

***Reconciliation* in Contemporary African Reformed Theology**

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“You call yourself a Christian in your letter to me. I have long known that you are a Christian; but the commandants of your army are not yet Christians and, if they persist in claiming they are, they will force us to believe that there is no God. What! Would their Christianity consist in destroying Christianity?”

Moshesh, paramount chief of the Basotho, to Boshoff, President of the Republic of the Orange Free State, 16th May 1858.

INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the reformed statements of faith articulated during the final stages of the *Freedom Struggle*, i.e. from 1974 – 1989, in South Africa. Characteristic of this all-inclusive struggle *for* human dignity and democracy and *against* white ‘Apartheid’ domination and oppression, is the decisive and determining role of the differentiated churches, ecclesiastical meetings, ecumenical councils and the outspoken and effective leadership of protruding bishops, ministers, pastors and influential lay people. In a Christian orientated country, it was self-evident that the church should and would play a conclusive role in the struggle. In its final stages the struggle therefore saw the publication of many confessional documents that carried trajectories of collective and shared theological thinking, either in support of the struggle, or with fundamental reservations and even downright denunciation thereof. Once again in our history Christian stood against Christian.

In the distinctive theological trajectories much is made of the role, the engagement and the unified praxis of the church, related to its prophetic calling. According to these documents, the church faced at that specific moment in history, an inevitable choice: it has to stand where God stands, that is on the side of the poor, the oppressed, those that suffered injustice. Or, as other reformed theologians argued, the church should stand against the revolution, because God is a God of order. The state is a divine instrument to maintain law and order. Only within this framework viable justice could be realised to all in the multi-racial and –cultural societies of South Africa. The contradictory lines of thinking also surfaced in reformed confessional statements during those years. Reformed church stood against reformed church.

This contribution limits itself to confessional statements by reformed churches and theologians during those years of conflict. The differentiating trajectories which surface in the literature are carefully traced and analysed. In the ensuing pages the basic trajectories have been put down, in the hope that the subsequent discussion will certainly provide more suggestions and new directions to deal and work intellectually and emotionally with the shared past, healing the wounds it imposed in a way true to our reformed confession and heritage.

In dealing with the differentiated trajectories in contextual reformed thinking, the paper first offers an overview of Christianity and the church in South Africa, to delineate the horizon against which this contemporary history of African theology should be comprehended. The attention then shifts to the expressive contemporary reformed statements, testimonies, and confessions related to the *Freedom Struggle* as the immediate context they reflected upon. Finally some concluding remarks will try to map out the underpinning suppositions and assumptions of this contemporary reformed and African theology, and link it to the wider context and history of the church in South Africa, that is to the critical question Moshesh articulated so many years earlier, when Boer commando's destroyed two mission stations of the Paris Evangelical Mission Society.

BACKGROUND: CHRISTIANITY AND CHURCH IN SOUTH AFRICA

Since 1652 South Africa's history is embedded in and comprehended in terms of a Christian motivation and awareness. In that year the renowned Dutch East India Company established a refreshment post at the Cape of Good Hope, which consolidated itself as a *Corpus Christianum*, in which those outside of the Christian faith (slaves, children of slaves, indigenous associates, etc.) were accommodated and offered membership of the only recognised Dutch-Cape and reformed church. In 1814 followed the inception of a British and Christian *commonwealth*, when the Cape colony was the first region of Southern Africa to be incorporated into the Imperial and Colonial British Empire. Colonisation also saw the establishment of many churches (including the Roman Catholic Church) and the incursion of many more mission societies. The colonial commonwealth provided for an 'ecclesiastical pluriformity' which was fundamental to the growth of a Christianised and Christian community. The 20th century saw the rise of *Christian nationalism*, politically dominated by a white (and Christian-Afrikaner) minority. This was terminated by the inauguration of the 1994 democratic dispensation.

Throughout our history the philosophical foundations, assumptions, implications and practicality or practises of the different but public dispensations have been questioned. Based on motivation derived from the Christian faith, or principles, the 'Patriots' in the 1780's, missionaries in the 19th century, Afrikaner Boers in the late 19th century (which lead to the devastating Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902)) and Christian leaders (Dube, Luthuli, Keet, and many more), churches, councils, organizations and movements in the 20th century for example raised

fundamental issues linked to injustice, oppression, poverty, liberation, discrimination, racism, civilian rights, etc. South Africa's is a history of contest. On occasion it debouched on violence, in which Christian faced Christian. Sides had to be taken and not without Christian commitment and conviction. In this regard one can point to the 1858 Boer-Basotho War, in which (Christian) Boer commandos attacked and destroyed Beersheba and Morija, two thriving mission stations of the Paris Evangelical Mission Society. Or, one could recall the Anglo-Boer War, when Christian armies took to the battle field to combat each other. "God save the queen/king" was sung in the Imperial army, who fought a 'justified war' to rectify the wrongs (e.g. the treatment of blacks) of the Boer Republics – a war that allowed for scorched earth strategies and concentration camps in which 27000 whites and 18000 blacks died. The Boers were convinced that God would defend justice and that He sides with the oppressed.

This paper calls to attention the '*Freedom Struggle*' (1955-1994) against the Christian-nationalist motivated policy of Apartheid, presented as the ultimate and only solution for what was identified as South Africa's multi-racial problem. On the one hand in particular from the historic Dutch Reformed Churches of South Africa, apartheid, or separate development, was embedded in the firm believe that God controlled the destinies of nations and the history of peoples in South Africa, and that He gathered their forbearers together from many lands and gave them this their own. He has guided them from generation to generation and wondrously delivered them from the dangers that beset them. This comprehension of the past received intellectually in the 1930's a historical-theological status. This was transferred to the second and third generations in life-defining categories, effectuating not only behavior, but also an understanding – and even *shaping* - of the world they live in and have to contend with. In the public domain Apartheid as a political system, was linked to this interpretation, arguing that separate development provided the only sustainable, fair, justifiable and therefore Christian solution to the problems of South Africa as a multinational and multi-cultural country. These churches were thus intimately involved in the constitutional development of the country and in its support and justification of Apartheid, expressed itself on the Christian implications of apartheid, separate development, autogenously development or whatever form the political thinking of the people of the country has assumed from time to time.

