withdraw from WARC did not obtain the necessary two-thirds majority. The document concludes laconically that “In July 1997 the Dutch Reformed Church was still a ‘suspended member’ of the WARC”.⁷¹⁸ The adoption of the Church and Society of 1986 is here seen as a radical move away from certain views contained in the 1974 document. Some parts, “caused great commotion” that in some months led to a schism and the establishment of the Afrikaans Protestantse Kerk.⁷¹⁹

Then the document in the following section continues by asking the question whether the DRC in what it is saying in the revised Church and Society-document in 1990 is just “parroting the decisions taken in 1990 by the then Government”—a view that has been expressed in some ecclesial and political camps. The Synod adopting the CS 90 was held in October and the government declared the new policy in February. The document is answering its question by maintaining that it would be unfair to say so, as the draft was finalised in the end of 1989.⁷²⁰

Thereafter it is pointing to the so-called Rustenburg conference, held in November 1990. One leading DRC theologian from Stellen-

⁷¹⁴ (DRC 1997, p. 15)

⁷¹⁵ (DRC 1997, p. 15-6)

⁷¹⁶ (DRC 1997, p. 16)

⁷¹⁷ (DRC 1997, p. 17)

⁷¹⁸ (DRC 1997, p. 18)

⁷¹⁹ (DRC 1997, p. 20)

⁷²⁰ (DRC 1997, p. 23)

bosch, Willy Jonker, confessed his own sin and guilt, and did the same on behalf of the church. The delegation from DRC declared that they associated themselves with Willie Jonker, and Desmond Tutu expressed his acceptance of that. The whole thing created some “disquiet in ecclesiastical ranks” but many within DRC looked upon this as an official Dutch Reformed Church acknowledgement “that apartheid is a sin and confesses that its part in enforcing and upholding apartheid was wrong”.⁷²¹ The document notes especially that “although many churches were willing—and eager—to hold bilateral discussions ...one important ecumenical door remained closed: that of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches”. However, they sent a delegation to South Africa in 1993. The main task was to find out whether or not DRC had fulfilled the requirements posed on it in Ottawa.⁷²²

Towards the end the document presents 26 theses.⁷²³ Among them are the following:

There was a broad consensus that separate development was a Biblical imperative (2). It can be accepted that there were good intentions amongst those who wanted to justify apartheid (3). The policy of apartheid was allowed to degenerate (4). The church did not take enough trouble to establish whether, in practice, apartheid complied with love and righteousness (5). In a sense, the DRC took a lead in establishing the apartheid concept (6). The church did not maintain a critical distance to the government (6). The DRC tended to put the interests of the Afrikaners over the interest of other people (9). Guidance on societal issues in the churches has been lacking (10). The suffering and poverty endured by people in South Africa ... cannot be ascribed to apartheid alone. A variety of social and economic realities contributed to their plight (16). The DRC will proceed with its endeavours to bring about greater unity in the church (20). The DRC should have made more serious enquiries on what happened under the different states of emergency (23). The DRC has completed its journey with apartheid (26).

⁷²¹ (DRC 1997, p. 23-5)

⁷²² (DRC 1997, p. 26)

⁷²³ (DRC 1997, p. 35-8)

Although rather direct and open about its historic role, the DRC document does not present any new standpoints. Now it is up to the URCSA, to other churches in South Africa and to the WARC to reflect on how the continuation should be.

8.6 Closing reflections

There is a Finnish dance called *letkajenkka*. The participants are dancing in a row/circle and moving both backwards and forwards, but now and then there shall be one more step in the advancing direction than in the other so in the end the overall movement of the dancers is forward even though it sometimes can be questioned whether any real progress is in evidence.

This chapter is dealing with something similar. All these documents and conferences/consultations/deliberations: Did they really move anything in any direction? Did the DRC change or not? Was it all a play for time or was it a necessity to take the time? Did they move, but slower than the surroundings so that in reality they became abandoned?

The DRC has moved to and fro in many issues as pointed out in the chapter. Former God-given ‘facts’ e.g. on nations as rooted in ontology has been forsaken, but the Afrikaner community can on the other hand be declared to have a special position. The absolute prohibition against interracial sexual relations has been given up, but declared to be problematic. Scriptural references to the position of black people in society is abandoned, but little is done about the legislation still keeping them in a subordinate position. The church-state issue is dealt with warily, by arguing that the church shouldn’t deal with societal matters, but by doing this, a *carte blanche* is given for the government to continue to govern in an un-godly way.

This ‘on the one hand—and on the other hand’—conduct is shown to be frequent.

Landmann describes it in this way: “all new insights are qualified by ‘however’-clauses”. Kinghorn is responding both yes and no to the question on whether the DRC has changed: “Yes, they have changed

since 1935, but only within a 50 year old paradigm, and are still far behind. No, they do not understand the South Africa of today and what is demanded of them, and are in great need of help to adjust.” The report of the SACC concludes: In 1950 the DRC organized, through its mission council ‘Federale Sending Raad’ a congress on “Die Naturelevraagstuk” [The Native question], during which the whole complex of relations between ‘races’ and “die totale maatskaplike *struktuur* van Suid-Afrika” was penetrated. There, they say, a ‘complete’ policy of apartheid was taken: On education, church service, social life, economy and political foundation, and the following 36 years thereafter—that is up to when the CS 86 is produced—“can be described as concentration on more and more sophisticating of the formulation of apartheid”. De Gruchy means the gap between the DRC and the rest of the world has widened to such an extent “that the new position of the NGK was totally inadequate”. Finally also Professor Jonker at the Rustenburg Consultation maintains that the DRC has excluded itself from a possible positive development by opting out itself.

Yes, change has taken place. But hesitant and not in accord with what happened around them. The mission policy taken in 1935, developed in 1950, and restated in 1974, seems in many ways still to be present also in 1997. Or as was said in the SACC analysis of the CS 86: The DRC has done an extensive missionary outreach work in several countries in Africa and that can be seen as "a tremendous record of its Missionary work ...[but]comes into crises when you come [to the question of] 'Missio Dei'; What is God doing in the world?" There the answer from the DRC is: "separate church formations for the different population groups". One example of that is Figure 3 on page 249.

