

**The church as a credible contributor to moral regeneration in
Democratic South Africa today:
A theological-ethical approach to current challenges**

by

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ABSTRACT

With the start of democracy in South Africa and the end of the legal Apartheid rule, it became apparent to those who identified the church with the liberation struggle that Christian communities had lost their significance in society today. This feeling, although not popular among theologians, became widely held by those who thought that we had arrived politically. This feeling was also supported by views which felt that democracy was the ultimate human form of governance. In this light, it is conceivable for churches to abandon the struggle because of the irrelevance of agitating a form of government that is affirmed and celebrated globally. Also, it became justified to abandon the struggle, if indeed the struggle was against Apartheid, because the enemy had been defeated. Consequently, this meant a withdrawal from siding with those whose rights were marginalised. Such an abrupt withdrawal from championing the rights of those who are marginalised (especially as displayed by the church during the Apartheid era) also raises many concerns pertaining to the role that the churches ought to be playing in the current democratic dispensation.

It is also conceivable that the initiative to struggle against Apartheid was motivated only by the fact that the Apartheid regime was unjust and that it discriminated against certain groups of South African citizens. The attainment of liberation in South Africa has plunged churches into an illusion that democratic states are capable of good governance and that when such a government exists, churches can safely concern themselves with their primary ecclesiastical duties—of preaching the Word of God and administering the sacraments and leave the socio-economic and political affairs to those who are governing.

It seems that this view is especially prevalent among the constituency of the church that brought forward a theological confession against the theological legitimacy

granted to the Apartheid ideology. To unapologetically declare its association with those on the margins, and to defy Apartheid for the evil that it was, this church brought about the Belhar Confession as proof of its allegiance to those on the margins. This study shall confine itself to the realm of the Christian community. It will look to the historicity of the URCSA precisely because it has been bold enough to pen a confession that chastised Apartheid.

Key Terms: HIV/AIDS, Moral Regeneration, URCSA, SACC, Apartheid, Society, Agency

DECLARATION

Student Number: 4528344

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled: **THE CHURCH AS A CREDIBLE CONTRIBUTOR TO MORAL REGENERATION IN DEMOCRATIC SOUTH AFRICA TODAY: A THEOLOGICAL-ETHICAL APPROACH TO CURRENT CHALLENGES** at the University of South Africa is my own work. All the sources I have used or quoted in the study have been indicated and acknowledged by way of complete references.

SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: 30/ 07/ 2014 _____

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DEDICATION

I lovingly dedicate this Ph.D thesis to my sons and best friends, Dr Llewellyn Padayachy and Ransley Padayachy, my daughters-in-law, Dr Vaishali Padayachy and Shevani Padayachy and my grandchildren Shreya Padayachy, Aaryan Padayachy, Vidya Padayachy and Saahil Padayachy.

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CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH PROPOSAL

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the advent of democracy in South Africa and the end of the legal Apartheid rule, it would appear to those who identified the church with the liberation struggle, that churches had lost their zeal. This could be partly because those who were at the forefront of this struggle now seem to be of the view that democracy is the ultimate human form of governance. In this light, it is conceivable that churches are able to abandon the struggle because of a lack of purpose in a just and democratic government. Such an abrupt withdrawal from championing the rights of those who are marginalised also raises many concerns pertaining to the role that the church ought to be playing in the current democratic dispensation. It is also conceivable that the initiative to struggle against Apartheid was motivated only by the fact that the Apartheid regime was unjust and that it discriminated against certain groups of South African citizens. The attainment of liberation in South Africa has fostered the illusion that democratic states are capable of good governance and that, when such a government exists, churches can safely concern themselves with their primary ecclesiastical duties and leave the socio-economic and political affairs to those who are governing.

While there is a sea of literature on the church's struggle against Apartheid, it is also true that the individual clergy who were on the frontlines became identified with the struggle. This instinctively brings to mind people such as Beyers Naude, Desmond Tutu, Allan Boesak, Frank Chikane and others. This research will focus on Alan Boesak's church, the former Dutch Reformed Mission Church, which amalgamated with the black Dutch Reformed Church in Africa to become the Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa. It will explore the continued role that Christian communities have in society. This is informed by the fact that the church, even within this confusing context, is still considered as the most trusted institution in South Africa. This research will explore how a Christian denomination such as the URCSA has

metamorphosed from being associated with the Apartheid DRC to empowering communities.

Within a new context such as the current democratic South Africa, the URCSA is challenged by the need to reinterpret the confession of Belhar so that it takes into account the changed and changing context while, at the same time, registering its association with those who remain on the fringes of the new South African context. This study is interested in a renewed interpretation of this declaration or confession precisely because the URCSA is compelled to ponder its purpose as a community of resident aliens in this world.

The changed and changing situation in South Africa has conferred a number of rights to those who were once alienated within their own country. The newly designed constitution guarantees all citizens their rights and benefits, while affording them the freedom of religion. Whereas the church used to be one of the organisations charged directly with matters that the state failed to address (wittingly as well as unwittingly), we now have, within our country, numerous Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) which deal with the issues that concern the populace.

In some instances in the past, pulpits were used to make their congregations aware of the evil inherent in Apartheid thinking and praxis. Those who followed that kind of gospel now find themselves in a quandary for they are not sure what the new dispensation brings them. This is partially due to the numerous calls made by prominent theologians after the demise of Apartheid that the church should now reconsider its approach to the state.¹

In 1995, after the first democratic and fair election held on South African soil, an anthology was published by the South Africa Council of Churches called 'Being church in South Africa today'. In 1997, there appeared a follow-up to this previous anthology

¹ For a detailed analysis of the views by these theologians, cf. Guma & Milton (1997).

entitled, *An African challenge to the church in the 21st century* (Guma & Milton 1997). This second anthology continued the discussion of what it means to be a church within the new context. These collections were written by theologians who once spearheaded the struggle against Apartheid. This call has undoubtedly confused many since it implies that, prior to the democratic epoch, the church was not a church in the true sense of the word. Consequently, the call seems to give the impression that the administration of the sacraments and the preaching of the Word are the only functions that the churches have to perform.

The birth of the Belhar Confession, among many other theological imperatives, was a significant statement of the church to the world, and has become a phenomenon which is difficult to fathom today. Although several studies have illustrated the importance of Belhar for the past, they lack consensus on how this confession can be translated into the current context.

1.2 Research problem

This study shall endeavour to probe the new context in which Christian communities find themselves today in South Africa. The research question is considering the continued trustworthiness of Christian communities to be moral agents in present day South Africa. This research questions whether the necessary paradigm shifts have been made within the frame of reference of a denomination which was very closely identified with the struggle against Apartheid. It contends that it is only when genuine and sincere debates, firstly within itself and then with others, become a norm that the church will come close to understanding the challenges that confront it today.

Arguably, not much research has been done on the subject. Furthermore, this study is of the view that more needs to be done in assessing the renewed relationship between the URCSA and society. This research will be undertaken in the form of a literary survey. In order to suggest ways in which the confessional church ought to

engage the public sphere in this new dispensation, the first chapter will briefly look at the history that brought about this church. In order to do that, it will have to deal with issues that created the discrepancies between the church and society, and the reactions that challenge the forces instituted to safeguard and sustain the differences between people.

Since this study is primarily aimed at assessing the URCSA in its current context, it is necessary to deal with the confession that has caused the brouhaha within reformed South African theological circles. This study will also delve into the issue of unity within the URCSA itself, with the hope of initiating a theological debate, which will require that both black and coloured members of this church deliberate the differences that they have between themselves.

1.3 Hypothesis

If the research question is anchored on the issue of trustworthiness of the Christian community, then it follows naturally that the church will have to harness this feeling which is shared by many Christian adherents in South Africa and the world. The hypothesis of this research is that the church and the URCSA, in particular, must look away from self pity and be a leader in creating a better society.

Because of the fact that Christian communities are perceived to be the most trustworthy institutions, this research will investigate the extent to which they can be harnessed to bring about real change in the lived experiences of their adherents and of those who are still marginalised by our society. This question is raised in a context where literature indicates that the Christian faith is gravitating towards the global South. The implications for this are for the Christian faith on the continent to assert itself and to boldly bring to the fore alternative solution that can contribute to the life of those who are still marginalised in history.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

The research will take the form of desk top research. Literature on the church during the struggle, the URCSA and the Belhar Confession will be consulted to frame the context in which ethical challenges for the present are made. While there is a sea of literature on the subject of the church struggle, not much has been done to link the trustworthiness of the church with the running of NGOs.

1.5 LIMITATIONS AND KEY ASSUMPTIONS

This research has been done within the ambit of theological ethics. The theology implied is that which informed the Belhar Confession of the URCSA. Theology, as seen through the struggle days, has always been public. This research wishes to galvanise a transformed church to take its position in society instead of closing itself up from the world. This research is furthermore also interested in the social-economic and cultural issues in the light of poverty and the HIV pandemic which can position the church as a leader in that domain.

1.6 ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

The fourth chapter is of particular importance. It is significant in that it raises the ethical issues and names them. This is done so that the church can once again see the gap between itself and the real world. These issues are varied, and, although they are not all mentioned, the church is reminded of their realities in order to engage with the issue of morality.

In Chapter 5, recommendations will be made for how a transformed church such the URCSA, which was unapologetic about its hostility towards Apartheid, could give leadership on the front of social empowerment. We shall also see how the dependency syndrome which is inevitable in the designated church has for a long time prevented this church to see its potential in leading society.

CHAPTER TWO: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR A TRANSFORMED CHURCH

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Although the focus of this study is not on Apartheid from an extensive socio-economic and political perspective, the issue cannot be explored significantly without referring to the impact that Apartheid had on black South Africans. Hence, this study will touch on the political details, although in a cursory manner.

Apartheid (Motlhabi 1984:5; cf. Mbali 1987:8) or 'separate development' was the Nationalist idea that each group (as defined by the engineers of Apartheid) in South Africa should have 'separate freedoms'. Besides the physical separation, this included political, cultural, socio-economic and religious separation. Chief Albert Luthuli described this by saying that

... there is really no possibility of anyone developing 'along his own lines' ... in practice 'developing along your own lines' turns out not to be developing along your own lines at all, but developing along the lines designated by the government through the Native Affairs Department. Even in determining the laws that govern us in our development, there is no attempt to consult those affected ... 'Development along your own lines' has come to mean 'developing along their own lines' (Motlhabi 1984:5; cf. Mbali 1987:8).