On the other hand, the Apartheid dispensation was associated with oppression and injustice, and thus rejected in terms of a biblical and prophetic theology: the God of the Bible "scatters the proud of heart, pulls down the mighty from their thrones and exalts the humble" (Lk 1:51-52). Throughout the Bible God appears as the Liberator of the oppressed, the poor, those that suffer. God is not neutral. He takes up the cause of the poor and oppressed and identifies Himself with their interests. He sides with the oppressed, therefore the church must take sides unequivocally and consistently with the poor and oppressed. Christians must participate in the struggle for liberation and a just society. The church should challenge, inspire and motivate

people to make sacrifices for justice and liberation. This is its message of hope. It must be preached and practised.

During the *FreedomStruggle* reformed Christians thus found themselves in opposite camps and understood the context in which they lived and witnessed along differentiated lines. In the following paragraphs these trajectories as expressed in a number of the most influential confessional statements are surveyed.

REFORMED CONFESSIONAL STATEMENTS DURING THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE

1974: Human Relations and the South African Scene in the light of Scripture

The survey starts with the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa's 1974 report *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the light of Scripture*.¹ The report was the result of careful consideration and reflection (since 1947) and "represented convictions in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) with regard to the problem of relationships in a multinational country, as seen from the point of view on the eternal and immutable norms of the Word of God."² It was the result of "collaboration between professors of theology, teaching staff at our theological institutions and leading figures in the ministry and mission fields."³ The report is motivated *historically*. The DRC sees itself as a direct continuation of the Reformed religion of the first "White colonists" who came to South Africa in 1652. The church represents about 42% of the White population (thus the greater majority of Afrikaans speaking citizens). Its existence is inseparable from the whole of the country's chequered history, it states. Since the beginning of South African history⁴, the DRC grappled with the problems of a multinational and multiracial country. As time went on, practical methods have been found to preach the gospel to peoples of widely divergent languages, cultures and levels of civilization, resulting eventually in the establishment of separate churches amongst the various population groups. "The progress of these churches was so blessed, and the results so positive, that this method had a considerable influence on later political thinking and developments."⁵ It follows, the report says, that the DRC has always been intimately involved in the constitutional development of South Africa. Giving constant attention to the demands of the Word of God in the particular situation of South Africa, the DRC has continually expressed itself on the Christian implications of

¹*Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture* (Cape Town: Dutch Reformed Church Publishers, 1976). This is the official translation of the report *Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die lig van die Skrif*, approved and accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church October 1974.

²*Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, 6.

³*Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, 6.

⁴Taken by this Church as 1652!

⁵*Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, 5

“Apartheid”, “separate development,” “autogenous development” or whatever form the political thinking of the country has assumed from time to time.⁶

The *Introduction* to the report thus clearly indicates which line of argumentation it intended to follow in the subsequent six chapters. The first chapter is dedicated to *General Remarks*, which focused on, with regard to relations between races and peoples, the need for constant reflection, the Word of God as premise and norm, the nature of the problem and the vital importance for a correct insight into the manner in which the problems should be solved, the hermeneutic principles and the scriptural data on race, nation and people in both Old and New Testaments.⁷

Chapter two deals with the church, the Kingdom of God and the *Oikomene*.⁸ Last mentioned *Oikomene* is related to “horizontalism” as a general tendency in ecumenical thinking, as opposed to the biblical priority to the vertical relationship between God and man, in which man’s horizontal relationship to the world is based.⁹

The report also analyses the *Theology of Revolution* in the identified context of the “horizontalist school of thought.”¹⁰ The *Theology of Revolution* can be seen as a revolt against the status quo, in which the use of violence is not necessarily excluded. This Theology, the report claims, “reproaches the church and its theology that it proclaims a ... defence at all costs of the status quo and resistance to every attempt at a renewal of society.” A further blame is that the church limits the Christian expectation only as consolation with a view to a better *jenseits* and an acquiescence in ‘this vale of tears’¹¹ and that it pietistically narrows and superficialises sin (that is the inability to realise that sin is also to be found in the structures of society). This *Theology* also emphasises man’s responsibility in the transformation of this world, the report concluded. The report rejected the concept of *revolution* as foreign to the Bible. A church though, whose thinking is reformatory, will act in a reformatory fashion with regard to the renewal of society. “We are aware that Calvin not only said “ecclesia semper reformanda,” but also “societas semper reformanda,” and we agree with him in this.¹²

The third chapter clarifies significant theme that confronted the DRC at the time: *The Church and Social Justice*.¹³ The report is frank: “Because man is created in the image of God, the basic concepts and norms for his life are love, justice, truth and peace. These arise,” the report

⁶*Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, 5.

⁷ *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, 7-38.

⁸*Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, 39-58.

⁹*Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, 55 ff.

¹⁰*Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, 59 ff.

¹¹*Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, 59.

¹²*Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, 62.

¹³*Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, 63-81.

upholds, “from his reconciliation with God in Christ, by regeneration and renewal (2 Cor. 5:17). On this basis the faithful are called upon to erect signposts of the Kingdom of God even in this dispensation, including the sphere of social relations.”¹⁴ In its preaching the church must therefore also call upon its adherents to apply the principles of the Kingdom of God in the social and political sphere. The church must preach the Kingdom’s prophetic message of reconciliation and healing, and at the same time denounce sin and seek to correct sinful structures in society. “Social injustice should be seen as a consequence of the sinful nature and its pervading influence in man’s social structures.”¹⁵ The church must therefore do everything in its power *within its own sphere* to realise the message of redemption of Christ.