An important change during the period covered above that must be taken note of is that the black churches, at the Vereeniging conference, for the first time clearly envisaged that they wanted one united, non-racial Reformed Church; an ecclesiological follow-up of the Freedom Charter of 1955.

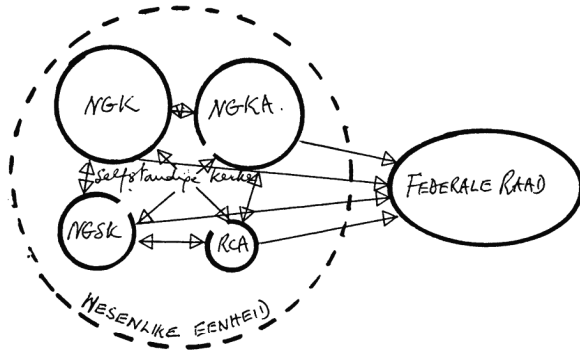
Then, what role can one presume that the WARC has had? I will come back to that question later but take note of the words of Douglas Bax who says that the:

"decision [of Ottawa] has without any doubt dramatically helped to drag the NGK, in spite of its first piqued and angry reaction and however reluctantly, to reconsider its support, for apartheid."

II

BYLAAG 3

POSISIE VAN NIER KERK VAN N.G.-KERKFAMILIE VOOR 1986.



POSISIE VAN NIER KERKE VAN N.G.-KERKFAMILIE NA 1986

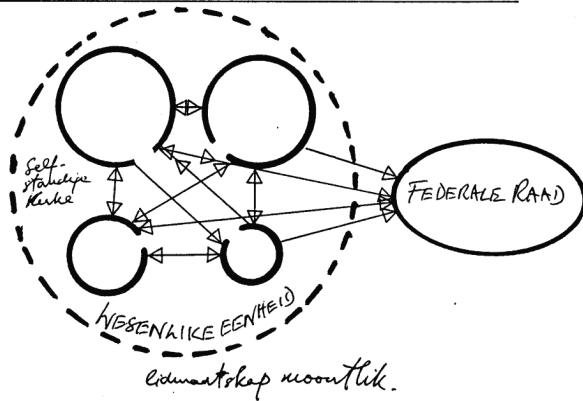


Figure 3 The family before and after the CS 86

In the lower circle, indicating the consequence of the CS 86, the text to the left says "independent churches" and at the bottom of the circle the text says "essential unity". Deliberations on issues of common interest should as earlier be handled in a federal council. The small text beneath the second group of circles says: 'membership [in the NGK (DRC) for non-whites: my insertion] possible.

9 Summary of findings in chapters 4 to 8

This dissertation is telling a story of a conflict. Formally it is a conflict between two adversaries. Therefore it is no surprise that a discussion of goalposts unfolds. Did the ball pass between the goalposts? Or, should not the goal have been moved to another position. Seen in a formal way no goalposts were moved—and the ball was shot between the goalposts. Others, that besides the two adversaries also are important stakeholders, argue that this—seen out of a deeper analysis of what the rules really said—was wrong and that the goalposts ought to have been moved.

One of the two adversaries is a church in South Africa, with strong roots in a Calvinistic tradition mainly of Dutch origin—the Dutch Reformed Church, or as it sometimes is accentuated: the white Dutch Reformed Church. Since the arrival of the Dutch in 1652, by way of the Dutch *Vereenigde Oost-indische Compagnie*, this church has held strong positions in all areas that finally made up the Republic of South Africa. Without being a state church in a traditional sense it has come very close to that position.

The other part is the community of Reformed Churches worldwide—the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, comprising some 75 million members in 214 member churches in 107 countries. Its beginning dates some 135 years back and has until very late been a very Western institution. It took until the 1980s until ‘the rest of the world’ became really visible—besides as an object—in the work of the Alliance.

In this chapter I will pin-point some central aspects in the development of this conflict. I will here leave the contrapuntal method aside and instead try to structure the material in a chronological order according to the different players as far as possible and as far as it functions as a crash-course to the topic I am dealing with.

9.1 The Players

9.1.1 The DRC

During the first 100 years of Dutch sovereignty in the Cape region of what today is South Africa no other Church besides the DRC was allowed to establish itself. German Lutherans for instance had to become Reformed. The Church in place was under the supremacy of the mother church in Amsterdam, but in reality governed by the Company, and as the main interest by them was to maximize their return they had little interest in taking high costs for ministers and local congregations. Very little was done of missionary work among the indigenous people—the San and the Khoikhoi.

Besides using the indigenous peoples as workers, slaves were brought to the region from South–East Asia and other parts of the African continent. Besides the reasons for the Company not to be active in the ‘Christianizing project’ also individual farmers and business-men were hesitant to strive for the conversion of those working for them. There are several reasons for this: One has to do with the religio-ideological view that they as Boers were an elect people. Being here on African soil was a result of having entered into a holy Covenant with God and gone from Europe to southern Africa in a special exodus. It was thus impossible for them to think that the wild and barbarous heathens that happened to be there ever could be part of that. The other reason was much more pragmatic: To baptize slaves was to give away necessary means of cheap labour force as a baptized slave ought to be emancipated. These two perspectives in relation to ‘the native question’ can be clearly discernible throughout the South African history: On the one hand the ideological—keep the black heathens far away in their own lands; On the other hand, the economic and pragmatic attitude—we must have good access to cheap labour force in the mines and on the farms. Nonetheless, some non-whites became Christianized and joined local DRC congregations.

Gradually the DRC acquired a more independent status. In the 1857 they decided two important things. The first was to take up mission work—in South Africa and in surrounding countries. Secondly they decided to allow for separation in the churches as some white members could not stand the situation: White and non-white members

should not share services, should not share the same Holy Communion, and should not share the same church buildings.

This meant in reality that the mission enterprise the DRC began went hand in hand with a policy of separation. At the end of the nineteenth century—at the time of the huge colonial mission project that was pouring out all over Africa—the DRC did more or less the same at home. One obvious example of that is the establishment in 1881 of a separate church for coloureds—the Dutch Reformed Mission Church. Albeit they after 1857 had not been allowed to share the services and Lord's Table with whites, they had nevertheless been members in the same church. From 1881 the non-whites were forced to leave for a separate church. Several other churches were over time established for certain non-white groups. A strong nationalistic striving grew, not least due to the terrible result of the Anglo-Boer war between 1899 and 1902. The missionary thinking became partner to this. When finally—for the first time—the DRC formulated its mission policy in 1935 it was mainly a blueprint of the idea of separation that already was present in the existence of separate churches for different 'race' groups.