A number of studies on the historicity of Apartheid in South Africa have been done addressed from different perspectives dependant on the political position of the study. This study concerns itself with the consensus that Apartheid was a catastrophe from which South Africa is trying to recover.²

² The new dispensation in South Africa has instigated many debates both from sociological, economic as well as theological perspectives to assess the damage caused by this ideology. Although

The socio-political and theological situations in South Africa were hardly separated from each other manifested by the closely-knit relationship which existed between the Dutch Reformed Church and the ruling National Party (NP). Serfontein, in his exposé of the relationship between the Apartheid regime and the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) gives a clear impression of how these two entities operated to bolster each other. He maintains that, since the NP came to power in 1948, it has been almost impossible to separate the interests of church, party and state. In the history of the NP, the NGK³ and its leaders have often played a direct and active role (Serfontein 1982:70).

The struggle against Apartheid was always undertaken in a unified form with a close co-operation between theological and political institutions. It is for this reason that it is difficult to credit one institution above the other. This unified approach opposing Apartheid affected the theology of the Belhar Confession. After sketching the context of the theology that brought about the Belhar Confession, this study will look critically at this theology and ponder its relevance to the challenges confronting us today.

2.2 AN INTERLUDE TO THE AFRIKANER'S QUEST FOR NATIONALISM

The evolution of the idea of nationhood amongst the Afrikaner people of South Africa was strengthened after the Anglo-Boer War and the subsequent challenges confronting these people in their search for a place to call their own. In the words of No Sizwe, the Afrikaner nationalist ideology developed historically as a response to social change (No Sizwe 1979:25). This social change can be located in the 19th century especially during the period of 1835-1840 when about 15 000 Afrikaners

it is feasible to conclude that it was the Afrikaner obsession with its national identity which gave birth to Apartheid, it should be kept in mind that the means instituted to safeguard that identity were detrimental to those who did not fit this category (Giliomee 2003).

³ Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK) is the Afrikaans name for the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC).

undertook an organised 'Great Trek' from the eastern parts of the Cape Colony to the interior. The reasons for the departure are clear and well-documented. There are both positive and negative readings of this immigration. Those in the former category hailed the move as a mighty national movement that resisted British colonialism and oppression (Van der Watt 1977:1). Contrary to this are those who looked upon this Trek as a terrible disaster in the history of South Africa (Duvenage 1981:20).

The causes for the Trek are briefly that, firstly, the Afrikaners felt alienated from the British authorities. This resulted in a sense of distrust that was to prevail between them and the British government. Secondly, was the emancipation of the 'coloureds' in the colony by the ordinances of 49 and 50 as well as the liberation of the slaves in 1834. Strauss (1994:94) is of the view that the Afrikaners understood this liberation as social equalisation between the slaves and their white colonisers. Lastly, there was the proclamation of English as the official language and the abolition of semi-representative local governing bodies.

The real reason for the trek, according to Giliomee (2003:144-145), was not so much the liberation of the slaves as economic reasons and the issue of land. He argues that the Afrikaners experienced a shortage of land and that their situation had steadily worsened between 1813 and the mid-1830s. It was during this 'Great Trek' that many Afrikaners started to rely extensively on their spirituality as well as their church. They began to look at themselves as the chosen nation of God and used the Bible to draw parallels between their journeys and those of the Israelites.

When the Afrikaners immigrated to the interior parts of the country, they encountered the indigenous people called the Bapedi. This nation, under the auspices of Chief Sekhukhuni, was very assertive and recalcitrant. The Bapedi had been building up a considerable supply of firearms since 1866 (De Klerk 1975:63) and wars between the immigrants from the Cape and the Bapedi continued until the discovery of diamonds in the interior of South Africa.

One can argue that it was the socio-economic and political situation of the Afrikaners that compelled them to look at the survival of their nation. Having pointed this out, we can also not evade the devious means that were instituted to realise this goal. This concern for the Afrikaner nation was to find form in the many subsequent movements that fortified the posterity of the Afrikaner nation. The *Broederbond*, which was a clandestine association, was one such a movement.

Jonker asserts that the Afrikaner civil religion and the close cohesion between church and nation was strengthened by the activities of a secret organisation called the *Afrikaner Broederbond* (Band of Brothers) in which church and cultural leaders co-operated to stimulate the struggle of their people against economic, cultural and political obstacles (Jonker 1996:249). Its members were carefully handpicked and consisted of the Afrikaner intelligentsia who exerted vast influence on almost all spheres of South African life. This organisation played a tremendous role in uplifting the Afrikaner people from the chaos created by the conflicts between them and the British (De Klerk 1975:193ff). The tension between the Afrikaners (who were also referred to as the *Boers* – farmers) and the British culminated in the Anglo-Boer War. This war represented a watershed in the history of the *Boers* because it finally disrupted their traditional *platteland* (rural farm orientated) society. The *Boers* now had to find ways of establishing themselves as an urban people.

It is by taking into account the issues, which brought about the Great Trek and the aftermath that resulted in the Anglo-Boer War that the question of separate development can be fairly introduced. The issue of separate development or, more appropriately, Apartheid, as a socio-economic, political and theological factor, had an impressive bearing on the history of the church in South Africa. Not only did it affect the church that was closely aligned with it, but it also affected those who organised themselves in combating this ideology. It is initially imperative to consider the political situation which was brought about not only by philosophies, but also by

some who devised theological interpretations that sanctioned the activities of the *status quo* at that time.

It was necessary for the protagonists of the Apartheid ideology to find ways of cementing their views of marginalising the natives from socio-economic and political spheres of the country. Amongst those who spearheaded these initiatives were three prominent academic figures who laboured tirelessly to find a systematic way of giving meaning to the Afrikaner nation. They were N. Diederichs, P.J. Meyer and G. Cronjé. As intellectuals, they were primarily responsible for laying down the theoretical framework that was later to be put into practice. As leaders of people who were searching for ways of articulating their being, these men found ways of uniting the Afrikaner people and much time was spent on exploring the concept of nationhood. Each one contributed theoretically to this goal.

It is contended that the most influential of all these figures was Diederichs. De Klerk argues that Diederichs, a professor of Political Philosophy at the Grey University College in the Free State (now the University of the Free State), wrote what was to become the most influential study on Nationalism as a worldview in 1936 (De Klerk 1975: 203f).

De Klerk saw Diederichs' treatise as the basis of what was to be known as the concept of 'Apartheid' or 'separate development'. This, declared De Klerk, was the first sustained statement of theologised politics to come from an Afrikaner (De Klerk 1975: 204). Albeit that Diederichs had been trained in various European universities and was obviously influenced by German philosophies, his work formed the core of the Afrikaner's new politics which was aligned, not to Calvinism as contained in the Institutes, but to its puritan mutations, with later neo-Calvinist accretions. Diederichs' work, developed in his book called *Nasionalisme as Lewensbeskouing en sy verhouding tot Internationalisme*, takes a similar line to that of the German Romantics' idealist notions. He explains the concept that 'man [sic] is a spiritual being

and as such an instrument of Divinity. For him the individual does not exist outside of a human community, the highest form of which is the nation' (De Klerk 1975: 204). It also becomes evident that, for him, the idea of nation is that a nation both is, and, at the same time, is coming into being. It is for this reason that Moodie (1975:158) maintains that

Diederichs posited the nation as the essential and necessary unit of social analysis. Individuals have existence only as far as they are taken up into the national whole.

Based on this understanding, Diederichs concludes that the notion of universal humanity is impossible. Self-evidently, Diederichs rejects equality and suggests that the only equality that must be accepted is the equality of opportunity for each to bring that which is within him to full expression. This can only be achieved when the individual perceives himself as a member of the nation (No Sizwe 1979:23).

The second Afrikaner intellectual who contributed extensively to the crystallisation of the Afrikaner nation is P. Meyer. In *Die Afrikaner*, written and published in 1941 by Meyer who was one time head of the *Broederbond*, he summarises the central calling of the Afrikaner nation as follows:

The people as a faith-unit fulfils its own calling on the one hand by realising the value-whole and on the other the life-order ordained by its faith ... The People are at the same time a social and a cultural community. In the realisation of its unique life-form the People creates its culture and in the creation of its culture it realises its own life form. These are the two sides of the fulfilment of its unique calling as given in its faith ... The ethnic calling which is contained in the ethnic faith is the most important and primary community forming and culture-creating factor in the coming-into-being of the People. The realisation of the sense and being of Peoplehood is the fulfilment of the ethnic calling, which finds its most precipitation in the ethnic language. The fulfilment of a People's calling is a dual process, namely community-formation and cultural creation out of the spiritual

constitution of the People over against its actuality (Meyer quoted in Moodie 1975:163).

Because the religion of the Afrikaner was so important, it started to dictate the way of life of this nation. Here we come close to seeing the Christian faith as a way of life and not merely as a faith that one can practice only on Sundays. There is even a similarity of African worldviews where it becomes impossible to separate the spiritual from the physical (Biko 1978a:41ff).

Cronjé's work was concurrent to that of Diederichs' and perhaps, to an extent, to that of Meyer. It was also a significant piece of work, which was to be used by the Nationalist government. It contained everything that was to have consequence to the unravelling of the Apartheid ideology. He called his book *'n Tuiste vir die Nageslag* (1945). He maintained that

the racial policy which we as Afrikaners should promote must be directed to the preservation of racial and cultural variety. This is because it is according to the will of God, and because with the knowledge at our disposal it can be justified on practical grounds (Cronjé 1945:168).

The myth of superiority was manifest in their perception that white culture and civilisation also contributed to the manner and way in which they interpreted reality. Here Cronjé is clearly not leaving the ideal that the Afrikaner will prosper to the 'will of God', but argues that this will be feasible because of the obvious fact that the knowledge that they have justifies the means instituted by them to achieve this end.

It is inevitable that the legislation which was to become law after the victory of the NP in 1948 was indeed premeditated and preconceived. This legislation was not implemented because of some irritation that necessitated it, but because it was a mechanism put into place to mute and prune the development of black people in this country. Cronjé contributed towards the justification of the Bantustans and the cheap

black labour that they provided which was imperative for the prosperity of the white economy and the control of black movement in urban areas when he said:

We should remember that the black man [sic] and in general the cheap black labour, is part of our current economic structure and the latter is based to a great extent on that cheap labour which is easily available. The total racial segregation will suggest that the black labour power will be excluded from the economic life *of the white man*. It will only be feasible [for whites to maintain economic power while still commanding the cheap black labour] if an economic structure was designed that addressed this issue. A structure that will be able to confirm the number of blacks in white communities and to which branches their affiliation for labour. All those blacks who are not useful and have no business being in white communities will then be repatriated to their reserves (Cronjé 1945:128).

It is these labour reserves that are manifested in shanty towns such as Langa and Khayalitsha in Cape Town, Khayamandi in Stellenbosch as well as the number of shantytowns in Gauteng. Black men were lured from the homelands to the cities to find ways of feeding their families but their families were seldom allowed the liberty of staying with them in the cities. It is therefore not entirely unfair to blame this system for the imbroglio that plunged many black families into, to such an extent that many of their descendants are still carrying the brand of this disruption and are yet to be redeemed from it.