Applying above principles, the report points to the complicated set of population relationships in South Africa: several highly disparate peoples which differ substantially from one another i.a. “in level of civilisation.” This places a heavy burden of responsibility on the privileged societies to let justice be done to all, “particularly because certain measures, essential to maintain order in certain situations, may cause suffering and hardship for some.”¹⁶ Although there are many superficial similarities between peoples and cultural possessions common to all, the intrinsic cultural possessions serve to emphasise the identity of each people, “It is precisely this fact that renders the acknowledgement of diversity of peoples so important. “This is”, the report affirms, “the sine qua non for responsible, realistic and practical policy by which relations among various disparate peoples in the same country must be regulated with the objective of preserving peace and equitable order in the best possible way.”¹⁷ In a multinational situation the calling of the church vis-à-vis the state is twofold: it must preach the norms of God’s Word for mutual relationships of various groups of peoples and for the duties of the authorities in this situation and it must warn when injustice is being done in the implementation of national policy and the application of laws.¹⁸ The duty of the state is to preserve order within its own particular area of jurisdiction, to reconcile and regulate the legal interests of the various groups for the sake of public order, to combat evil and to preserve justice. The state may use instruments of power and even the sword to keep in check the pervasive influence of sin, the report explains. As an institution the church submits itself to the authority and law of the state, provided the legal order does not conflict with the Word of God. In conclusion, the report maintains that “a political system based on autogenous or separate development of various population groups can be justified from the Bible, but the commandment to love one’s neighbor must at all times be the ethical norm towards establishing sound inter-people relationships.”¹⁹

¹⁴*Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, 63.

¹⁵*Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, 64.

¹⁶*Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, 64.

¹⁷*Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, 65.

¹⁸*Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, 69.

¹⁹*Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, 71.

In the fourth chapter the *Church and Missionary Work* is treated.²⁰ The existence of separate Dutch Reformed church affiliations for the various population groups is recognised by the report as being in accordance with the “plurality of church affiliations described in the Bible.”²¹ These enable each individual to hear and preach the great deeds of God in the context of his own language, culture and national affiliation. There is also an essential unity among the separate DRC affiliations of the various population groups: the common belief in and attachment to the same God and his Word, the acceptance of the same reformed confession and church government and also their historical association.²² Visible unity should be expressed in federal meetings “with a predetermined and clearly defined objective.”²³

Chapter five is devoted to *marriage and racially mixed marriages*, which the DRC found to be undesirable.²⁴ The last chapter consists of concluding remarks. “If the Dutch Reformed Church does differ from other churches,” it observes, “the difference is not due to a different view of moral concepts and values or of Christian ethics, but to a different view of the situation in South Africa and the teachings of God’s Word in this regard. There is no difference in ideals and objectives, but merely disagreement on the best methods achieving these ideals.”²⁵

Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture clearly stated the views of the DRC, as the historic church of South Africa, for a Christian motivated future of the country and its peoples. As such, the report is a culmination of theological thinking, consideration and adjustment since the Church first articulated it’s a biblical justification of Apartheid in terms of a Theology of Apartheid in 1947. When one reads the *Theological Declaration* of the reformed *Broederkring*, published in 1979, it is apparent that the already disputed views of the DRC was not seen as “merely disagreement on the best methods” to achieve the same ideals for South Africa, but that these were embedded in a much deeper level of confessional and theological differences. Since the *Broederkring* involved ministers from the DRC’s ‘daughter churches,’ the *Declaration* must therefore be considered next.

1979: Theological Declaration: Broederkring

The *Broederkring*, or later *BelydendeKring*, was originally formed (1974) to work towards the unity of the Dutch Reformed Family of churches, a unity that was not to be sought along the federal contours that *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture* officially envisaged. The *Kring* (or *Circle*), that comprised of (black and white) ministers of the Dutch Reformed Family of Churches, also studied the prophetic role of the church in the light of

²⁰*Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, 82-92.

²¹*Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, 82.

²²*Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, 82.

²³*Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, 84.

²⁴*Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, 93 ff.

²⁵*Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, 100,

what it identified as the oppressive legal structures. It constitutes a deliberate convergence with an interpretation of the South African context that underpinned documents like *A Message to the People of South Africa* (1968),²⁶ the SPROCAS report *Apartheid and the Church*, the *Declaration of Faith* of the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (1973)²⁷ and the *Koinonia Declaration* (1977).²⁸ In 1979 it issued a four article *Theological Declaration*, which was a “statement of faith.” The first article states that God upholds the whole universe by his Word and Spirit. He struggles for his own righteousness. “In this respect God chooses constantly for his own righteousness and consequently stands on the side of those who are victims of injustice.” God reveals Himself in his Word, they confess, as the One who throughout history in his relationship to men binds himself to his own justice in order to make the world a place to live in. Through Jesus Christ, his life-giving Word, He breaks the power of injustice. God gathers for Him in this world a new people who He has liberated from oppressive powers through Jesus Christ (2nd article). “As Gods property the church must be busy standing where God stands, viz. against injustice and with those who are denied justice” (3rd article). In the South African situation this means that the church should “unflinchingly persevere for establishing God’s justice.” The church may therefore, in faith allegiance with its Head Jesus Christ, come into conflict with human authorities, governments, powers and ideologies. If the church has to suffer in the process, “we know that this is part of the way of God’s people through history and that the Word of Christ remains in force: I will never leave you or forsake you” (Heb 13:5) (4th article).²⁹

The *Theological Declaration* undoubtedly confirmed that the division between churches in South Africa, also surfaced among the Dutch Reformed Family of Churches, in a context that since the Soweto Uprisings in June 1976, created a situation of increasing tension and polarisation in the country. In 1980 prominent theologians from the DRC voiced their concern in a *Reformation Day Witness*, a concern that differed from the presumptions of the 1974 *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, but followed in terms of language and argument, also a different trajectory of thinking than the *Theological Declaration*.

1980: Reformation Day Witness

On 31st October 1980 eight well-known academics who were ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church issued a *Witness*. They expressed their deep concern about the apparent powerlessness of the institutionalised church in South Africa “to carry out its divine calling of

²⁶Published by the South African Council of Churches. See D Thomas, *Councils in the Ecumenical Movement: South Africa 1904-1975* (Johannesburg: South African Council of Churches, 1975), 107-112.

²⁷J de Gruchy & C Villa-Vicencio (Eds.), *Apartheid is a Heresy* (Cape Town: Struik, 1983), 160.

²⁸JWHofmeyr, JA Millard, CJJ Froneman, *History of the Church in South Africa. A Document and Source Book* (Pretoria: UNISA, 1991), 291-300.