Much of the missional thinking of the DRC functioned as a platform for the National Party when they won the election in 1948 and seized the power. For this there are several reasons. One is that the understanding in the Church of the Afrikaners as an elect people also was an underlying 'truth' for the political leadership. That is not surprising as they to a large extent had their denominational background in the DRC or other Reformed Churches. The secret, or semi-secret, nationalistic cultural organisation Broederbond—with its explicit aim at strengthening the Afrikaner's cause—was a strong uniting factor between the Church and the State.

When I study the documents from the 60s and 70s that in a sense replace the mission policy of 1935, it is obvious that the DRC is relying on the Reformed tradition about the relation to the state. They happily pointed out that the civil government, like the church, was a gift of God and that as such it had a duty to express God's rule over the world. But they stopped short of the words about the Church as a guardian against misuse of power by the same authority. Instead the DRC gave full support—also theologically—to the development of the apartheid state. Critical voices from abroad was turned down by referring to the special,

and difficult, situation in the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-colored South Africa that people in other countries could not understand. The media was also said to distort the situation and the critics were communists and atheists. This was especially true for the World Council of Churches. Neither the WARC, nor the South African Council of Churches gave voice to a meaningful criticism in the eyes of the DRC. Step by step the DRC isolated itself from all and everyone that could have helped them to reflect upon their theology and its implementation in relation to the state. They became the National Party in prayer.

9.1.2 The WARC

Without any doubt the WARC dealt with the South Africa issue rather early. In the 60s and 70s it is possible to follow it in the deliberations in the Executive Council and at its General Councils. The general emancipation that is taking place in Africa can be assumed to have a role in that. The criticism regarding racism is clear. At the General Council in 1970 they declared that a church that by doctrine and/or practice affirms segregation of peoples as a law for its life cannot be regarded as an authentic member of the body of Christ. It was a strong saying but not much is happening. Many good words, but little workshop. The most important thing that might have happened during the 70s was a study programme for the member churches on Human Rights and on Theology of Liberation. This was a base that was paving the way for coming decisions.

Due to financial problems it took twelve years before the next General Council that took place in Ottawa in Canada in 1982.

9.2 The conflict

My impression is that when the churches met in Ottawa no particular preparations had been made for any specific statement regarding apartheid, and even less for any action.

Despite that the Council took the outstandingly strong statement of a *Status confessionis* which literally means a situation of confessing. A more developed definition could be as follows: a Christian, a group of Christians, a church, or a group of churches are of the opinion that a

situation has developed, a moment of truth has dawned, in which nothing less than their most fundamental confession concerning the Christian gospel itself, is at stake, so that they feel compelled to witness and act over against this threat.

The WARC—pushed by representatives from the non-white South African member churches—decided that the situation in South Africa where the DRC gave support to, and theological sanction of, the apartheid policy of the regime had reached this level of gravity. An overwhelming majority voted for the suspension of the DRC and one more Church until they rejected apartheid. Three conditions should be fulfilled before they were allowed to return. These conditions were: that a) Black Christians shouldn't be excluded from Church services, [in the DRC and the NHK churches] b) Concrete support in word and deed was to be given to those who suffer under the system of apartheid, c) Unequivocal synod resolutions should be made which reject apartheid and commit the Church to dismantle it in both church and politics.

The motion was adopted with an overwhelming majority. The DRC delegates opposed the decision and went home to inform their synod that met only a month later. Naturally the question arose as to whether the DRC should leave the WARC. It came close to that as a majority voted for it, but the necessary two-thirds majority was not reached. The Synod re-iterated its missiological standpoints from 1974 and took a decision that they the coming four years would work out new positions that also would serve as the answer to the WARC.

9.3 The match

The 'match' took place between 1982 and 1998. The suspension was finally removed when the DRC at its 1998 Synod accepted a Joint declaration that had been proposed at the WARC General Council in Debrecken the previous year.

During this time South Africa itself underwent a dramatic change. In 1990 the new government under F W de Klerk released Nelson Mandela after 27 years in prison and with him several other political detainees. The ANC and several political and anti-apartheid groupings were unbanned. The dawn of a negotiated revolution had come. After the extremely difficult last years of the 80s when the country gradually

became ungovernable and the State of Emergency was constantly in force a new situation developed where it was not as easy as before to align the church and the state with each other. The cause of the Afrikaners was more difficult to discern and the question arose about what the way forward for the church of the Afrikaners should look like. 'New' words came to the fore: negotiation, reconciliation, rainbow nation.

In May 1994 Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as president for a new South Africa. Apartheid—or as its proponents in state and church often said: separate development—was gone. At least as a policy for the state.

9.3.1 Deliberations

It took in reality five years before the DRC provided any real answer regarding the suspension decision in Ottawa. It came with the *Church and Society 1996* policy document that was replacing the earlier one from the 70s. To some extent it dissociates the church from earlier positions of biblical motivated attitudes to the separation of different peoples. Nonetheless, still it declares that there is an intimate bond between the Afrikaners and the Church. It also declares that the concept of race plays no role in the Bible. But still, there is no repudiation of apartheid as such as sin and contrary to the gospel. At most, some of its manifestation is criticized.

Not surprisingly the WARC does not accept this as a fulfilment of the demands so as to re-instate the DRC into the fellowship. The WARC continuously follows the development in South Africa, in Church and society. That was another decision at the Ottawa General Council. They try to establish meeting-places but fail almost every time due to hesitation within the DRC. While the discussion with the DRC is weak the discussion with the so-called daughter churches—i.e. the churches the DRC created for non-whites—develops as their own position theologically and practically is strengthened over time.

In 1990 a revised version of the 1986 Church and Society document is produced. It alters the perspectives on some views but is in the whole a rather disappointing document. The major question still remains unsolved—the abandoning of apartheid as such, not just in some of its expressions—despite words about how the Church has wrongfully

allowed forced separation and division of peoples and admitted that a system functioning like that must be regarded as sin. But as earlier it is qualified. It is about 'forced' separation and it is not apartheid 'per se' but apartheid functioning in a certain way.