This shows how the socio-economic and political aspects influenced both the engineers of Apartheid as well as the subjects of Apartheid.

Cronjé wrote another book later, this time in collaboration with two prominent theologians of the DRC, Dr W. Nicol who was moderator of the DRC and Prof. Dr E.P. Groenewald, entitled *Regverdige Rasse-Apartheid* (Justified Racial Segregation) (Cronjé 1947:147). Nicol argued that whites '*kan goeie Christene wees en tog met 'n heilige erns vir die voortbestaan van ons ras waak*' (Nicol 1947:21-22). Groenewald

declared that he wished this separation to be complete. In order to substantiate his claim that what they were doing with Apartheid had divine sanction, Groenewald pointed to Scripture. Texts to which he referred particularly to substantiate his viewpoint included the narrative of building of the tower of Babel in Gen. 11 (Groenewald 1947:43ff).

The victory of the NP in 1948 meant the implementation of a number of laws aimed at ensuring the place of black people as underdogs and subordinate to white people. De Gruchy argues that, although racial discrimination was entrenched in the union constitution and determined much of the legislation between 1910 and 1948, it did not have the rigid, ideological character that it assumed under Apartheid (De Gruchy 1979:53-54). These Apartheid policies, which officially became law in 1948, classified people in terms of race. The race to which one belonged would determine where one stayed, studied as well as whom one could marry.

Botha has captured the essence of this obscurity when he maintained that

Waar jy kon woon, skoolgaan en studeer. Waar jy kan werk of speel en swem en baie dikwels ook of jy kon skoolgaan, studeer, werk ens., dit alles is vir jou bepaal by registrasie van jou geboorte (Botha & Naudé 1998:24).

Many cases of legislation enacted by the NP regime during its reign include the Immorality Act, press censorship, restrictions on the movement of blacks and a number of other discriminatory laws (Mbali 1987:11f). The Communism Act of 1950, amended in 1954, is of particular importance in this regard. Another notorious legislation was the Bantu Education Act which was described by the Minister of Education, Hendrik Verwoerd at the time:

Education must train and teach in accordance with their opportunities in life, according to the sphere in which they live ... Education should have roots entirely in the Native areas and in the Native environment and Native community in all

aspects. There is no place for him in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour.⁴

Tlhagale traces the obsession for the monopoly of land and labour to the infamous 1913 Natives Land Act, which sought to lay down 'permanent lines of territorial segregation' between blacks and whites. In his opinion, this was one of the factors, coupled with the growing demand for labour by the mining, industrial and agricultural sectors, which encouraged the process of proletarianisation (Tlhagale 1991:145).

The white 'concern for the native' has its roots in the paternalism that was already evident when missionaries appeared for the first time in Africa.⁵ There is no doubt that some of these policies were deliberately designed to inhibit black people from becoming fully human.

Apartheid was more than a mere accident but was a deliberate act on the part of the NP government. To maintain, therefore, that racist attitudes came about because of the common view about Africa which was held by many Europeans at the time, is to understate the question.

The idea of deliberately marginalising black people from the broader South African situation is conspicuous in the many acts which were passed by the government of South Africa. The statement by the Stallard Commission illustrated this:

The Native should only be allowed to enter the urban areas, which are essentially the White man's [sic] creation, when he is willing to enter and

⁴ One of the infamous statements made by one of the architects of Apartheid, Hendrik Verwoerd (Villa-Vicencio 1988:95).

⁵ Cf. the Three-self policy of the missionaries Venn and Anderson adopted by the DRC Synodical Commission in 1935, quoted in Hofmeyr & Pillay (1994:253).

administer to the needs of the White man, and should depart therefrom [sic] when he ceases to minister (Tlhagale 1985:128).

This zeal for unfair competition between whites and blacks cannot be confined to Afrikaners alone. Some Black Consciousness leaders believe that the white Afrikaner regime has been quite successful in establishing fear for black people even among liberals. By dexterously scaring the world of the 'swart gevaar'⁶, they managed to convince even some of the most familiar liberal voices that 'perhaps Apartheid is worth a try'.⁷

Many policies were put into existence to ensure the division between blacks and whites. It was even admitted in one of synods where the DRC discussed separate development that the traditional fear of the Afrikaner of equality of treatment between black and white had its origin in his antipathy to the idea of racial fusion (Hofmeyr & Pillay 1994:253). This view is explained by Kinghorn (1986:54):

... veral in die dertigerjare, in Suid-Afrika goedgesinde ore sou vind goedgesinde ore sou vind is te verstane, veral aangesien die gepopulariserde weergawe daarvan in Duitsland die blanke Germaan (en dus min of meer die Afrikaner) as die kanon van rassuiwerheid verklaar het ... rassuiwerheid, die sonde van bloedvermenging, ens., was grootliks in die lug.

He continues by referring to the publication for racial studies by the Broederbond which states:

⁶ Swart gevaar—Black danger—is a notion developed by the Apartheid regime of instilling fear into white people for black people. It served the purpose of calling on all whites to unite against blacks for there was something to fear in the event of the black person assuming his/her rightful place in South Africa.

⁷ The most familiar liberal white voice that is referred to here is that of Dr Alan Paton who made this statement in an interview in London. See Biko (1972:18).

Nou as ons aanneem dat die eienskappe van die blanke in die algemeen te verkies is bo die van die kaffer (intellektueel, esteties en moreel) dan sal dus in al die gevalle waar die eienskap van die kaffer dominant is, agteruitgang plaasvind. In plaas van 'n suiwer blanke tiepe kry ons 'n individu met swaart of donker vel, verlies van liggaamlike skoonheid mag nie so swaar weeg as die intellektuele en morele agteruitgang nie, ofskoon geen blanke wat sy raseienskappe op prys stel graag soos 'n kaffer sal lyk nie (Kingshorn 1986:54).

The view illustrated by Kingshorn still has implications for the perceptions that black and white as well as black and coloured have of each other today. It is therefore in this light that Verwoerd's statement ought to be understood.

These beliefs were, over time, inculcated into the moral fibre of the white populace and would later be used to substantiate the DRC's stance concerning the prohibition of mixed marriages and to inculcate this purported superiority over blacks who were forced to accept their status as being inferior to that of whites.

In dealing with the question of ideologies, van de Beek (2001:59) is correct in maintaining that many black South Africans still find it difficult to accept that they are equal to whites, primarily because the socio-economic and political status has remained virtually unchanged (at least for black on the margins of society). It is still very common to hear a black person referring to a white person as a 'baas' irrespective of the social standing of the white person.

Steve Biko contended that the discrepancies created between black and white people in South Africa were consolidated by one chief factor which is the economy of this country. He believed that the affirmation of white Afrikaner Nationalism at the expense of the black majority was encouraged by the politics of economy: 'There is no doubt that the colour question in South African politics was originally introduced for economic motives' (Biko 1976:17).

Biko says that the leaders of the white community had to create some kind of barrier between black and whites so that the whites could enjoy privilege at the expense of blacks but still felt free to give a moral explanation for the obvious exploitation that prickled even the hardest of white consciences (Biko 1976:17). It would be this economic greed which, on the one hand fuelled their need to subjugate the black person which later brought whites to the conclusion that blacks were, in essence, inferior to whites.

Both theologians as well as sociologists have criticised Neo-Calvinism for providing theological support to the controversial ideology of the Apartheid government. From the margins of theology, there were strong voices of criticism against this tradition from Dunbar Moodie, as well as politicians such as No Sizwe. We shall now turn to investigate Neo-Calvinism more closely and probe whether the subject has been [mis]used to justify selfish interests.

2.3 THE ABUSE OF NEO-CALVINISM FOR THE IDEOLOGY OF APARTHEID?

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) a staunch reformer and devout disciple of Calvin whose views are sometimes called neo-Calvinism was especially well-known for his spheres sovereignty which means the absolute sovereignty of God. In a lecture delivered on the subject of sphere sovereignty to a student body of the Free University of Amsterdam, Kuyper uttered the phrase for which he was to become most famous: 'There is not a single inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ who is sovereign over all, does not cry: Mine' (Bratt 1998:488).

Kuyper believed that God delegated this sovereignty to humanity, but not to any one person or institution. Thus, for him, there is a distinct sovereignty over each sphere of life: family, education and business among others. Although Kuyper negated the delegation of sovereignty to individual institutions or persons, he acknowledged that each of these spheres has a person or institution, which is charged with safeguarding

this sovereignty. For this reason, in the realm of education, the school is sovereign, so, in the realm of justice, the state is the delegated authority (Bratt 1998:467).

Dunbar Moodie illustrated how neo-Calvinism, through Kuyper, influenced the Afrikaner Nationalism⁸ and Scottish evangelism as well as secular romantic Nationalism (Bosch 1985:61-73). Durand maintains that the two reformed theological traditions converged to shape the Afrikaner civil religion and its supportive theology. The adherents of these traditions did not differ on those social and racial issues that formed the *raison d'être* of Afrikaner civil religion (Durand 1985:40).

When taking into account Kuyper's views with regard to his spheres of sovereignty, and comparing them with the way in which he came to be interpreted by the Afrikaners, it seems possible that the advocates of Apartheid South Africa have either misunderstood him or have deliberately used him to substantiate their intentions. Others, like Durand, seem to think that it is not enough to simply argue that Kuyper was either misused or misrepresented because his theology was transplanted to the South African context and adapted to the Afrikaner's national struggle too easily (Durand 1985:42).

Durand argues that, within the South African account of Kuyperian theology, there are a number of trends which are reminiscent of the German *Ordnungstheologie* because of the use of Kuyper's cosmological apparatus and the emphasis on the orders of creation even though it was not as crude as the German version (Durand 1985:40). According to Durand, this Kuyperian cosmology was combined with an orthodox Christology to such an extent that any effort to subject the theology to a Christological criticism was defused right from the start.

⁸ Moodie was especially helpful in demonstrating how Neo-Calvinism influenced the Afrikaner civil religion. To see a detailed exploration of this, and how it contributed to the rise of Afrikaner nationalism in South Africa, cf. Moodie (1975).

While Durand seems to be blaming the Kuyperian line of tradition for not being able to produce critical and dissident voices in a period when the historical circumstances and the general spiritual climate was not conducive to such thinking, the reason for this might be located elsewhere. Although, as Durand maintains, opposition among theologians did develop later on, it ought to be taken into account that theological debates were monopolised by whites who had bought into the theological leadership of their leaders.

Kuyperian theology was introduced to the South African situation in the second and third decades of the twentieth century when Afrikanerdom was looking for a theology that was not only reformed and orthodox but one that was also able to accommodate a fast-growing Nationalism characterised by an aversion to English domination and a fear of eventual black domination (Durand 1985:41). Albeit that the issue of a lack of political leadership amongst the Afrikaners is debatable, the Afrikaner populace followed their leaders without seeing the need to criticise and question its leadership.