²⁹Hofmeyr, Millard, Froneman, *History of the Church in South Africa*, 302.

reconciliation on a meaningful and credible basis in a situation of increasing tension and polarisation ... in our country ... to give spiritual leadership to the authorities and community by means of a clear and consistent witness to the promises and demands of God's Kingdom as far as the social reality is concerned ... to resist mutual estrangement and exclusivity among Christians ... and to work against divisions." In all humility they plead to strive for "the elimination of loveless and racist attitudes and actions which cause hurtful incidents and not the message of God's reconciling grace ... to demonstrate the solidarity of Christian love with all those that are placed in positions of helpless suffering and need by social practise, economic oppression and political policy and for a form of church unity in which the oneness of believers adhering to the same confession can take visible form."

They were also convinced that the Dutch Reformed Church, together with other churches, could make a God-honouring contribution towards "the advance of mutual trust and acceptance among the different population groups of our country ... a deeper consciousness of the demands of God's Word under which both the authorities and their subjects are called to reform the present order, so that every individual can be given the scope to realise their potential as the bearer of the image of God." Lastly they thought that the existing group differences between people can through the power of God's renewing grace, be developed in to something that "provides for mutual enrichment and the upholding of each other in the one body of Christ." The *Witness* was signed by CFA Borchartd, JH Combrink, AB du Toit, WP Esterhuyse, JA Heyns, WD Jonker, BA Müller and HW Rossouw.³⁰

Apparently these DRC theologians were convinced that the fundamental and envisioned argument of their church's 1974 *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, could not be defended from the Bible, neither could it be followed for practical political reasons. The *Witness* in principle called for new line of thinking, a new approach and the termination of the *Theology of Apartheid*. The 1979 line of argumentation of the *Broederkring* however received an enormous impetus at the meeting of ABRESCA (also at the end of October 1980) when reformed theologians in depth discussed the South African situation, and the role of the church in that regard.

1980: Alliance of Black Reformed Churches in Southern Africa (ABRESCA)

The *Alliance of Black Reformed Churches in Southern Africa (ABRESCA)* met in conference 26-30 October 1980 at Hammanskraal, a large township north of Pretoria, and at the time part of the Homeland Bophuthatswana. ABRESCA's *Theological Basis*, which confesses the supreme authority of the Word of God, upholds that Christ is the Lord of all life and that it is their task to proclaim it. "God institutes the authority of the state, it further proclaims, "for the just and

³⁰Hofmeyr, Millard, Froneman, *History of the Church in South Africa*, 303-304.

legitimate government of the world. Therefore we obey government only in so far as its laws and instructions are not in conflict with the word of God. Obedience to earthly authorities is only obedience *in God*.” In addition the *Basis* professes that the “indivisibility of the body of Christ demands that the barriers of race, culture ethnicity, language and sex be transcended.” ABRESCA also “unequivocally declares that apartheid is a sin, and that the moral and theological justification of it is a travesty of the gospel, a betrayal of the reformed tradition and a heresy.”

This *epitomising* of apartheid had far reaching consequences. It deeply influenced the Statement on *Racism and South Africa*³¹ by the General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Ottawa during August 1982, in which the situation in South Africa was consequently understood 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 our common confession as Reformed Churches. We declare with Black Christians of South Africa that apartheid (separate development) is a sin, and that the moral and theological justification of it is a travesty of the gospel and, in its persistent disobedience to the Word of God, a theological heresy.”³² This offered the platform for the Dutch Reformed Mission Church DRMC, a church established for ‘coloureds’ in 1881 by the DRC in terms of its mission policy, to table the *Confession of Belhar* at its synodical meeting in October 1982, finally adopted in 1986. This was experienced as “A moment of Truth” in the history of the DRMC. In addition to the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordt, the DRMC thus received a fourth confessional standard.

1982/1986: The Confession of Belhar

The *Confession of Belhar* entails 5 articles of faith.³³ In the first, the belief in the triune God who gathers, protects and cares for his Church by His Word and Spirit, “as he has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end” is confessed. The following article emphasises the *unity* of the church. Christ’s work of reconciliation is made manifest in the Church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another. The unity must therefore become visible, so that the world may believe. Any doctrine which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders the visible and active unity of the church is therefore rejected.³⁴ In the third article it is confessed that God has entrusted to his Church the message of *reconciliation* through Jesus Christ and that the credibility of the message is seriously affected and obstructed when it is “proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of

³¹Hofmeyr, Millard, Froneman, *History of the Church in South Africa*, 333-337.

³²Hofmeyr, Millard, Froneman, *History of the Church in South Africa*, 335.

³³Hofmeyr, Millard, Froneman, *History of the Church in South Africa*, 346-348.

³⁴Hofmeyr, Millard, Froneman, *History of the Church in South Africa*, 346-347.

people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity.”³⁵ Any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the Gospel must therefore be considered ideology and false doctrine. Article four professes that God has revealed himself as the One who 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 ... that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need..” The church as God’s possession must stand where He stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged...”³⁶ The fifth article concludes: We belief that in obedience to Jesus Christ, ... the Church is called to confess and do all this, even though authorities and laws forbid them and even though punishment and suffering be the consequence.”³⁷

The theological and historical critiquing of Apartheid culminated in the acceptance of the *Confession of Belhar*. This confessional standard embodied a turning point that in particular and fundamentally confronted the DRC Family of Churches in Africa. The contextual opposition to apartheid now being elevated to the permanency and *conclusiveness* of confessional status, in principle challenged the world wide family of reformed churches to reflect on this contemporary South African theological development.

In 1985/86 the situation in South Africa dramatically changed. The country was plummeted into in a state of emergency as the movement against apartheid gained irretrievable momentum, which was led by the United Democratic Front. The change came in 1990. The last three documents that we consider, came from this period of time. The first is the *Kairos Document*, followed by the *Road to Damascus* and the DRC’s testimony *Church and Society*.

1985: The Kairos Document

In September 1985 *The Kairos Document* was published as *A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa*.³⁸ It presented itself as a *Challenge to the Church* as a prophetic word, a proclamation. It saw its method or way of doing theology as its most exciting and important contribution. The immediate context was the “state of emergency” in South Africa. It “reinforced the people’s faith and hope for a new and just society in South Africa. It came as an empowering instrument of faith committing them more than ever before to the struggle for

³⁵Hofmeyr, Millard, Froneman, *History of the Church in South Africa*, 247.