While the 1986 document was turned down at the General Council in Seoul in 1989 the sequel from 1990 was discussed in the Executive Committee. The reaction was the same—it was not in concordance with the demands.

9.3.2 Throw-ins

The coloured Church, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, played an instrumental role in pushing the WARC to become more active in its relations to the South African situation. It also was strong in theological development in relation to the *Status confessionis* question and what that meant to all the churches.

A very substantial result of that was its development of the Belhar Confession. It was seen as a way of establishing a fresh base for a united church replacing the older racially defined churches in the DRC family. The development of this Confession followed a pattern with roots in the Bekenntniskirche in Germany at the time of the WWII. It was also well in line with ongoing confessional work in many Churches of the Reformed tradition worldwide.

Although theologically in full accordance with the older confessional base of the Reformed Churches, the DRC had great difficulties in embracing the Belhar Confession. A vivid discussion took place within the WARC, and between them and the black churches in South Africa if this confession should be seen as an acid test on whether the DRC really had changed at heart or not. Finally the WARC meant that making the acceptance of the Belhar as a condition would be to move the goalposts and would therefore not be possible.

Another document that played an immensely important role—in South Africa and internationally—was the Kairos document. Emanating from some 10 local black ministers in townships around Johannesburg it became a strong incitement for individuals, churches and organisations to begin to reflect from below about what it was to be black, subjugated, poor and divided and what had to be done about it from a Christian

point of view. This document was a strong expression of an autochthonous liberation theology. The document discussed to a large extent the evil state and the Church that had gone astray in its relation to this state. It also declared that the time—God's time—,not only to talk to but to act with the poor and suppressed, had come.

It was totally dismissed by the DRC, but the WARC encouraged its member churches to study the document for future deliberations on the South African issue.

In 1989 and 1990 two important conferences took place. The first was for the wider Reformed family of churches and the other was for any interested church in South Africa. They were called respectively the Vereeniging and the Rustenburg conference. Both dealt with the relation between the Church and society.

The Vereeniging meeting began well and black and white delegates expressed sorrow and asked for forgiveness for deeds and standpoints in the past. The testimony that was worked out in the conference was about apartheid. The members of the DRC delegation could not sign it, but had participated all the way in its development and in some instances—for instance by pinpointing a willingness to strive for a united non-racial church—expressed a view that went beyond earlier statements. When the DRC delegation presents the testimony to the leadership of the church it was clamped down on immediately. They were not ready to reflect on the structures of a new church—the *laager* was to be kept tight. This was one important reason for the WARC not to re-admit the DRC at the imminent General Council. At the same time it had shown that there were some breaches in the wall

The Rustenburg conference the following year was a paramount gathering. Almost 100 denominations were present. A strong declaration was taken denouncing apartheid in its intention, its implementation and its consequences as an evil policy and declaring the practice and defense of apartheid as though it were biblically and theologically legitimate an act of disobedience to God.

The thing this conference is most remembered for is however a speech by the DRC theologian Willie Jonker who not only for himself but on behalf of his church expressed responsibility for the political, social, economical and structural wrongs that have been done to many and asked for forgiveness for this sin. Desmond Tutu immediately ac-

cepted this and expressed forgiveness. A critical debate then originated as to what mandate both of them had to say what they said. At the end this was described as the first time the system of apartheid had been condemned together with those who supported it in the past, and that apartheid was declared being a sin. This was later to be used by the DRC in arguing that they have abandoned apartheid.

9.4 Other Stakeholders

The South African Council of Churches has been instrumental in the analysis of the work of the churches in South Africa. It has also been of great importance in facilitating support for studies overseas for black students, to give advice to people and to provide support to many in need, especially to those families where the breadwinner was put to jail. In my study I have taken up the analytical side of the SACC. They have studied the different documents provided by the DRC—not least the Church and Society documents—and reflected upon them and thereby been of help to others, such as the WARC.

At the end of the period I have dealt with, the TRC—the Truth and Reconciliation Commission began to play an important role. Not only individuals were asked to step up to admit misdeeds but the corporate sector, the political parties, the civic sector, the Churches and many more were asked to do the same. The DRC refused to do this while the black churches appeared before the commission and presented a submission. Instead of this the DRC depicted its journey with apartheid in another document that was handed over to the commission.

The somewhat unbelievable thing is that the DRC still—after the Rustenburg conference, after the new government, after numerous discussions with the WARC—feels the need to say that it can be accepted that there were good intentions amongst those who wanted to justify apartheid. It also added that the suffering and poverty endured by people in South Africa cannot be ascribed to apartheid alone but to a variety of social and economic realities—as if the apartheid ideology did not comprise all of this.

The excuses in that document are manifold but still the question can be raised whether a real change at heart had taken place.

9.5 High game?

Finally, despite all hesitation, the WARC proposed at its General Council in 1997 in Debrecen that the DRC should be welcomed back from the cold, if only its Synod the following years subscribed to the joint declaration.

They did. The ball was understood as having been placed between the goalposts.

Whether this was a correct decision, given not the old requirements from 1982 but the actual situation in South Africa was not discussed in reality, although there were those who proposed another track.

Instead the WARC expressed a hope that this—the return to the fellowship—would give rise to a new momentum for a new non-racial church. Until now the outcome has been weak.

Part IV

10 Conclusions

Milan Opočenský is giving a speech at the DRC Synod in October 13, 1998. It is preceding the decision of whether to accept the proposed declaration from the WARC General Council the previous year or not. He concludes the speech by saying: “Today is a special moment—and I dare to say: it is a Kairos”. He is awaiting a ‘yes’ from those gathered, and he is expecting them to “vigorously pursue the process of unification”.⁷²⁴

To promote this and to make them willing to approve this declaration the following day he several times re-iterates that there are no further conditions and new goalposts if only they say yes to the declaration. He explicitly takes up the Belhar Confession and declares that he has no intention of forcing them to adopt it.

The following day the decision is taken in line with the anticipation of Opočenský and thereby the conflict between the WARC and the DRC is settled.

Does this mean that the meaning of the three requirements has been understood?