By the time that the Afrikaners comprehended their national and political situation, and by the time of the customary visits to the Free University of Amsterdam which was considered the bastion of Kuyperianism, Kuyperian theology—at least the Afrikaner version—was already deeply entrenched into the moral fibre of the DRC and had gained considerable influence over its people. Durand asserts that, after the trial of Professor J. Du Plessis⁹, it became increasingly difficult for any Afrikaner theologian to openly oppose the Kuyperian system in its South African context. Opposition to it, he continues, could not only be misconstrued as treason to the

⁹ The 'Du Plessis affair' refers to the trial of Stellenbosch theologian Johannes Du Plessis. He found himself in the centre in a quandary for his acceptance and usage of new tools for the interpretation of Scripture that began to dominate European theology during his time. He became influenced especially by Bultman, Barth and Brunner. His advocacy to use these theologians led to his removal from his post as professor in New Testament and Missiology in 1930.

Afrikaner cause, but also as an indication of theological unreliability and as a threat to the reformed tradition as such (Durand 1985:41).

De Gruchy seems to be echoing Durand's sentiments by stating that it becomes superfluous merely to state that Kuyper was misused or misrepresented. He blames the Apartheid ideology on the Neo-Calvinism of Abraham Kuyper. Although he agrees that Kuyper was somewhat misused in South Africa, he appears to be affirming the fact that some parts of Kuyper's theology leave a number of loopholes that can be misused (De Gruchy 1984:107). Kuyper's writings and actions confirmed his conservatism, particularly evident in his lectures on Calvinism that were delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1898. In these lectures, especially in the lecture on Calvinism as a life system, he described the relationship of man-to-man:

the second condition, with which, for the sake of creating a life system every profound movement has to comply: viz., a fundamental interpretation of its own touching the relation of man to man ... there is no uniformity among men, but endless multiformity. In creation itself the difference has been established between woman and man. Physical and spiritual gifts and talents cause one person to differ from the other ... The social position of the rich and poor differs widely. Now these differences are in a special way weakened or accentuated by every consistent life system, and Paganism, Islamism, Romanism as well as Modernism, and so also Calvinism have accordance with their primordial principle. If as Paganism contends, God dwells in the creature, a divine superiority is exhibited in whatever is high among men [sic]... On the other hand whatever is lower is considered as godless, and therefore gives rise to systems of caste in India and Egypt, and to slavery everywhere else, thereby placing one man under a base subjection of his fellowman (Kuyper 1931:51-52).

Although Kuyper is correct in pointing out the obvious differences among human beings (i.e. between women and men, physical and spiritual), Kuyper's distinctions are very simplistic and remain prone to misuse and misinterpretation. It cannot be

denied that Kuyper's neo-Calvinism, so distorted in its South African interpretation, robbed neo-Calvinism of its potential to contribute to the enhancement of the South African situation.¹⁰ Moodie argues that, according to Kuyper's spheres of sovereignty, a point could be made against a number of legislations, which encroached on this independence, for example, the notorious immorality act, which prohibited marriage between black and white people (Moodie 1975:55).

De Gruchy believes that the mistake of South African theologians of not engaging critically with Kuyper's spheres of sovereignty led them to misuse it in a way that is parallel with the misuse of the 'orders of creation' by some Lutherans (e.g. Paul Althaus) during the Third Reich (De Gruchy 1984:110). Regarding the Nationalism of the Afrikaners, De Gruchy concludes that the reason for this misuse of Kuyper was ideological, and he bases this conclusion on the fact that neo-Calvinism in South Africa was wedded to the German romantic view of history and the German organic view of the state (De Gruchy 1984:110).

He continues to maintain that the idea of national sovereignty and of each nation having its particular historical calling, destiny and cultural mandate, suited not only the Germans and the Dutch national character, but suited a number of other nations including the Afrikaner nation at the end of the nineteenth century (De Gruchy 1984:110). This is evident in the Afrikaner idea of nation.

In South Africa, the main exponent of Kuyper's nationalistic theory was the philosopher H.G. Stoker, for whom 'the People' (*Die Volk*) was a separate sphere with its own structure and purpose, grounded in the ordinances of God's creation (see De Gruchy 1984:110; Moodie 1975:66). The fundamental point that De Gruchy is making is that Kuyper's neo-Calvinism provided one point of departure for this development,

¹⁰ See especially his sphere sovereignty. Cf. Bratt (1998:488f), as well as Moodie's comment on Kuyper's independent sphere of social life (Moodie 1975:55).

but the end product was not only a contradiction of Kuyper's doctrine of the spheres but the creation of an Afrikaner civil religion that has too often been mistaken for Calvinism.

It was this religion which would fulfil a central role both in the Afrikaner's struggle for identity, and subsequently, become a theological base upon which nationalism would flourish. In Moodie's opinion, Stoker's neo-Calvinism was able to accommodate and sustain the Afrikaner civil religion because, in his view, the Afrikaner people were sovereign in their own circle, acknowledging no other Lord than God, whose purpose was seen in its structures and calling, as well as its historical destiny (Moodie 1975:66). Even their usage and interpretation of Scripture illustrated their sovereignty. Jonker argues that, in the interpretation of their own history, they equated the Great Trek from the Cape Colony to the northern parts of the country with the delivery of the Israelites from Egypt, and their military clashes with the people of Africa with the wars of Israel against the Canaanites and the Philistines (Jonker 1996:248).

The beliefs of these Afrikaner philosophers and theologians would, no doubt, accelerate the inhumane treatment of black South Africans. In order for the whites to sustain this lie, black people had to be denied any chance of proving their equality with white people. This manifested itself in the reservations put on certain skilled labour, the lack of training in skilled work, as well as the tight orbit around professional possibilities for blacks. The irony, Biko said, is that the system turned around and said that blacks were inferior because they had no professional people in spite of the fact that they make it impossible for blacks to acquire these skills (Biko 1976:18).

The fact that these beliefs were internalised and had become part of the mental framework of white people, meant that black people were merely subscribed to this *status quo* without their consent. This economic greed, clothed in nationalist

convictions, would determine the climate in the regime's political meetings as well as within meetings of the DRC where they discussed the good that they thought they were doing for black people.

Although the DRC was ostensibly primarily involved in shaping the policies of this regime theologically, there is ample evidence which suggests that other theological traditions were also involved in cementing this ideology. Nico Horn (1992:157) argues that John Lake, who was praised for being the proclaimer of a non-racial historical Pentecostal gospel, also contributed to the fact that Apartheid became law. According to Horn, Lake had gained favour from Prime Minister General Louis Botha because he had outlined a native policy and had submitted it to the government (Horn 1992:157-58).

The conclusion of this research is that, to the neo-Calvinism of Kuyper and others that is blamed for Apartheid, must be added other theological traditions as well. The politics which governed the Apartheid ideology was not only confined to the fact that the Afrikaner, in particular, was desperate for a sense of belonging. All the efforts undertaken to achieve this were well contemplated including a theological foundation for Apartheid.

The opportunity of convincing the Afrikaner people came with the aftermath of the Anglo-Boer War. Their Nationalism became a spiritual attitude that coloured every expression of their lives. The DRC synods in which most issues concerning the civil community were discussed did not endorse the legislations by the NP regime haphazardly, but members of this church went to these church meetings having already devised strategies to sway those who might have had difficulty with them.

The Apartheid mentality has origins beyond its official legitimacy by the NP government in 1948. Serfontein's study on *Apartheid, Change and the NG Kerk* (1982) illustrates how Afrikaners were duped into accepting a lifestyle in which religion and church became of paramount importance. From the perspective of the DRC and its

role in the political success of this ideology, Serfontein illustrated how gullible most Afrikaners were. He attempted to illustrate that this gullibility was brought about by the fact that religion and the church were of paramount importance to the Afrikaners and that these were interwoven in their daily life (Serfontein 1982) (see Introduction).

It was impossible to think about the Apartheid regime without at the same time thinking about the DRC.¹¹ Serfontein explained that the DRC was related to the Apartheid regime through:

- Unquestioning support of the government in all its policies and actions;
- Blind support for Apartheid political principles, apart from minor criticism of details of application;
- A golden rule that nothing must be said or done to 'embarrass' or 'confront' the government;
- The maintenance of special liaison machinery and committees through which the NGK, without any fuss and publicity, could be in contact with the government or government departments, 'in a proper, correct and responsible manner' (Serfontein 1982:76).

A number of theological declarations emerged, challenging the attitude of this church towards the state. We shall now briefly turn to look at the struggle of the church against the theological support for this ideology.

2.4 A SYNOPSIS OF THE CHURCH'S STRUGGLE AGAINST APARTHEID

Admittedly, this subheading sounds vague and rightly begs the question 'Which church?' According to Professor J. De Gruchy (1991:67), it is impossible to speak

¹¹ For a detailed explanation of the decisions made by the church in support of the legislation, and the DRC's views concerning these decisions, cf. Marais (1986). When reading this, one cannot ignore the resemblance of the content deliberated at some of the major DRC gatherings with that contained in the studies by Cronjé (1945).

about a single church's struggle against Apartheid. De Gruchy explains that, because of the awkward situation in which South African churches found themselves, it was not a single church struggling against Apartheid; instead the struggle was undertaken by individuals who organised themselves under the ambits of the URCSA, Christian Institute and similar organisations. The evils which were justified by the system made it increasingly difficult for (at least some) Christians to remain unaware of the activities orchestrated by the NP. The consequence was that the struggling church had initially to find a theory, which would not only refute Apartheid on biblical grounds, but also find amicable ways of making people aware that the inhumane treatment they were enduring at the hands of whites was unbiblical.

Apartheid became a concern for the struggling church not only because of the hermeneutics utilised in supporting the Apartheid ideology, but also because the legislation implemented had excruciating effects on the socio-economic and political situation of the black people. The organisational confrontation of the church against Apartheid was in the period of the 1960s when the Christian Council became the South African Council of Churches. It would be under this ambit that Christians would interpret and question Apartheid. This council formed a theological commission to 'consider what obedience God requires of the church in her witness to her unity in Christ in South Africa' (De Gruchy 1985:20).

Some black churches resisted the inclination to join those within the struggling church movement. Among these can be counted some of the African Independent Churches (AIC), so called because they have no links with white missionary churches. In fact, some AIC churches, especially the Zionist Christian Church (ZCC) was seen as being in complete harmony with the Apartheid ideology, which opposed any sort of social mixing, including integrated churches (Anderson 2001:103). The ZCC was therefore favoured by the Apartheid regime, particularly because of its policies, which forbade its members to interfere in the affairs of the government. The leaders of this church, first the son of the founder, Edward Lekganyane (1925-1967) and then

his son, Barnabas, made it quite clear that the ZCC has no room for people who subverted the security of the state and broke the laws of the land (Anderson 2001:104).