³⁶Hofmeyr, Millard, Froneman, *History of the Church in South Africa*, 348.

³⁷Hofmeyr, Millard, Froneman, *History of the Church in South Africa*, 348.

³⁸*The Kairos Document. Challenge to the Church. A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa* (Braamfontein: Skotaville Publishers, 1986, 2nd Edition). The first edition was signed by 111 theologians and lay people, of which at least half came from churches with a reformed confession and tradition (E.g. Dutch Reformed Mission Church, Reformed Church in Africa, Dutch Reformed Church in Africa, United Congregational Church, Evangelical Presbyterian Church and Reformed Presbyterian Church).

justice and peace in South Africa.” In the preface to the revised second edition (published in September 1986) the Kairos Theologians were convinced that “whilst the Botha regime is going all out to demonstrate its power and its determination to maintain apartheid at all costs, the people have become more determined than ever to resist this regime even at the cost of their lives. This is indeed frightening. It is a *real Kairos!*”³⁹

The Kairos Document entailed six chapters. The first chapter is entitled: ‘The Moment of Truth.’⁴⁰ The crisis in which South Africa has been plunged in is, according to the Kairos theologians, “the Kairos or moment of truth not only for apartheid, but also for the Church and all other faiths and religions.”⁴¹ The theological significance of this moment of truth compels the church to analyse more carefully the different theologies embraced in them and to speak out boldly about the real significance of these theologies. The crisis for the church is that both oppressor and oppressed claim loyalty to the same church. The church is therefore about to be shown up for what it really is and no cover up will be possible. Three theologies were identified and analysed: ‘State Theology,’ ‘Church Theology’ and ‘Prophetic Theology.’⁴²

The second chapter is dedicated to a critique of ‘State Theology.’ The South African Apartheid State, the document observes, has a theology of its own, misusing theological concepts and biblical texts for its own political purposes. Romans 13:1-7 is misused to give the State an absolute and divine authority.⁴³ The idea of ‘law and order’ is used to determine and control “what the people may be permitted to regard as just and unjust.”⁴⁴ Thirdly this State theology has created or invented the ‘atheistic’ “communism” or the “threat of communism” to function as its own symbol of evil.⁴⁵ Finally there is the use of the Name of God by the State. “The god of the South African State is not merely an idol or false god, it is the devil disguised as Almighty God – the antichrist.”⁴⁶

The third chapter critiques what *The Kairos Document* identifies as ‘Church Theology.’ This theology emphasises reconciliation⁴⁷ and calls for justice⁴⁸ and non-violence.⁴⁹ This is regarded as superficial and even counter-productive, “because instead of engaging in an in-depth analysis of the signs of our times, it relies on a few stock ideas derived from Christian tradition

³⁹*The Kairos Document*, Preface.

⁴⁰*The Kairos Document*, 1 ff.

⁴¹*The Kairos Document*, 1.

⁴²*The Kairos Document*, 2.

⁴³*The Kairos Document*, 3-5.

⁴⁴*The Kairos Document*, 5-6.

⁴⁵*The Kairos Document*, 7.

⁴⁶*The Kairos Document*, 8.

⁴⁷*The Kairos Document*, 9-11.

⁴⁸*The Kairos Document*, 11-12.

⁴⁹*The Kairos Document*, 13-15.

and the uncritically and repeatedly applies them to our situation.”⁵⁰The inadequacies of this theology are due to the fact that ‘Church Theology’ has not developed a social analysis that would enable it to understand the mechanics of injustice and oppression. Closely linked to this is the lack of an adequate understanding of politics and political strategy.⁵¹ It makes a virtue of neutrality and sits on the side-lines. Why? The type of *faith and spirituality* that tended to be an other-worldly affair, that has very little to do with affairs and social problems of this world and that tends to rely upon God to intervene in his own good time, is a spirituality that leaves very little for human beings to do and act.⁵²

In chapter four – ‘Towards a Prophetic Theology’ - *The Kairos Document* argues a “response from Christians that is biblical, spiritual, pastoral, and above all, prophetic.”⁵³As a response prophetic theology should be solidly grounded in the Bible. It searches the Word of God for a message that is relevant to what “we are experiencing in South Africa.”⁵⁴ Consequently a prophetic theology would include a reading of the signs of the times, as did the prophets in their times, and as did Jesus tells us to do. The starting point of prophetic theology will therefore be the experience of the present kairos, the experience of oppression and tyranny, of conflict, crisis and struggle, “our experience of trying to be Christians in this situation.”⁵⁵ Prophetic theology thus always calls for action and is always confrontational. And, it places a great deal of emphasis on *hope*. It denounces sin and announces salvation.⁵⁶

In the light of the biblical teaching about suffering, oppression and tyranny⁵⁷prophetic theology in South Africa has to *analyse* the current situation. It therefore makes use of the “social categories that the Bible makes use of, namely, the oppressor and the oppressed.”⁵⁸ Structurally these two are in conflict in South Africa. Prophetic theology faces “us with a fundamental choice that admits of no compromises.”⁵⁹ If it is established beyond doubt that a particular government rules is a tyrant, or that a particular regime is tyrannical (as in South Africa), the people acquire the right to resist and to find a means to protect their own interests against injustice and oppression.”⁶⁰ It has made itself the “enemy of the people, and therefore the enemy of God.”⁶¹ The most loving thing that can be done to both the oppressed and the

⁵⁰*The Kairos Document*, 9.

⁵¹*The Kairos Document*, 15-16.

⁵²*The Kairos Document*, 16.

⁵³*The Kairos Document*, 17.

⁵⁴*The Kairos Document*, 17.

⁵⁵*The Kairos Document*, 17.

⁵⁶*The Kairos Document*, 18.

⁵⁷*The Kairos Document*, 18-20.

⁵⁸*The Kairos Document*, 21.

⁵⁹*The Kairos Document*, 22.

⁶⁰*The Kairos Document*, 22.