They were: a) Black Christians are no longer excluded from Church services, especially from Holy Communion, [in the DRC and NHK] b) Concrete support in word and deed was to be given to those

⁷²⁴ (Opočenský 1998)

who suffer under the system of apartheid, (“separate development”), c) Unequivocal synod resolutions are made which reject apartheid and commit the Church to dismantling this system in both church and politics.⁷²⁵

The first of the three requirements was dealt with by the DRC in the Church and Society 1986 document. It opened for non-white members in the DRC. However, the structure of the church was not altered at all. The figure at the end of chapter 8 gives a very enlightening insight into this. This is an almost cosmetic change whereby individuals, if they like, can choose to participate in the service in a local white congregation and to become a member—as long as the congregation in question is adhering to the synodical decision. The CS 86 as well as the CS 90 has one paragraph in relation to this that makes it difficult to really know what was meant: “the normal pattern is ...to be received as members where provision has been made for their pastoral needs”.⁷²⁶ To me it sounds as a kind of back-door—‘Yes, but...’.

Besides this there was no drive towards a real re-unification and furthermore the whole apartheid legislation is unquestioned. People are to live apart and therefore the possibility of cross-ethnic membership is rather rare also due to factual socio-topographic division of people. The DRC initiated and endorsed much of the heavy legislation—such as the Group Areas Act—and refrained from insisting on the repeal of it later and instead just asked for it to “be applied with compassion and humanity”.⁷²⁷ This means that the DRC never took any battle against the structural difficulties for people to be free to participate in church life of their choice.

It is true that there were those who left the DRC as a reaction on the decisions in CS 86—and established the APK—but behind that lay much more than the open membership in the congregations. It was a question of the Afrikaner identity in a much wider context.

The WARC on the other hand never lifted this issue up to any higher level as such. On a general level they supported views that were

⁷²⁵ (WARC 1982, p. 179)

⁷²⁶ (DRC 1987, p. 42, § 269)

⁷²⁷ (DRC 1997, p. 7, 20)

expressed for instance in the Kairos document about the need to abstain from discussion on the individualistic level and to transform the issues to a structural-societal level but what this really would require (one church?) in this connection was never tested.

Consequently, one must admit that the first requirement was read and understood in a very shallow sense. It is quite possible to say that the requirement was fulfilled but in reality it did not mean much.

The second requirement is not dealt with much at all. Most DRC members are no evil persons, of course. When the so-called mission churches were established the mother, the DRC, acted in a parental way and supported the poor daughters. For a long time it meant having the power to govern them, but to a large extent also an extensive diaconal work was carried forth.

If this is what is meant by the words in the second requirement then there are no doubts about the DRC giving substantial support to those who suffer under the system of apartheid. Still, the same problem is present: On the one hand a system that keeps people down is supported and upheld, while on the other hand support is given in a paternalistic and colonial mindset.

If it instead meant to recognize “racist structures [that has] led to exclusive privileges for the white section of the population at the expense of the blacks ... [and] a situation of injustice and oppression” as is said in the resolution from Ottawa⁷²⁸, and to work towards this, it is clear that the DRC never really lived up to the very meaning of the text.

On the other hand it is also questionable in what way the WARC really challenged the DRC on this. The third requirement became early the main threshold that the DRC had to overcome and as long as that was not done the other two requirements seemed to be of minor interest. The second became to some extent obsolete in 1994 when the new dispensation with Mandela in the lead took over. Then it was natural to abstain from the discussion about racist structures, injustice and oppression—although many such elements persisted, but no longer as an expression of apartheid but as an expression of a neo-liberal post-colonial system where the issue not so much was about racism as about

⁷²⁸ (WARC 1982, p. 178 section II.1)

class, albeit rooted in a racial mindset. The question about the economic system is taken up on a more general level by the WARC at its General Council in Debrecen in 1997 by declaring a *processus confessionis* about the exclusion of the poor from the global economy. However, it might be somewhat symptomatic that at least some in the GC expressed doubts in accepting the statement without knowing precisely what its implications were.⁷²⁹

One conclusion could be that also on this requirement the individual level—diaconal work for individual or congregational needs—came to the fore and the societal-structural level disappeared into the background. At most it became something that the DRC asked the government to handle with ‘compassion and humanity’—as if torture, for instance, could be carried forth in a compassionated and humane way.

Consequently, I cannot come to any other result than that the second requirement was read in a very narrow way, forgetting all the other text that surrounded it in the resolution from Ottawa and gave it its *raison d’être*.

While the DRC since the presentation of the CS 86 argued that it had fulfilled all three requirements, and was not challenged in any substantial way regarding the two first, the third became a stumbling-block.

As I have shown above, all the way the DRC provided their declarations and utterances with reservations; ‘buts’, ‘on the other hand’, or ‘however’-clauses, to use the words of Christina Landmann. One might think that the word ‘unequivocal’ ought to be clear. The problem I can distinguish is that the word ‘apartheid’ is not clear. However, it ought to be said that the WARC at least tries to give some kind of framework for the comprehension of the word.

“Apartheid (separate development)”, according to the minutes from Ottawa, “...is institutionalized in the laws, policies and structures of the nation; it has resulted in horrendous injustice, suffering, exploitation and degradation of millions of black Africans for whom Christ died; and it

⁷²⁹ (WARC 1997, p. 244-5)

has been given moral and theological justification by the white Dutch Reformed Churches in South Africa.”⁷³⁰

When the DRC in the 1997 publication, *The story of Dutch Reformed Church's Journey with Apartheid*, tries to describe (define) apartheid, it is done in the following fashion:

“Apartheid is a legally regulated political and social pattern of thought and action which, in forcibly separating groups of people, actually envisaged the wellbeing of all those involved, but could not, in the process of its implementation, bring about the full realization of its initial objectives; on the contrary, it not only advantaged one population group at the expense of the other, but also wronged individuals.”⁷³¹

The distance between the two definitions—as late as in 1997—is illuminating and surprising, and gives at the same time a hint of the hermeneutical difficulties inherent in the discussion between the DRC and all other actors, be that the WARC, the black churches, the SACC or others. The DRC and their critics seem not to comprehend the world, or even the South African society, in any similar way at all.