Although the DRC did almost everything to see to it that Apartheid was theologically entrenched, there were also theologians of this denomination who were opposed to Apartheid and questioned the moral and theological sanctions it was enjoying from the DRC. They included theologians such as Johannes Du Plessis, Professors B.B. Keet and B.J. Marais who concluded that Apartheid was not from Scripture but was an exegesis considered normative in light of the values of an external-biblical criterion (Kingham 1986:104).

Keet and Marais's concession that this erroneous theological sanction was made without its proponents' awareness of their own philosophical interest, is not entirely convincing. Apartheid was not merely an ideology but was, in fact, a political strategy to show the strength of the Afrikaner nation. If the theologians who provided the theological base for this idea had only made a simple exegetical mistake, it could not have condoned the existence of the *Broederbond*.

2.4.1 White Racism and the strengthening of Apartheid in South Africa

The subject of racism between black and white people in South Africa cannot be confined to the relationship between the Afrikaners and the blacks but includes the white English speaking people of this country.

With regard to the attitude of English speaking churches in South Africa, it is imperative that we remember that Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking whites constituted a single nation in the classical bourgeois nations. Largely, the positions adopted depended on the degree of economic and political interlocking of local and imperialist capital was deemed necessary for the survival of the capitalist system in South Africa (No Sizwe 1979:27).

No Sizwe explains that, after the defeat of the Boer Republics in 1902 and the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910, politics in South Africa referred essentially to the struggle for parliamentary hegemony between predominantly English speaking and predominantly Afrikaans speaking groups of whites, irrespective of the classes to which they belonged or aspired to belong (No Sizwe 1979:11). During this competition, blacks were considered to be the main source of unskilled and semi-skilled labour and the whites were designated the main source of skilled labour, enterprise and capital (No Sizwe 1979:11; Tlhagale 1991:142ff).

The genuineness of the English-speaking people, who, at least in church circles, spoke strongly against Apartheid, became suspect when confronted with the incentive that negative sanctions might be applied against them because of their solidarity with the black people.

James Cochrane suggests that the victory of the Afrikaner political forces in 1948 stands as a symbol of disaster for English-speaking whites as a group. For him, this victory represents far less a victory of segregationist view over liberal than a particularly acute moment in a much longer competition between two groups sharing a dominant position in an oppressive society (Cochrane 1987:3).

Cochrane argues that the historical 'losers' in this competition, the English speakers, then mounted an ideological attack on the winners, the shapers of strict Apartheid ideals. Villa-Vicencio is also aware of this hypocrisy. He writes,

the English-speaking churches rejected the heresy of providing a theological justification for Apartheid but were entrapped in the morass of being unable to translate their noblest ideas into practice.

Villa-Vicencio believes that black people have never easily accepted the gap between what these churches said about Apartheid and what they did about it (Villa-Vicencio 1986:53).

2.5 THE RISE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF BLACK CRITICAL THEOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA

The concept of 'critical theology' in the South African situation refers to those theologies which called the theological underpinnings that Apartheid theology enjoyed from the DRC, into question. Therefore, critical theology should be understood against the backdrop of Apartheid ideology. It is a theology which sought to re-examine itself in the light of the Anglo-Saxon and Germanic theological traditions. 'Critical theology' in South Africa refused to ignore the concrete socio-economic and political realms in which it found itself. This study will confine itself to black theology that emerged from organisations such as the Christian Institute (CI), South African Council of Churches as a critical reaction to the legitimacy of Apartheid theology. Black theology, *be it in the USA or South Africa* did not drop from the sky; it was not created *ex nihilo*. It was, on the contrary, the product of the struggles that were being waged by black people in the late 1960s and 1970s (Mosala & Tlhagale 1986) (emphasis mine). Black critical theology was transported from the shores of the United States of America to South Africa by the University Christian Movement in 1971. This happened through the director of theological concerns, Basil Moore. Upon arrival in South Africa, this theology was placed under a separate project and bore the name 'black theology'. The first director of this project was Sabelo Ntwasa. Black theology was propagated throughout South Africa by means of seminars and ministers' caucuses. The findings of these meetings were compiled and prepared for publications. While this was still under way, Ntwasa was banned (Moore 1976; Mosala & Tlhagale 1986).

Black critical theology in South Africa, which informed the Belhar Confession, had as much to do with the political situation at the time as it did with a type of theological

hermeneutics which made race a precondition for membership with the DRC.¹² Such a theology had to question the theological support of Apartheid by the dominant (Afrikaner) theology without parting ways with the fundamentals of theology even though differing opinions to the mainstream were regarded with great suspicion. Naudé maintained that, within the DRC tradition itself, new theological insights were seen to be tantamount to heresy.¹³

In defence of black theology, Jonker asserts that given the social and political situation of the black people in South Africa, it would have been completely incomprehensible if their spiritual leaders had not felt the existential need to read the Bible from within their situation as did the *Afrikaners* in their time of oppression and poverty. In the case of the *Afrikaners*, it led to the development of a civil religion, while, in the case of black theology, it led to a theology of liberation aimed at the restoration of the full humanity and dignity, as well as the political and economic liberation of black people (Jonker 1996:252).

2.6 AN EXAMINATION OF BLACK LIBERATION THEOLOGY AS CRITICAL THEOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA.

One of the most important Christian responsibilities is pursuing a theology that would tenaciously stress the liberation of humanity from any oppressive system.

¹² In a recent study, Piet Naudé managed to illustrate the point that the confession of Belhar stands in a tradition where many South African theologians have questioned the Apartheid theology. He maintains that there are at least eight declarations which spelled out the situation in South Africa. These are the DRMC circuit of Wynberg's decision on Apartheid in 1948, SA Catholic Bishops' Conference's statement on Apartheid (1957), URCSA's Message to the people of South Africa (1968), The Lutheran World Federation's statement, South Africa: Confessional Integrity (Dar-es-Salaam 1977), Alliance of Black Reformed Christians in Southern Africa (ABRECSA): Charter and declaration (Oct. 1981), Open Letter by 123 Dutch Reformed Church pastors and theologians (March 1982), World Alliance of Reformed Churches: Racism and South Africa (Aug 1982). For a thorough discussion on these documents cf. Naudé (2003: 158f).

¹³ Naudé (2003:157) reminds us of his professor at Stellenbosch, Professor Willie Jonker who used to remark: 'If one day you say something completely new in the church, you are probably erring'.

Although we accept that the institution of human governments is biblically motivated, their fallibility warns that we interpret our theological relation to them with great caution.

In an attempt to prevent any gross misinterpretation of our view with regard to human governance, we must indicate that our view is that the state (whether in a democratic or undemocratic setting) remains fallible due to the fact that human beings who are used as tools of the state are in essence fallible. It would therefore be extremely naïve to assume that now that we in South Africa have arrived at our long expected democracy, issues such as evil and injustice have ceased to exist.

To compound the question, the need to table the issue of justice was fuelled by the fact that the institutions of government, which were created and operated in conformity to the global world, have remained virtually unchanged. What is factual is that we have succeeded to substitute a regime by a white minority with a democratically elected one.

Within South African theological circles, biblical hermeneutics and interpretations of Apartheid were dealt with in a contorted way that, very soon, even some black people bought into this fallacy. The Afrikaner civil religion which was intrinsic in the theology of the DRC, made it easy for the state to achieve its objectives (Jonker 1996:252). By sanctioning Apartheid in this way, people could conveniently switch from being an unscrupulous boss during the week to being a pious, innocuous member of the faith community on Sundays—from treating black people inhumanely during the week to pretending that they are all equal on Sundays. This inconsistent attitude and behaviour served as a catalyst for some black theologians to critically appraise their own position.

According to Boesak (1976b:3), black people felt that the God whom the Afrikaners worshiped could not be the same God which they were worshiping. It was this realisation that gave birth to black theology in South Africa. Tlhalagale asserted that

images of God as a just, loving and merciful Father did not correspond with the harsh reality of racism, landlessness, economic exploitation and political powerlessness. The black populace felt that Apartheid was to blame for the fact that Christianity had, for them, become increasingly questionable (Tlhagale 1991:143).

Apart from the fact that theology could not continue to ignore the socio-economic and political aspects of this country, black theology wanted to discover how it could remain faithful to its reformed nature and, at the same time, interpret reformed theology so that its constituency did not feel alienated (Boesak 1984).

Tlhagale has noted that the persistent use of the word 'black' to qualify a critical theological investigation has drawn much criticism from both black and white liberals, let alone the outright condemnation from the dominant Afrikaner group. The charge, he continues, is that it perpetuates racism, distorts theological reflection and promotes a provincial mentality (Tlhagale 1991:142). For Manas Buthelezi (1976:34), black theology is nothing but a methodological formula whose genius consists of paying tribute to the fact that theological honesty cannot but recognise the particularity of the black man's [sic] situation. Black theology, which is not without its shortcomings, is a direct and aggressive response to the situation where blacks encountered alienation at political, economic and cultural levels. Black theology is a realisation, which stems from the context of the black person. What this suggests is not that people from other races are excluded, however, in South Africa during the Apartheid epoch, the mechanics needed to operate in black theology required that those who engaged with it should be those whom the system of Apartheid was discriminating against.

The term 'contextual theology' that was used by both black and liberal white theologians needs to be understood against the background that many dreamt of a South Africa in which race would not dictate their standing in society. It was for this reason that Tlhagale was opposed to the term 'contextual theology' for, in its

interpretation, the concept remained an evasive expression in as far as it accommodated the self-justification of the oppressed group (Tlhagale 1991:142). For Tlhagale, it was impossible to negate black theology on these grounds because the 'black' in black theology substantiated the unique experience of the underdog. Because of the ambiguous standing of liberal whites in the debate about the emancipation of black people, some black theologians came to question the sincerity of liberal whites in identifying with the plight of the majority of blacks.

However, having said that, it would be incorrect to assert that it was only black people in this country who became aware of the gross injustices that some whites were perpetrating against them. On the contrary, there were some critical white voices who spoke against the policies of Apartheid as well as the theology that acted as a base for such pseudo-Christian teaching. The reality that some whites were fully aware of the situation but chose to look away, cannot be denied. This may be a perfectly human impulse that, when one is faced with issues which are too horrendous to contemplate, one closes one's eyes to the reality and makes a virtue out of powerlessness.

According to Boesak (1976b:2), innocence, which literally means 'not harmful', can have both bad and good connotations. In contrast to genuine innocence, there exists a state of 'pseudo-innocence'. This kind of innocence capitalises on naïveté. In order to maintain the *status quo*, it is necessary for whites to believe and to continue to believe that they are innocent, argues Boesak.

The type of innocence that Boesak criticises is the very same childlike innocence which has led many to believe that liberation theology is, in essence, political theology. The negative connotation that has been attributed to liberation theology has also served as means of questioning any type of theological talk that tends to take seriously the condition in which humanity finds itself. It was also for this reason

that many theologians who opposed black theological hermeneutics felt threatened by the Belhar Confession (and continue to view it with great suspicion today).