⁶¹*The Kairos Document*, 24.

oppressors “is to eliminate the oppression, remove the tyrants from power and establish a just government for the common good of *all the people*.”⁶² In terms of the biblical teaching of liberation and hope, prophetic theology’s message of hope is most relevant at the moment of crisis in South Africa. In addressing the oppressed, it will thus focus the attention on the future.⁶³

The conclusion of the *Kairos Document* is that “now is the time to act – to act hopefully, to act with full confidence and trust in God.”⁶⁴ The fifth chapter is therefore a ‘Challenge to Action.’⁶⁵ The church should take sides, uniting herself with God “who is always on the side of the oppressed” (Ps 103:6).⁶⁶ “Unity and reconciliation within the Church itself is only possible around God and Jesus Christ who are to be found on the side of the poor and the oppressed.”⁶⁷ The church therefore has to participate in the struggle in terms of concrete and effective action by transforming its activities, involvement in special campaigns, civil disobedience and moral guidance embedded in the moral duty to resist oppression and to struggle for liberation and justice.⁶⁸

The sixth chapter invites for further discussion, reflection and prayer. “We are convinced,” write the *Kairos* theologians, “that this challenge comes from God and that it is addressed to all of us. We see the present crisis or Kairos as indeed a divine visitation.”⁶⁹ Finally a call goes out to all “our brothers and sisters throughout the world to give us the necessary support ... so that the daily loss of so many lives may be brought to a speedy end.”⁷⁰

1989: Road to Damascus

Over a period of two and a half years, hundreds of Christians from different church traditions in seven countries (the Philippines, South Korea, Namibia, South Africa, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala) were involved in drafting *The Road to Damascus. Kairos and Conversion*⁷¹ as a proclamation of faith and a call to conversion. It consists of 91 thesis divided in four chapters and a conclusion. In the Preamble the signatories of the document state that what they have in common “is not only a situation of violent political conflict, but also the phenomenon of

⁶² *The Kairos Document*, 24-25.

⁶³ *The Kairos Document*, 26.

⁶⁴ *The Kairos Document*, 27.

⁶⁵ *The Kairos Document*, 28 ff.

⁶⁶ *The Kairos Document*, 28.

⁶⁷ *The Kairos Document*, 28.

⁶⁸ *The Kairos Document*, 29-30.

⁶⁹ *The Kairos Document*, 31.

⁷⁰ *The Kairos Document*, 31.

⁷¹ *The Road to Damascus. Kairos and Conversion* (Braamfontein: Skotaville Publishers, 1989). More than 150 theologians in South Africa and Namibia from reformed churches and a reformed tradition signed the document. A Total of approximately 550 theologians and lay persons sign this ecumenical document.

Christians on both sides of the conflict.⁷² This is accompanied, they say, by the development of a Christian theology that sides with the poor and the oppressed on the one hand, and on the other by a Christian theology that sides with the oppressor.⁷³ The purpose of the document is not simply to deplore the divisions among Christians or to exhort both sides to seek unity. It wishes to lay bare the historical and political roots of the conflict (chapter 1), to affirm the faith of the poor and oppressed Christians (chapter 2), to condemn the sins of those who oppress, exploit, persecute and kill people (chapter 3) and to call to conversion those that have strayed from the truth of the Christian faith (chapter 4).

The line of argumentation in the first chapter rests upon historical interpretation. Colonialism, interpreted in a particular way, is identified as one of the “roots of our conflict.”⁷⁴ European and Christian nations have colonised “our countries.” Conquest and evangelicalism, colonisation and the establishment of churches advanced together to oppress, “to enslave millions, uprooted from their native land, deculturised and deprived of their wealth and resources.”⁷⁵ This constituted a history of suffering and oppression. And, a history of struggle and resistance. Christians were also to be found on the side of those who protest and fought against colonialism.

Colonialism was replaced by what the document calls the domination of ‘Western Imperialism.’⁷⁶ “Their web of economic control includes an unfair international trade system, multinational companies that monopolise strategic sections of our economy, economic policies dictated by lending banks and governments together with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.”⁷⁷ The effects of this modern post-colonial imperialism upon the Third World form a litany of woes: suffering, poverty, displacements from land, unsanitary slums, unemployment, etc. In the living tradition of popular resistance there is a growing and mass democratic movement - men women and children, students, youth teachers, church people and cultural workers, doctors, nurses lawyers, and business people - against Western Imperialism. This marks the coming of age of a new historical subject.⁷⁸

The misuse of Christianity as a religious legitimisation for the West, as a response to an earlier development that provide for Christians’ participation in the struggle against colonialism.⁷⁹

⁷²*The Road to Damascus*, preamble.

⁷³The two antagonistic forms of theology is referred to with a variety of different names: liberation theology, feminist theology, minjung theology, black theology, etc. on the one hand and state theology, anti-communist evangelicals, conservative Christianity, the theology of reconciliation, etc. on the other.

⁷⁴*The Road to Damascus*, 1-2.

⁷⁵*The Road to Damascus*, 1.

⁷⁶*The Road to Damascus*, 2 ff.

⁷⁷*The Road to Damascus*, 2.

⁷⁸*The Road to Damascus*, 3.

⁷⁹*The Road to Damascus*, 5.

Again Christians participated in the people's movement, "to release the power and resources of their faith and the Church to serve the poor."⁸⁰ The Christian faith is now introduced in the political conflict. Both oppressor and oppressed seek religious legitimation. Both sides invoke the Name of God and of Jesus Christ, which means that the conflict has entered the churches. The conflict amongst Christians therefore raises some serious questions, the document states. Is the God invoked by both sides the same God? Is God on both sides? If not, on whose side is God?⁸¹

The document deliberately answers these questions in the ensuing chapters. The second chapter offers an analysis of the faith of the poor.⁸² The Damascus theologians are convinced that the missionaries preached a God and Gospel that suited the cause of the oppressor. Their experience of poverty and oppression motivated them to read the Bible with different eyes. The true God was discovered. He is the God of the poor and is angry about injustice in the world and he will judge all human beings according to what they have done or not to the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick and those in prison.⁸³ He is on the side of the poor, the oppressed, the persecuted. This faith must be proclaimed in a situation of political conflict between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless. When this faith is condemned as a heresy, "we are faced with a *kairos*, a moment of truth, a time of decision, a time of grace, a God-given opportunity for conversion and hope."⁸⁴

The next chapter (three) explicates the lack of faith that has prevented Christians from exercising the prophetic mission given to them by Christ.⁸⁵ Christians have often been silent instead of denouncing injustice and oppression, remained uninvolved instead of working for justice. What are the reasons? For some, the reason lies in a life not confronted by the suffering and struggle of the poor "and therefore the choice of a convenient God who does not challenge us to take part in a movement for change."⁸⁶ For others it lies in a choice of privilege and power, "and a *conscious* defence of the status quo."⁸⁷ For such people it is not only the inability to hear and see; it is a refusal to hear and see. It is not merely a lack of faith in the living god, it is the worship of a false God – the sin of idolatry. And, idolatry⁸⁸ leads Christians to other sins – heresy,⁸⁹ apostasy,⁹⁰ hypocrisy⁹¹ and blasphemy.⁹² The call to conversion – the road to

⁸⁰The Road to Damascus, 5.