An idea that was present during the whole period I am covering, and which is clearly visible in the DRC apartheid definition, is that there were good intentions behind apartheid, that it was in its implementation ‘mistakes’ were done, and that not all that was done under the designation of apartheid was bad. Together with the phrase ‘separate development’ went a perception of ‘different but equal’. All the way since the arrival of the Dutch at the Cape there has been differing views of the relation between whites and non-whites; either was the ideological view put forward—we, as whites are an elect group that should not mix with other peoples; or else has the economic need been pushed in the foreground—we need an easily movable workforce in the ‘homelands’ that can be called in when we need them. Both perspectives were pre-

⁷³⁰ (WARC 1982, p. 178; section II.3)

⁷³¹ (DRC 1997, p. 4)

sent in the church. Whichever of these two views that are held it is a flagrant expression of the colonial and imperialistic mindset that began with the East-India Company in 1652.

When the APK broke away after the CS 86 it was but one expression of the need to keep the ideology—the Afrikaner identity—in the centre. In both CS 86 and CS 90 the importance of, but also the inherent problems with, the migrant labour system as providing economic value is dealt with. The colonial paradigm is obvious; we need that kind of workforce in mines and as domestic workers, but as that will create problems, not least for their family situation, we must make sure that we can give support concerning their spiritual needs.

Time and again, also as late as in 1997, the problems for the non-white population is seen as having other roots, such as certain not defined social and economic realities that are to be in place beside apartheid. What the DRC do not provide then, is the description of which these realities are or how they function beside the all-encompassing system of apartheid.

Without doubt the WARC has been correct in its reluctance to accept the earlier argumentation by the DRC about its rejection of apartheid. Their understanding of apartheid has been far from what was inherent in the statement in Ottawa. Whether they really had ‘change at heart’ in 1998 is difficult—if not impossible⁷³²—to have any opinion of. Nonetheless, it is not strange that doubts could be raised as there were those in the Synodical debate about the *Joint declaration* who made a proposal that the first paragraph in the resolution—about the “repudiation of any theological justification of apartheid as a matter of *Status confessionis*”—ought not to be subscribed to by the DRC.

However, the Synod voted against that proposal and said ‘yes’ to the proposed declaration.⁷³³ Could they have done anything else four years after the commencement of the ‘Rainbow Nation’?

⁷³² Especially as I am dealing with a church with some 1,1 million members and not a few individuals.

⁷³³ (DRC GS 1998, p. 42, 412); Piet Straus, vice moderator of the DRC 2002-2007, maintain that the reason for wanting to decline the SC is that the question of *apartheid* is seen an ethical issue, not a confessional. (Strauss, Interview with Piet Strauss in Bloemfontein 2007, m. 29)

By the above I have provided an answer to the first of the three questions in my second set of questions: *How shall we understand the meaning of the three requirements?* The second question is a sequel: *Did the DRC fulfil the demands?*

In the eyes of many DRC members, also people in the leadership this took place long before the 1998 Synod and they felt humiliated to have to deal with the question. To many it took place already at the Rustenburg conference in 1990 when Willie Jonker expressed his apologies and declared apartheid a sin on behalf of the church, or even through the 1986 *Church and Society* document. For others this happened at the so-called ‘Reconciliation Synod’ in 1994 when Nelson Mandela came to greet them and a reconciliatory hand was said to be extended to Beyers Naudé and Ben Marais.⁷³⁴

Yes, they fulfilled the requirements, in a formal way, very hesitantly, following what was happening around them in the South African Society and internationally. There are no examples of any ‘paradigm shifts’ or strong statements pushing the government, but timid, small steps little by little so as not to endanger anything. Always after changes that took place on the governmental/societal level, never ahead of those processes with a prophetic voice.

Then, why was the WARC contented with this? Or, as I posed my third question in that set: *Hesitant discussions went on within the WARC on whether the replies from the DRC really covered what many felt was needed (Had the ball been shot between the goalposts?). With that question unsolved—was the welcome back of the DRC rather an adaption to a new post-apartheid situation than an acceptance of its answer?*

People and organisations in South Africa expressed great hesitation. So did also some international authorities on South Africa. At least some in the Executive Council were very wavering in their attitude to the situation and the role of the DRC. There have also been voices

⁷³⁴ According to Piet Strauss this is a statement that needs qualifying. Excuses were to be expressed in general terms. Someone wanted to mention Beyers Naudé specifically but that was turned down. When he arrived at the synod someone nonetheless stepped up and told him that this excuse also was directed to him and then it was difficult for the synod to “differ from that”. (Strauss 2007, m. 36)

that—when the recorder is switched off—maintain the opinion that there was in (parts) of the WARC leadership a feeling of exhaustion towards the South African issue and a longing for the end of it. A longing to be able to carry on with other issues. It is nothing strange to consider that kind of deliberations.

However, there are reasons to think that the WARC a) realised that the new democratic situation in South Africa in itself pushed issues in another way than before, maybe even better way than what the WARC itself could do, b) that the re-admittance would be a better way of continuing and deepening the discussion with the DRC, and that c) the situation, described by Opočenský as a situation of Kairos really was there and that the decision would make the re-unification process speed up. Maybe he did not take in the dissonant voices.

Naturally it will also become more and more difficult to talk about the apartheid issue as such the longer we distance us in time from that period. Naturally this does not mean that the issues about justice and reconciliation are solved. These core questions must find new paths, a new language, a new hermeneutic. What I mentioned about the Kairos theology (at the end of section 4.3.2.2) points in the same direction. The old language is not valid in the new situation. It can be seen as symptomatic that the economic justice issue came to the fore in the Debrecen General Council.

The declaration states also that the WARC pledges to work pastorally with the DRC and other churches in the process of unity and reconciliation. It would have been to act in line with Kinghorns view that ecumenical support was needed to make it possible for the DRC to move into new positions. Unfortunately I strongly get the impression that the WARC has not been too busy to live up to this. According to Setri Nyomi, general secretary of the WARC, a proposal was made to “be available as a platform, a facilitator in the process” around 2001. This was turned down and not renewed until 2008.⁷³⁵

⁷³⁵ (Nyomi 2008, m. 5:30); Even if the interest might have been lacking of the South African side— perhaps both from the DRC and the URCSA—the question ‘couldn’t the WARC have done more’ still lingers. An examination of these processes belongs, however, to another investigation.