2.7 THE PLACE OF BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS IN BLACK THEOLOGY

The Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in South Africa owes its existence to students led by Steve Bantu Biko, Barney Pityana, Harry Nengwenkulu and others who organised themselves into a vanguard for the black peoples' total emancipation from white domination and even white liberalism. As the first president of this movement, Biko led a breakaway from the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) to form the all black student organisation called South African Students Organisation (SASO) (Woods 1987:150ff).

Biko and others became very much aware that NUSAS, being a white liberal student organisation, was not able to identify fully with the struggle of the blacks. Whites had a double standard, for they could maintain to understand the struggle of black people, yet when confronted with the incentive that negative sanctions might be applied to them upon identification with blacks, they would abandon the black cause. The popular statement by Biko: 'black man you are on your own' has to be understood against this background. Woods argues that, in response to the negative connotations that had been attributed to the black race by the Afrikaners, it was the philosophy of SASO to express group pride and determination by blacks to rise up and realise the envisaged self (Woods 1987:55).

Goba (1986:61) suggests that an examination of the socio-economic context shaping both these organisations, NUSAS and SASO, especially in the late 1960s, as one way of understanding the BCM and its relation to black theology. Black Consciousness and black theology are parallel; black theology being the theological response to the challenge of white theology. Biko (1976:36) maintained that Black Consciousness would be irrelevant in a homogeneous, non-exploitative egalitarian society. It is the opinion of the researcher that the same would apply to the concept of 'black

theology'. West agrees with Biko when he says that blackness has no meaning outside of a system of race-conscious people and practices (West 1994:39). He concludes, therefore, that blackness is a political and ethical construct.

Black theology, which is a counterpart of Black Consciousness, is a 'reactionary theology' which found moral and theological justification from the very source from which it also based its truth: the Bible.

While most of the black theologians who engaged in black theology had some form of an academic background, some blacks to which this black theology phenomenon appealed to did not have some kind of sound theological education. Examples to substantiate this claim can be found in the likes of Steve Biko who actively engaged black theology and yet had no formal theological training. Motlhabi asserts that most blacks who initiated black theology in South Africa, were primarily ministers in the church while the rest were then still studying towards the ministry. In the case of the latter, theologians such as James Cone and Albert Cleage would be an inspiration for them.

Mosala and Tlhagale (1986:xi) charged that young black South African theologians were being iconoclastic rather than constructive in their approach. The critique brought by these two theologians against the aspiring young black theologians is rather unfortunate since they themselves would fall in the very category that they criticised. Both Mosala and Tlhagale do not elaborate on what they understand to be a constructive approach to theology. The younger theologians ventured to reflect critically on reformed theology with the aim of refuting the justification of Apartheid and correcting the distorted meaning of what it means to be reformed. This could only have been possible if they had understood the traditions in which they stood.

Just as Barth became disappointed with the liberalism of his mentors who, when faced with the complexity of war, conveniently forgot that they were Christians, so, many advocates of black liberation theology became disenchanted with a type of

theology that refused them the opportunity to look at their situation when thinking about God. Goba (1988:Preface) said that

taking into account that theology in South Africa has been dominated by the white missionary mentality and ecclesiastical paternalism, black theologians will have to develop and articulate a theology which reflects their cultural and political experience of oppression.

2.8 THE CRISIS OF BLACK LIBERATION THEOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Goba opposes Boesak's view that the Christian faith transcends all ideologies and all nationalist ideals and that Christian faith transcends specific groups and nations within specific ideals and interests (cf. Boesak 1976a:121). Goba's critique departs from the opinion that theology is ideological in the sense that it projects a political vision of those who participate in it (Goba 1988:65). His point is that black theology takes form within the context of the struggle by black people and, in that regard, reflects the ideological interests of black people. One of the reasons why the Black Reformed Churches (DRMC and DRCA) were able to successfully resist Apartheid in this country, was because these churches were tenaciously anchored into a sound type of theology and because of this, had a specific understanding of scripture. Boesak's view of the transcendental nature of the Christian faith is thus informed by this ideal.

Black reformed theologians brought their theology with them to Black Consciousness. They believed that Black Consciousness, which is the other leg of black theology as an ideology of the black struggle, is not to be confined to the realm of aesthetics but also constituted a programme of political action which was informed by their hermeneutics.

One of the objectives of Black Consciousness was to devise ways of informing black people about the evil of Apartheid and to bring about authentic liberation. Goba suggests that Black Consciousness is political in the sense that it identifies white

oppressive socio-economic structures (1988:66). Biko lambasted blacks for standing united in their anger and disdain for the white man when they were all together, cursing whites and their oppressive tactics, yet when they returned to their dilapidated houses and are suddenly confronted by the police, their curses turned into words of praise for what the whites were doing for the black people (Biko 1972). On the one hand, black theology (and, for that matter, Black Consciousness) must be credited for helping to instil a sense of self-worth into black people. We cannot deny that the economic discrepancies that still exist between black and white contradict the essence of Black Consciousness. Given this, it should be questioned whether Black Consciousness and black theology reached their objectives? This is the very question that many prominent theologians are evading.

Goba rejects the speculation that black theology and therefore Black Consciousness was only something that existed within the black middle class. Already in 1986, Goba argued that, to speak about a pocket of the emerging black bourgeois class was to create confusion in the minds of people because, as far as the average black person was concerned, the black middle class was part and parcel of the oppressive socio-political status quo in this country (Goba 1986:66). The criticism levelled against this theology cannot be ignored. This researcher believes that this theology did not manage to reach the blacks on grassroots level. Mosala has criticised black theology for this very reason:

It cannot be contested that although Black theology has developed and is well and live [sic], it has not yet, as a weapon of theory, become the property of the struggling black masses. To this extent, it is a theory that has not yet become a material force because it has not gripped the masses. It has served its purpose well as a weapon of criticism against white theology and the white society. That activity, however, does not replace criticism of the weapon itself (Mosala 1986:176).

While advocates for Black theology and Black Consciousness may not have thought beyond the primary goal of Black theology which was to ensure that black people attained political power in this country, they were ignoring the rapid growth of the black middle class. While Biko made a point in history, he did not see the complex black situation of today. Black people (and particularly those who are still on the fringes of spheres of politics and the economy) are still dependent on whites who monopolise the economy of this country. In essence, what this means is that Black Consciousness runs the risk of becoming meaningless for many black people who remain eternally dependent on whites for their survival. Black Consciousness therefore only makes sense to those who are not subjected to this reality—those who are able to assert themselves because they are not dependent economically and otherwise on white people. The adage, ‘cash is king’, is therefore true in this regard.

Careful analysis of the Black Consciousness movement and Black theology suggests that, if taken to extremes, Black Consciousness and Black theology run the risk of stooping to the same level as Afrikaner nationalist ideology and Afrikaner theology. We must beware of ideologies particularly because of their inherent inclination to obfuscate objectivity. Many proponents of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa have mistaken the Black Consciousness Movement to be an end in itself. However, a careful analysis of Biko and this movement shows that Black Consciousness was, rather, a means to an end. The most crucial question ought to be whether this movement has reached its objective of correcting the lies told by Afrikaner Nationalism and Afrikaner theology.

Thlagale, commenting on the Black Consciousness Movement, argues that complete black solidarity is impossible, due to the ethnic differences which exist amongst black people (Thlagale 1991:150). The differences within the black community because of the emergence of black working middle class also demolish the myth of total black unity. Speaking from a black perspective in in the united States of America, Cornel

West has criticised the black working class for the same reasons outlined by Tlhagale (West 1994).

2.8.1 The conflict between Black Theology and African Theology in South Africa

Black theology was aimed primarily at refuting the theological legitimacy of Apartheid and the political effects that it had on black people. Due to this, some theologians in South Africa have argued that black theology would lose its significance once the Apartheid system was obliterated. Tinyiko Maluleke (1995:1-30) has argued strongly against this prediction, suggesting instead the need for Africans to utilise African culture in their theological deliberations.

It is therefore conceivable that some black theologians especially Motlhabi—a one time vigorous exponent of black theology—would claim that, as a political theology, Black theology should make way for African theology¹⁴ in which the focus will shift to a search for consensus on the methodology which Africans will employ as they do theology in this country and on the African continent at large (Motlhabi 1994:113-141). We have already claimed that black theology, as a critical theology for many a theological alternative, is not without its shortcomings.

Certainly, these points have serious implications for the interpretation of black theology in contemporary South Africa. This thesis contends that black theology, as a critical theology of liberation, finds itself in a crisis and that this crisis warrants

¹⁴ By African theology we refer to black theologians in South Africa who are arguing that, in line with the call for an African renaissance, black people need to find indigenous methodologies for doing theology. We think especially of the works by Bishop Buti Tlhagale, Mokgethi Motlhabi, Itumelng Mosala and others. All these theologians established black theology in South Africa. It is however apparent that they had become frustrated with the theological methods used in Europe and the West when doing theology. Some of their speeches were made in celebration of 30 years of theological training at the University of the Western Cape in 2003. These lectures will be published by the Ecumenical Fellowship of South Africa (EFSA) in the middle of this year. Some articles cited in this study reflect the position held by some of them on this matter.

theological reflection on a number of issues which question the relevance, and importance of black theology today in South Africa. The epoch in which black theology stands in this country today, with the accelerated call made by African theologians that theology in Africa should cut ties with the West and Europe in terms of its theological method, compounds the crisis.

Motlhabi argues that the time has arrived for Black theology to make way for African theology. Maluleke vehemently rejects this approach and believes that Motlhabi reached his conclusion without fundamentally understanding what Black theology was all about (Maluleke 1995:1ff).¹⁵

Black theology is confronted with the challenge of asserting itself against African theology that seems to interpret Black theology as a mere European extension, which inhibits serious black theological reflection. This makes Black theology, in essence, merely political theology without direct links to Black African culture. The reason for this is that Black theology has apparently done nothing to ensure that European culture is being eliminated from the Christian faith which is then clothed in African culture. This is a valid charge given the fact that many Black reformed churches are still struggling to reconcile their Africanness with a church that had its roots in a different context. Obviously, with all the shortcomings that are evident in black theology, it must be understood that an objection of this type of theology was to liberate black people from the shackles of self-hatred.

2.8.2 Unanswered questions for Black theology in South Africa today

Seen in the above light, the suspicion of the Dutch systematic theologian Abraham van de Beek of liberation theology is justified (Van de Beek 2002:237). Van de Beek is convinced that liberation theology has a political orientation. His discomfort with the

¹⁵ Maluleke criticises Motlhabi on a number of points where he (Motlhabi) seems to call into question the significance of black theology and opts for African theology.

intrinsic ulterior motive in liberation theology prompts him to ask an imperative question to the adherents of liberation theology 'Liberated—and then?' (Van de Beek 2002:240).