⁸¹The Road to Damascus, 6.

⁸²The Road to Damascus, 7-9.

⁸³The Road to Damascus, 9.

⁸⁴The Road to Damascus, 9.

⁸⁵The Road to Damascus, 10-18.

⁸⁶The Road to Damascus, 10.

⁸⁷The Road to Damascus, 10.

⁸⁸The Road to Damascus, 10-13.

⁸⁹The Road to Damascus, 13-15.

⁹⁰The Road to Damascus, 15-16.

Damascus – to the God who is on the side of the poor is treated in chapter four.⁹³ On this road Paul was confronted with the conflict between two images or beliefs about God. Therefore, this *kairos* on the road to Damascus must be taken seriously by all who in the name of God support the persecution of Christians who side with the poor. “The call to conversion is loud and clear.”⁹⁴ “We cannot sit on the fence and profess neutrality while people are being persecuted, exploited and killed.”⁹⁵

In conclusion the document asserts that it has made clear “that we believe that those Christians who side with the imperialists, the oppressors and the exploiters of people are siding with the idolaters who worship money, power, privilege and pleasure.”⁹⁶ To misuse Christianity to defend oppression is heretical. The document was also written “to give account of the hope that is in us.”⁹⁷ “Because of our faith in Jesus, we are bold enough to hope for something that fulfils and transcends all human expectations, namely the reign of God.”⁹⁸

1986/1990: Church and Society. A Testimony of the Dutch Reformed Church

The DRC had to review its 1974 declaration of *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*. This was done at the 1986 and 1990 General Synods. *Church and Society* as a statement of policy was the first courageous attempt at shaking off an unfortunate image of the DRC. The Church thus offered this statement as a “sign of its integrity, as guidelines for its members to follow and as an invitation to dialogue with the ecumenic (sic!) community – with this one prayer in our hearts that also in this way we may serve the Kingdom of Christ.”⁹⁹ In the Preface to *Church and Society* the DRC states that this church, aware of its vocation has “during the long years of its existence in Southern Africa endeavoured to understand and construe what demands these circumstances pose to the ministry of the Gospel.”¹⁰⁰ The DRC is aware of what has been done in the past (“however faulty and full of shortcomings it may have been”) but is nevertheless convinced that everything was not without significance, but of service to the Kingdom of God.¹⁰¹ For the DRC the call to draw closer to the Biblical demands concerning what a church ought to be, still remained a matter of grave concern for the Church. Hence the testimony: *Church and Society*.

⁹¹*The Road to Damascus*, 17 ff.

⁹²*The Road to Damascus*, 18.

⁹³*The Road to Damascus*, 19-20.

⁹⁴*The Road to Damascus*, 20.

⁹⁵*The Road to Damascus*, 20.

⁹⁶*The Road to Damascus*, 21.

⁹⁷*The Road to Damascus*, 21.

⁹⁸*The Road to Damascus*, 21.

⁹⁹*Church and Society 1990. A Testimony of the Dutch Reformed Church* (Bloemfontein: NG Sendingpers, 1990), foreword.

¹⁰⁰*Church and Society 1990*, preface.

¹⁰¹*Church and Society 1990*, preface.

Church and Society comprises of two chapters: *Basic Scriptural Principles*¹⁰² regarding the Bible and its interpretation (paragraph 1), the church (paragraph 2) and the church and group relations (paragraph 3) and the in the second chapter *Some Practical Implications*¹⁰³ are discussed. In the first chapter's first paragraph, an introduction,¹⁰⁴ it is i.a. stated that portions of the Bible such as Gen 2:18, 10:19-20, 11:1, 7-9, Deut 32:8, Prov 22:28, Matt 24:7, John 17:20-23, Acts 2:8, 17:26, 1 Cor 7:20, 12, Gal. 3:28-29 and Rev 21:3, 24 may not be used as a Scriptural basis for political models. The Bible must be interpreted in terms of its own character.¹⁰⁵ The second paragraph gives an exposition of the church with regard to its nature and calling.¹⁰⁶ The church as the people of God, is a unique creation of God in a sinful and broken world. The essence of the church is determined by the Word of God. In accordance with Christ's threefold office the church has a prophetic, priestly and kingly task.¹⁰⁷ When proclaiming the Gospel, the church must earnestly heed the specific spiritual and cultural needs of the various communities to whom the word is taken. Allowance may therefore be made for the church to be indigenous. The church is a fellowship of faith, confession and worship, which means that faith in the Triune God and his revelation in Scripture is the only prerequisite for membership of the church.¹⁰⁸

The church is also a mission and diaconal fellowship. The diaconal services must reach out to all people, must oppose all structures in the community which are contradictory to Scripture and must endeavour to bring about a better society and must liaise with the authorities on all levels to eliminate the causes of distress and must make all people aware of the fact that they have a personal responsibility to be supporting as far as possible.¹⁰⁹ As a universal fellowship the church may not be restricted to one nation or group. As a reconciled fellowship the church is one in the Triune God. This must be experienced concretely, visibly and must be maintained in the midst of all diversity.¹¹⁰

The third paragraph deals with group relations, race and nation. The testimony this time finds the differences of race and colour play no part in the Bible's assessment of mankind. Racism is therefore a grievous sin which no person or church may defend or practise.¹¹¹ With regard to the relationship between church, nation and nations, nation and church may not be identified as one. In structuring the church, however, provision may be made for linguistic and cultural

¹⁰²*Church and Society 1990, 2-32.*

¹⁰³*Church and Society 1990, 33-46.*

¹⁰⁴*Church and Society 1990, 2-4.*

¹⁰⁵*Church and Society 1990, 3, 4.*

¹⁰⁶*Church and Society 1990, 4-14.*

¹⁰⁷*Church and Society 1990, 5.*

¹⁰⁸*Church and Society 1990, 7.*

¹⁰⁹*Church and Society 1990, 9.*

¹¹⁰*Church and Society 1990, 11-12.* Diversity cannot be used as a pretext for disunity in the church.