My first question was about the *Status confessionis* and the DRC mission policy. Did the SC express a criticism of the mission policy of the DRC?

In Reformed circles it is said that when faith, praxis, or organizational structure of a church flagrantly contradict the marks of the true Church, and this church is consequently striving against the true Church, we are called to struggle against that church as a false church. In such a situation the Gospel itself is at stake. Then it is time to declare that this situation to constitute a *Status confessionis* for our churches, which means that we regard this as an issue on which it is not possible to differ without seriously jeopardizing the integrity of the common confession as Reformed Churches.

Such a situation arises when a church in its doctrine and/or practice affirms segregation of peoples as a law for its life. The gospel preached by that church must be seen as a pseudo-gospel and such a church cannot be regarded as an authentic member of the body of Christ.

The Dutch reformed Church in South Africa developed over time an ideology and a praxis that well fits in to the description above for a church that has been corrupt to such an extent that it is preaching an adverse gospel. I have given the long story from the establishment of the Dutch East-India Company and the fear for *gelykstelling*, over the decision in 1857 'due to the weakness of some', via the establishment of other churches for non-whites beginning in 1881 with the Dutch Reformed Mission Church. I have given some insights in the early absence of missionary zeal later to be reversed into a strong missionary outreach drive, carried forth by many new young missionaries as an expression of a nationalistic calling. All the time separateness had been a central element, early, during the time of the Great Trek, in the decisions in 1857 and 1881 and for those young missionaries in the 50s who wanted to support the emergence of the 'homelands'.

If the above indicated the facts on the ground, the different documents, from 1935 and onwards up to the Church and Society in 1990 described what was already implemented.

There are no examples of documents directly entitled something like 'Mission Policy document for the DRC' under the main period this dissertation is covering. Instead it is as if the 'mission thinking' is just below the surface in the DRC and from there determines its relation to the surrounding society.

Understood positively, this corresponds with what I have mentioned above about Bosch's view that mission is at the centre of theology and the general ecumenical expression that mission should be "the theme of all theology". Yet, it doesn't say anything about the content. The Mission Conference in San Antonio 1989 is, however, rather outspoken; mission has to do with care for the whole creation, unconditional love for all people and concern for unity and fellowship among all human beings. Understood like that the wording 'mission policy' loses importance and the actual deeds become much more important.

As I have shown, those in South Africa who scrutinized the theology of the DRC has understood its reflection on mission in this way. One example is the debate around the Belhar Confession. As I exposed in section 5.3 the question of the mission policy of the DRC is widely discussed in relation to the Confession. The same goes with the Church and Society 1986 document. In section 8.1.2.2 I have taken up the critical voices from the South African Council of Churches and the discussion on the mission policy of the DRC is a major part there.

Sometimes the word blueprint is used to describe the relation between the mission policies of the DRC as an ideological base for the coming government apartheid policy. Whether that word is a good one or not there is no reason to question the close connection between the policies of the DRC and the developing apartheid state. So when the separateness of the church became the apartheid of the state the church continued to give sanction and theological justification for this development.

The apartheid, as it was described at the end of the 70s "being a system of oppression and injustice, is sinful and antithetical to the gospel because it is based on the fundamental irreconcilability of human beings, thus rendering ineffective the reconciling and uniting power of our Lord Jesus Christ".⁷³⁶

Thus, although the *Status confessionis* is declared against a church that in its life, by its support for apartheid, contradicts the true confession of the Reformed Churches, it is in reality directed towards its understanding of what mission is. And if a church's understanding of mission is corrupt, the whole church is on a quagmire in line with the

⁷³⁶ (Botman 2000, p. 110)

understanding of Christianity as missionary by its very nature, or else it denies its very *raison d'être*. Or to use the strong words of David Bosch that even theology, “rightly understood, has no reason to exist other than critically to accompany the *missio Dei*. So mission should be ‘the theme of all theology’”.⁷³⁷

By this I have answered my first question. Yes, the *Status confessionis* is clearly related to the situation between the DRC and its so-called daughter churches wherein the mission policy is of great importance and thus expressed a critique of this mission policy.

This dissertation is about a conflict that has a beginning, in Ottawa in 1982, and an end, in Pretoria in 1998. However, no story looks like that in reality.

There is a background and there is the aftermath. Hermeneutics teaches us that what we know beforehand influences our understanding of the present. The aftermath, when we know something about it, is likewise forming our comprehension of the past. Edward Said maintains not only that past and present “inform each other”, or “implies each other”, but also that there is a “combativeness with which individuals and institutions decide on what is tradition and what is not.” Therefore, neither past, nor present has “a complete meaning alone”.⁷³⁸

My presentation of the story of a conflict in chapters 4-8 has been ways of letting several voices interact with each other. Together they have built a mosaic from different parts of the story. They have sometimes been interdependent, often interrelated, and sometimes seemingly independent. These voices have been clearly audible at certain periods and retreated into the background at others. I would like to comprehend them in line with Said’s contrapuntal idea.

Chapter 9 was an attempt to straighten up the story in one chronological sequence. By that it was in a way easier to follow the process and at the same time it lost most of its contents. All the interaction and most of the descriptions of interrelatedness is lost.

It also has a tendency to focus on the DRC and the WARC, while most interlocutors from ‘below’ become showed into the background as

⁷³⁷ (Bosch 1994 (1991), p. 494)

⁷³⁸ (Said 1994 (1993), p. 4)

shadowy figures. The most important stakeholders—the people in the former so-called daughter churches, people in the former homelands and in the townships—ought instead to be the front figures in the conflict. They are the ones who have to carry the burden of failure in solving the conflict in a good way and can benefit from a good outcome—together with all white people of the DRC who also for long have been bereaved all the possibilities a widened and open society can provide.

So now, at the very end of this dissertation, and in my analysing of the outcome I have to pick up my hypotheses again.

Before discussing the content, I must make a note on the idea of a hypothesis as such. There is no neutral position from where I write what I write. As I pinpointed already initially in chapter 1 I have from the outset a pre-understanding that determines much of my work. History and future determine my ‘today’. In every respect I have made choices along the path—inter alia whom to talk to and what documents to look for. It cannot be otherwise. This goes for the hypotheses as well. While formulating them I have already some knowledge, or at least think that I know something, about the topic I am about to write on. Without that it would not be possible to formulate a meaningful hypothesis. Therefore it can look like I have already made up the result before formulating the hypotheses. That is only partly true. The rest is a consequence of the language game, or the hermeneutic necessity.