With this question, Van de Beek raises the issue that if political liberation is the goal of liberation, then what happens after this goal has been reached? What is more, the current situation in South Africa, which has created a black middle class, complicates the manner in which blacks articulate their liberation projects.

Having attained democracy in South Africa, where do we go from here? It goes without saying that Apartheid as a political and theological strategy has been conquered, yet this does not suggest that all is well since democracy, as a human form of governance, is not perfect. Questions are raised regarding those who once spearheaded the struggle. Many of these leaders have availed themselves in the reconstruction processes of the new South Africa. However, the fact that not much is being done today to ensure that theology retains its critical approach should concern the church.

Black liberation theology in this country has had a particular discourse and it is best understood when the issues which precipitated it are taken into account. Thus the question raised by Van de Beek seeks clarity on the best potential role of black theology today.

Some African theologians have argued that Black theology would become irrelevant once Black people were freed from the yoke of Apartheid, and will have to make room for African theology. Could it be that these current theological discourses have become a reality? (cf. Setiloane 1979; Motlhabi 1994:113ff; Mbiti 1974:41ff)

It is clear that many lay people look at Black theology as something which was merely an intellectual exercise that did not help Black people. The reason for this is that not much was done to apply Black theology more practically to the masses. While Black

Consciousness gives form to black theology, this type of theology only makes sense when the social structures are altered in such a manner that people are not economically or emotionally dependent on each other for a sense of self-worth. Black consciousness and therefore Black theology is irrelevant in a context where a black labourer is still dependent on a wage that he/she receives from his/her white employer. This presupposes that something needs to be done in order to empower the ordinary human being.

2.9 CONCLUSION

The URCSA is referred to as a confessing church simply because it has been one of the churches to promulgate a confession in the light of Apartheid and is confronted with a challenge of embodying this very confession. The next chapter looks at how the Belhar Confession can be translated into everyday language making it relevant to its new context so that ordinary people are able to relate to it, and preventing it from becoming a mere intellectual exercise as was the case with Black theology and Black Consciousness.

There have been a number of confessing movements in South Africa including the newly founded URCSA. The terminology of confession has not illustrated continuity, at least not since the dawn of democracy in South Africa. This study has attempted to deal extensively with this concept. It has argued that if the negative connotations are removed from this concept—confessions tantamount to fixed dogmatic rules which guide the life of the church—and confession is dealt with as a comment on the word of God and not the Word of God itself, we shall realise that the only way of asserting the place of the church in the world is to do this in a confessional manner. This would mean not speaking about God in absolute terms, but in a manner that is always aware of the fact that what one believes to be true today might not be so tomorrow. A confessing church is thus a church which acknowledges its being in the world, a

church which is called to speak about God but is only human and cannot speak about God in unlimited terms.

The theological situation in South Africa is now more controversial than it was in the past. This study has tried to demonstrate the point that the DRC provided justification for the Apartheid system because the DRC was the Apartheid regime at prayer. It has dealt with the theologies opposing the Apartheid regime which reacted against what they believed were a contradiction of the gospel.

It has pointed out that the danger exists that black theology, as a critical response to the Apartheid theology, might become just as problematic as its opposition if not carefully considered. Before dismissing Black theology in its totality, we should examine whether this theology has reached its objective. The prominent critical aspect of this theology should be maintained as we consider the theological contribution the church can make to society. As we deal with the subject of African theology, it is imperative that we clearly define what we mean. Is it clear as to who is an African today? And who is included into the concept 'An African'?

While the situation in South Africa has changed for the better, it does not exempt us from continual critical, but constructive, engagement between the church and the political structures. All ideologies must be tested and questioned.

For present purposes, a confessional approach is simply one which takes its position seriously, while remaining cautious of inflexibility. This approach admits that human speech about God is limited and that one cannot certainly claim that one has arrived. Before we attempt this, we will first deal with the Belhar confession and its role within the new democratic dispensation. The next chapter will, therefore, deal more extensively with the new situation in which the URCSA finds itself.

CHAPTER THREE: HOPE NOT ONLY FOR THE CHURCH BUT FOR THE CIVIL COMMUNITY AS WELL

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided a historical overview of the situation which brought about Apartheid in South Africa. It explained that Apartheid was not only a product of the Afrikaner civil religion, but that the German ideology of Nationalism also played a part. While following the implementation of Apartheid as a legitimate policy, it has described the fierce opposition confronting this ideology. The birth of critical theology in this country was discussed as a 'reactionary theology'. While the significance of this theology is not denied, this study remains of the view that it should have been interpreted primarily as a means towards an end, and not an end in itself.

In this chapter, the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa as a confessional institution will be discussed, concentrating on the new political context in which this church finds itself. Those who were involved with the Belhar Confession have prided themselves on the fact that the Barmen declaration was very similar to the Belhar Confession. Although, in reality, there are differences between the two confessions in terms of the socio-political conditions which informed them, Barmen was used as a guideline to inform the Belhar Confession.

This chapter will discuss ways that the Belhar Confession might be used to inform a constructive engagement with the state. Barth could be considered the sole author of the Barmen declaration and his views, specifically his view with regard to the constitution of a confession, were widely used during the deliberations around a *status confessionis* in South Africa. This chapter will engage with Barth and the position of the Belhar Confession concerning church unity today.

The concept of a *status confessionis* is not new to the South African context. The controversy surrounding this concept as it re-entered the theological debate around

Apartheid, raises important questions for the South African situation. This chapter will investigate the reasons that led to the state of confession in South Africa and critically debate the criterion of what constitutes a confession within the new context of the country.

While black and white people in this country were divided during Apartheid, the fact was that black people were further divided among themselves. This manifest itself in denominations which were created based on race. For instance, in the DRC tradition, there was a separate denomination for the coloureds called the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC), a separate church for blacks called the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) and an Indian church called the Reformed Church in Africa (RCA).

While the DRMC and the DRCA united in 1994, some sectors of the DRCA decided against the move hence the DRCA still remains an independent church albeit the majority now belong to the URCSA. The relationships between black and coloured people in the URCSA will be investigated in the hope that it will provoke a debate which will engender genuine deliberation between these two groups in this denomination. This is to develop a new sense of unity into people who were involved in the dismantling of a discriminatory regime. A confessing church can play a pivotal role in this process.

3.2 THE COMPLEX NATURE OF A *STATUS CONFSSIONIS*

The term *status confessionis* relates to certain situations in the church that should remain 'neutral matters' even though the gospel of Christ is at stake. The first *adiaphora* (neutral matters) conflict happened around 1548 when several Catholic customs and procedures were introduced into Lutheran Protestantism.

Some theologians, especially Melanchthon, endorsed them as *adiaphora*, however, others, such as Matthias Flacius, opposed them strongly (Smit 1984:8). According to

Smit, Flacius was of the opinion that, in a situation of confession and offence, there were no *adiaphora* or neutral matters (*nihil est adiaphora in casu confessionis et scandali*—When provocation demands an act of confession, there is no such a thing as an indifferent practice [researcher’s translation]).

The concept was used for the second time in the twentieth century during raging conflicts in the church. When the confessing church in Germany came into being, it opposed the so-called German Christians¹⁶ who, in loyalty to Hitler, endorsed the exclusion of Christians with Jewish backgrounds from the offices of the church. The concept of *status confessionis* was used traditionally to remind the church that the time might come when it would be forced to speak boldly in support of the Gospel.

Smit concedes to the complex nature of the concept of *confessionis* and says that informal use of it leads to misconception that can nullify the meaning embedded in it (cf. Smit 1982:8). For Smit, the expression *status confessionis* is not a technical term with a fixed and definite meaning but must be understood in light of the few occasions in history when it was used. Similarly, Durand asserts that the controversy surrounding the events of confession, coupled with the spirit of intolerance in which a confession was issued, contributed to the fact that Protestantism never achieved the unity of spirit it desired (Durand 1984:33). Durand refers to the reformer of Strasbourg, Martin Bucer, and his reactions in 1529 to the question of whether Strasbourg should adopt a confession of faith drawn up by Luther.

His reaction to this call was that faith is based on the sure and only Word of God. The human mind, he believed, is unable to comprehend and express this Word adequately; the unity of faith should therefore be sought in divine Scripture rather than in human words, which can only end in discord (Durand 1984:33).

¹⁶ The ‘German Christians’ were those among the Protestant Churches under Hitler who were most keen to bring a synthesis between Nazism and Christianity, identifying religious aims with national aims (cf. Busch (1976:224).

Bucer does not deny confession but he understands that human words are undoubtedly fallible and should not replace the sovereign Word of God in the Bible. Christians are bound to differ among themselves for they do not perceive reality in the same way. The question raised by the Church created a dilemma of whether the time was right to call upon such a confession.

Confessional speech about God does not suggest that humanity is not in a position to speak, but instead it reminds humanity of the fact that human speech and thought about God is limited. It reminds us that what we might be saying today with conviction and passion might not be as relevant and necessary tomorrow. As people whose realities are conditioned by numerous and diverse aspects, we have to come to grips with the fact that choosing a side and aligning ourselves to a particular course, does not guarantee that all other Christians will agree with us. We acknowledge that there are many situations in which the church should have called upon its confession in its situation; furthermore, it is imperative that we remind ourselves of the complexity in which we find ourselves as Christians.

Theologians of the 20th and 21st centuries agree that the first major call for a *status confessionis* was during the church's struggle in Germany (cf. Smit 1984; De Gruchy 1984; Cochrane 1976).¹⁷ It was during April, 1933, that Bonhoeffer concluded that a moment of decision can occur in which ongoing disputes in church and theology suddenly end and change into a situation of confession because the Gospel itself is put at risk and everything becomes concentrated on one crucial issue (Smit 1982:9). Bonhoeffer was of the opinion that these circumstances compelled the church to confess and to voice its opposition to forces that threatened Christianity.

¹⁷ This researcher is aware of the fact that this view is debateable and that the issue of confessions which addressed their specific situations go way beyond the situation in Germany. However, this researcher is convinced that, in terms of contemporary usage of confessions, the situation in Germany illustrates a rather new and unique approach to confessions.

The catalyst, which prompted the church in Germany to think critically about its position, was precipitated by the introduction of the Aryan paragraph. According to this paragraph, only Aryans were allowed to become preachers or office bearers in the German Evangelical Church while Jewish Christians were not allowed to these offices.

Cochrane (1976:22) maintains that whether one regards a theory of the racial superiority of the Aryan race or anti-Semitism as the basic principle of National Socialism, the fact remains that, from the beginning, National Socialism viewed Jews not merely as an inferior race but as the *Gegenrasse* whose main objective was to overthrow the Aryan race. In the light of this, German Christians sought to combine Christianity with tenets of National Socialism (Cochrane 1976:37).