¹¹¹*Church and Society 1990, 15-17.*

differences related to the diversity of peoples, but then in such a way that the church's unity is not jeopardised, but served.¹¹²

The last part of the paragraph is dedicated to Biblical-ethical guidelines for personal and group relationships. The practise of righteousness and justice is an important biblical precept.¹¹³ Believers therefore must be sensitive and intercede for the rights of the destitute, the poor, the wronged and the defenceless.¹¹⁴ In doing so they follow the example set by God Himself. This means that injustice and distress must be brought to the attention of the authorities and all parties concerned.¹¹⁵ As far as the church's responsibility with regard to group relations is concerned, Church and society testifies that in its proclamation of the church must call on members to bring the principles of God's Kingdom to bear in social and political spheres, that is, all forms of justice must be firmly rejected. In its meetings it must deal in an ecclesiastical way with matters which have religious-ethical implications and in this way concentrate on its own task.¹¹⁶

The second chapter (*Some Practical Implications*) is an effort to apply the *Basic Principles* to the DRC and its family, and to offer directions in which they can be implemented. It is e.g. stated that membership of all DR congregations are open to any believer who accepts the confession of the church.¹¹⁷ The DRC now also recognises the training, licensing and the mutual eligibility of ministers of the Word to be called to congregations within the family of DR Churches.¹¹⁸ An important aspect concerns the DRC and political models. Scripture is not a political manual from which specific political models can be deduced, therefore the church may not prescribe political models to government, but by virtue of its prophetic function it will continue to test every existing and proposed political model against the Biblical principles and norms.¹¹⁹ With regard to Apartheid, the DRC acknowledges that "for too long it has adjudges the policy of apartheid too abstractly and theoretically, and therefore too uncritically."¹²⁰ The church made the error of allowing forced separation and division op peoples in its own circle to be considered a biblical imperative. Any system which in practise functions in the way apartheid did, is unacceptable in the light of Scripture and the Christian conscience and must be rejected as sinful. Any attempt

¹¹²*Church and Society 1990*, 18.

¹¹³*Church and Society 1990*, 21.

¹¹⁴*Church and Society 1990*, 22.

¹¹⁵*Church and Society 1990*, 23.

¹¹⁶*Church and Society 1990*, 30.

¹¹⁷*Church and Society 1990*, 35.

¹¹⁸*Church and Society 1990*, 36.

¹¹⁹*Church and Society 1990*, 38.

¹²⁰*Church and Society 1990*, 39.

by a church to defend such a system biblically and ethically, must be seen as a serious fallacy, that is to say, it is in conflict with the Bible.¹²¹

The first (1974) and the last (1986/1990) of the documents surveyed, belong to the white DRC. They represent the thinking, reflection, and self-critique of a church that was convinced that its public theology biblically justified the policy of apartheid. Reconsideration during the last 16 years of the theological and confessional motivated rejection of this theology, forced this church to review its position. *Church and Society* is a testimony in this regard, articulated in terms of language that is carried by the tradition of the DRC and not that typical of the trajectories that discarded both the system and theology of Apartheid.

CONCLUSION

The eight above listed key documents are important indicators of a contemporary history of African reformed theology, in which these sources spoke for itself. They were voiced in a particular political and Christian dominated context as declarations, statements of faith, testimonies, comments and a decisive doctrinal standard. Our investigation identified two theological trajectories, from two opposing perspectives in understanding the context, casted in typical theological language linked to shared issues like e.g. justice. Both trajectories have in common the emphasis on the Kingdom or reign of God, the role and visible presence of the church in society, the voice and vital influence of the church in terms of a comprehensive significant public theology, the calling (and ability) of the church to make or to bring about change or reform to society that would be based upon values as justice, peace, equality, freedom, etc., the role of the state and government, and in final instance where God in Christ was and is to be found. In this context of political and racial oppression and the battles for freedom a development can also be traced, most prominently profiled in the statements of the historic DRC.

As was seen, the trajectories disclose differentiated assumptions and conjectures, which brought Christians and churches in opposite camps. The *Confession of Belhar*, the *Kairos Document* and the *Road to Damascus* made this a powerful point of departure, while in the rest of the documents it functioned as an underpinning assumption. Thoroughly aware of that 20 odd years 'distance in history' provides for a limited and preliminary appraisal of these reformed-theological trajectories of thinking, one cannot but to admit that the fact that Christian stood against Christian, church opposed church, interpretation contradicted interpretation, unveils the depth and width of the constituting problem this history of the church confronts us with. In South Africa this is not new. The paramount Chief of Lesotho

¹²¹*Church and Society* 1990, 40.

confronted the Christians with the consequences of their endeavours in 1858, when he wrote to the Christian and white President of the Free State:

“You call yourself a Christian in your letter to me. I have long known that you are a Christian; but the commandants of your army are not yet Christians and, if they persist in claiming they are, they will force us to believe that there is no God. What! Would their Christianity consist in destroying Christianity?”

Siding Christians made God side in Christ. And, exactly this empowered (reformed) Christians to profess, to state, to testify, to confess, to analyse and to act during the years of our *FreedomStruggle*. The *crucified* Christ, however, let nobody side with Him, not Peter (I will give my life to you), not Thomas (let us go and die with Him), not the apostles, disciples, neither the women that followed Him. He was alone, the perfect redeeming offer for us. This Christ asks to be ministered to a contextual South African theology, to people praying for reconciliation, forgiveness, healing, still suffering, still facing their history, and still receiving a full and blessed life.

Because of the living Christ, who is always with His children, Moshesh was wrong.