In the first hypothesis I maintain that *the DRC did not give a reply to the WARC that involved the deeper meaning of the Status confessionis but complied with the explicit wording of the requirements*

Is it true or false? There are many reasons to argue that the leadership of the church—who in a rather hierarchical and clergy-centred church has much power—in its entirety had great difficulties to come to a deeper understanding. Still at the final decision in 1998 there were those who did not want to subscribe to that part of *the Joint Declaration*. The many proposals along the way about having fulfilled the requirements point in the direction of refraining from really dealing with it and rather acting in the way many have accused them of: as little as possible as late as possible. That does not mean, however, that there was no one who wanted to do much more. My interviews indicate that

there were those with a strong gut-feeling of what had to be said and done but who were or felt prevented by the clerical structures to do so.

Another reason for my conclusion is that I now, eleven years later, still must note that the re-unification issue is pending.

It would nevertheless be unfair not to mention the situation in which the DRC found themselves—between a growing international criticism and strong nationalistic tendencies at home. Yet, this does not excuse them for not having been listening more to the other churches in the family or to other prophetic voices within the church or elsewhere. A more open attitude to the ‘other’ could have paved the way for bolder steps.

My second hypothesis was about whether the WARC *followed a legalistic pattern in their assessment of the reply from the DRC and thereby let pragmatism prevail over radicalism.*

It is an undisputable fact that the WARC abstained from bringing any new conditions—or goalposts—into the conclusion of the conflict with the DRC. That a discussion on the possibility to put forward additional conditions—especially the Belhar Confession—went on for some years clearly indicates that the WARC leadership had realized that the original conditions had weakened over time. The development in the black churches, the publishing of the Kairos document, the Vereeniging consultation, the political development in the 90s, the meeting with the member churches in Johannesburg in 1993—all of that had contributed to building up a new picture indicating that something else was needed.

Is then my hypothesis correct? In a very formal way it can be said to be correct. In the structure of an organization like the WARC where one wants to stick to the decisions taken, it would presumably be seen as illegal or at least fraudulent to go beyond the 1982 decision. But a more radical stance ought to have had some impact on the final decision. In that sense one can say that abstaining from moving the goalposts, or taking any other measures, was an easy and pragmatic way out.

However, the words I use—‘legalistic’ and ‘pragmatism’—have several emotive connotations that make them difficult to use. When I have had the opportunity to read letters, memos etc and to talk to representatives of the Executive Council the picture becomes more complicated. One question emerges then more than any other as the one

that guided the WARC leadership in the considerations: What serves the interests of the Family of the DRC best and what is the most effective way to promote a continued re-unification process? It is a fair and reasonable question but it is difficult to assess whether the outcome would have been different with a more demanding proposal in the *Joint declaration*.

This December, 2009,—when I finalize this dissertation—it is more than eleven years since the DRC took its decision to accept the *Joint declaration* from Debrecen. With that perspective, would it not be time for a deeper analysis of what is needed to reach the target, to set up a new joint taskforce between the WARC and the whole DRC family of churches—to put the ball into play again?



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Appendices

I. Abbreviations and explanation of names and terms

Churches in the Dutch Reformed Church 'family' in its closer meaning, i.e the DRC and the churches that was the consequence of racially determined separation of churches from 1881 and onwards.

DRC (= D.R. Church).....	Dutch Reformed Church ('white')
NGK (= N.G.Kerk).....	Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (DRC in afrikaans)
Ned. Geref. Kerk.....	see above
DRMC.....	Dutch Reformed Mission Church ('coloured')
NGSK.....	Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sending Kerk (DRMC in afrikaans)
DRCA.....	Dutch Reformed Church in Africa ('black')
NGKA.....	Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Afrika (DRCA in afrikaans)
Ned. Geref. Kerk in Afrika.(= NGKA)	
N.G. Bantukerk in South Afrika	(An older name for NGKA)
DR Mission Churches.....	A confusing older term for black churches, used up to 1962 (Is not the same as DRMC)
RCA.....	Reformed Church in Africa (for Indian people)
Indian Reformed Church...	An older name
URCSA.....	Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa. (The amalgamation of DRCA and DRMC in 1994)

—some DRCA congregations has due to conflicts stayed outside the URCA so a DRCA still exists.)

VGKSA URCSA in Afrikaans

Mother church.....DRC

Daughter churches.....DRMC, DRCA, RCA

Fed. Council.....Council for the ‘family’, established by DRC in the early 60s to handle common issues

The family also incorporated a wider circle of churches—the ‘mission’ churches in other countries in Africa.

Other Afrikaans Reformed churches

APK.....Afrikaans protestante Kerk

HK (= NHK).....Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk

.....Gereeformerde Kerk (‘Doppers’)

Other abbreviations used in this dissertation

Abreca.....Alliance of Black Reformed Christians in South Africa

ANC.....African National Congress

ASK.....Algemene Synodical kommissie. See GSC

BK.....Belydende Kring

CC (=CCSA).....Christian Council (in South Africa)

CI.....Christian Institute

CS 86.....Church and Society 1986 document

CS 90.....Church and Society 1990 document

EC.....Executive Committee in the WARC

GC.....General Council – WARC’s highest deciding body

GSC.....General Synodical Commission. Central body working for the General Synod in the DRC

ICT.....Institute for Contextual Theology

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JTSA.....	Journal of Theology for Southern Africa
KD.....	Kairos Document
LMS	London Missionary Society
LWF.....	Lutheran World Federation
PCR.....	Program to Combat Racism (at WCC)
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SA.....	South Africa
SAARC.....	Southern African Alliance of Reformed Churches
SACC.....	South African Council of Churches
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UN	United Nation
VOC	Dutch East-Asia Company
WARC.....	World Alliance of Reformed Churches
WCC.....	World Council of Churches
WWII	World War II

II. Index over themes, persons, places and organizations/churches

Due to the overwhelming occurrence of the names *the Dutch Reformed Church/DRC* and *the World Alliance of Reformed Churches/WARC* in the thesis I will not list them here.

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