The confessing church in Germany came into existence, not necessarily through Hitler and National Socialism, but to combat the German Christians with their natural theology. Barth was aware of the feelings among the confessing Christians that National Socialism, with its belief in the superiority of the German race, was innocuous as long as it did not dictate how the church should manage its affairs. In 1942, Barth pointed out that most of the members of the confessing church 'thought they could agree to, or at least sympathise with, the political and social aims of National Socialism' (Hunsinger 2000:78).

When Hitler appointed Bishop Muller to the office of protectorate for the German Christians, it became clear to the evangelical church that Muller was no longer a mere liaison between Hitler and the church but had become a representative of the party in the church. The confessing church had to take a stand to stop the church being dictated to by secular forces. It felt the threat that the state wanted to determine membership to it, hence its call for a *status confessionis* (Smit 1982; Busch 1976; Cochrane 1976).

The German *status confessionis* compelled the church to express its disagreement with the discrimination of Jews which was against Christian teachings. The confessing church had to align itself with those who suffer, and, in that situation, it was clearly the Jews who were placed deliberately on the fringes of the German community. Christian Jews were not allowed to occupy any key positions in the church. Although the church wanted to profess solidarity with the Jews, the church was faced with the difficulty of a sound theological declaration because there remained always the danger of falling into the snare of its own ideologies. Therefore, while there was a situation that called for such a confession, it was felt that some time should pass before the declaration of a *status confessionis*.

Small forms of protest erupted against the Aryan paragraph, but the people were continually reminded about *adiaphora*. This discouraged members of the church from interfering with it. Bonhoeffer wrote a private letter to Barth asking him whether it was not time that the church brought about its confession with regard to its situation. Barth was convinced that the situation did warrant a *status confessionis* but he was not sure as to the immediate steps to take (Smit 1982:10).

Another significant church debate in which the *status confessionis* featured was the ecumenical rejection of racism. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) announced a *status confessionis* concerning racism and Apartheid at Dar es Salaam in 1977 and declared once again that the situation did not involve merely *adiaphora* but that the essence of the church itself was at stake. Under the theme of 'Christ a New Community', Manas Buthelezi delivered an address on 'In Christ a Community in the Holy Spirit'. The meeting adopted a concise, threefold resolution with the title 'Declaration on confessional integrity' (*status confessionis* in South Africa) (Smit 1982:13).

This assembly maintained that, under normal circumstances, the Church might have differences of opinion on political issues. Political and social structures could become

perverted and oppressive but that it was 'in agreement with the confession' to reject the Apartheid system publicly and unambiguously. In Smit's opinion, the statement clearly involved the question of what constitutes *adiaphora* 'under normal circumstances' but it did not spell out what 'in agreement with the confession' meant (Smit 1982:13). It became increasingly clear that many of the assembled were confused by the jargon of *status confessionis*. Some thought that it referred to the *Confessio Augustana*, especially article 16. It was suggested that a study commission of experts be elected to look into the issue and that it would gather later to advise the LWF. Many were convinced that the term *status confessionis* should be abandoned, though the designation of an abnormal confessional situation could be retained (Smit 1982:13).

Despite the confusion that surrounded the use of this concept, a lively debate ensued in Lutheran circles in South Africa. The resolution taken by the LWF influenced the debate on this subject at least within the Reformed church family. Even though the resolutions by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) took place independently of the decision by the LWF on the subject (Smit 1982:13), it would have been impossible for the DRMC to ignore the LWF's findings on the issue. In turn, the DRMC adopted a number of strong resolutions concerning the ideology of Apartheid and rejected it as being in conflict with the teaching of the Gospel on church unity and reconciliation. These resolutions were reached after the incident of the LWF.

There can be no doubt that black people were not alone in their struggle against Apartheid.¹⁸ On February 14, 1980, the black delegates to a consultation on racism of the South African Council of Churches at Hammanskraal appealed to white Christians to show their willingness to purge the church of racism (Hofmeyr & Pillay 1994:279). Six years before this, also at Hammanskraal, the World Council of Churches (WCC)

¹⁸ Reference can be made to Beyers Naudé and the Christian Institute. For more on this aspect, see De Gruchy (1979:140ff).

took a resolution to take concrete action against racism and established a fund for a programme to combat racism (Hofmeyer & Pillay 1994:279). In August, 1980, the central conference of the WCC in Geneva released a declaration on South Africa in which an appeal was made to the World Council and its member churches, together with other churches, to witness that Apartheid was a sin that was to be rejected.

Two years later, in August 1982, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) met in Ottawa on the *status confessionis* of the South African context. During this period, Allan Boesak played a pivotal role in introducing the verdict by the WARC on South Africa. Boesak argued vigorously that Apartheid was not merely an evil ideology, but a pseudo-religious ideology perpetuated and justified from the bosom of reformed churches. Finally, he requested the World Alliance to identify itself with the resolution of the 1978 Synod that Apartheid was irreconcilable with the gospel of Christ and to declare it a heresy.

The World Alliance issued a detailed declaration on Racism and South Africa in August which consisted of three sections:

- Section 1 expressed some basic truths about the gospel. The theology of Apartheid had been designed by the South African Reformed theologians and was fallacious; Apartheid was therefore a pseudo-religious ideology as well as a political policy.
- Section 2 reminded the Alliance that it had already adopted several resolutions on that matter. Thus, the exclusion of any people on grounds of race, colour or nationality from any congregation and part of the life of the church, contradicted the very nature of the church.
- Section 3 said that the General Council of WARC declared that this situation constituted a *status confessionis* for its churches. It declared that *adiaphora* did not apply in this case.

When the synod of the DRMC debated a resolution on this matter on 1 October 1982 in Belhar, the synod took note of the proposal by its delegates to Ottawa that the Synod should accept the resolution of the WARC on racism. Thus, the DRMC declared that it constituted a *status confessionis*.

3.3 THE POLITICAL STATUS OF THE BELHAR CONFESSION

The prelude (above) to the situation that precipitated the confession of Belhar, shows that this confession had its impetus in socio-economic and political dynamics, thus grounding it firmly within a political context.

The allegation that Belhar was a concoction of liberation theologies coupled with Marxist socialist theories was difficult to defend and was used by some theologians as an excuse not to read the content of the confession itself. The confession itself does not refer explicitly to its catalyst, Apartheid for various reasons, the most significant being the controversial interpretation of the word 'politics'. To advocate 'talk of politics' in which one ideology vied for dominance over another would have done more harm than good. Inevitably, therefore, the school of thought in current theological discourse has given a different meaning to the concept of 'liberation theology'. Theories utilised to assess socio-economic and political dynamics have always encountered harsh disapproval, and a possible result would be that liberation theology would be dismissed as a politicised theology.

Because of the decision by the synod not to refer explicitly to Apartheid, a particular group of people or a specific church, the Belhar Confession has proven to be a more versatile and resilient confession for it possesses the potential of being relevant in a new and changed context. The synod's avoidance of explicit political terms has prevented the negativity which is attached to the concept of politics.

Various studies have been undertaken to establish the relationship of this confession to earlier confessions within the reformed tradition (Horn 1984). This confession took

its cue from the Barmen declaration, thus, in that sense, it is not an original confession. Horn (1984) made a comparative study of the Belhar Confession (*Konsep-belydenis*) and the Barmen declaration pointing out the influences of both the Barmen declaration and the theology of Barth on the formation of the Belhar Confession. Naudé reminded us that in South Africa, there were numerous theological declarations made against the theological legitimacy given by the DRC to Apartheid which preceded the Belhar Confession.

The origin of Belhar in the political arena was evoked by the Apartheid ideology that had been given sanctity by the DRC hermeneutics and theological reflections. The Belhar Confession was therefore both a political and an ecclesiastical response to the situation in the country. The third article in this confession wrestles with the issue of reconciliation, which (at the conception of this confession) was practically impossible (Belhar Confession Appendix A). What is more, the fourth article is explicitly political in its reference to justice and true peace among men. It admits that, in a world of injustice and enmity, God is the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged. It continues to reject any ideology that would legitimate forms of injustice, and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel (Belhar Confession, Appendix A).

3.4 THE CURRENT CONTEXT OF THE CHURCH AND THEOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA

For the church to fulfil its calling effectively, it needs a clear comprehension of the context in which it exists. The church in South Africa today is characterised by modernity and post-modernity, the scourge of unemployment, a young and fragile democracy, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, moral decay and poverty. The URCSA, a church that has its roots in Africa, has inherited a socio-economic and political legacy from the Apartheid era. South Africa and South Africans are still trying to recover from its after effects.

Among the many effects is the issue of moral decay which is tearing the South African situation apart. It is impossible to deal with this subject without taking into consideration the situations that caused it. The moral decay of the Apartheid state was caused by self-hatred, self denigration and a deep sense of cultural alienation (Goba 1997:65). This showed itself during the peak of the struggle in the violent killing of people by means of necklacing them.¹⁹

Some of these bodies were exhumed from their graves and burned once again. It was this system of moral decay which created deeper divisions between whites and blacks, between adults and the youth, women and men, the result being a sick society (Goba 1997:67).

The consequences of that moral decay are emerging now in South Africa in a deep moral disregard which manifests itself in the rape of women, the sexual abuse of children, serial killings of innocent people, particularly women and children, the breakdown of discipline in many families and the high rate of divorce as people fail to develop quality relations that have lasting value. To this should be added the corruption of both public and business officials (Goba 1997:67).

The URCSA, motivated by a zeal for justice particularly in addressing political injustice, can contribute to remedying the situation but the *modus operandi* of this denomination will have to be different from that which was espoused during the struggle against Apartheid. The challenge is to engage in critical analysis of the moral values reflected in the policies of the new government. In order to do this, the church shall have to refrain from the notion of 'political correctness' which is the tendency to pay lip service to the policies of the present government.

¹⁹ The word necklace refers to when activist put a tyre around the neck of their enemy and set him/her alight.

After the demise of Apartheid, churches in this country convened to adopt what they termed a 'critical solidarity' approach to the present government. The term in itself is problematic in that it does not include a type of criticism which is encapsulated in the biblical vision as seen in the prophetic traditions where denunciation, rebuke and sometimes even confrontation is exercised.

One of the new opportunities which confront the church today under a secular state is to promote a moral vision that will make an important contribution in choosing who we are *as a church* in society. The church as a bearer of moral tradition informed by the vision of the sovereign rule of God, must demonstrate its relevance in our communities and political life. Through a Christian praxis, a new moral lifestyle must be promoted that encapsulated the biblical ethos, as well as the African view of morality which is reflected in the concept of *Ubuntu, botho* (which is translated as humanity) (Goba 1997:68).

To choose who we are in a contemporary South Africa confronts the church with a hermeneutical challenge. It begs of the church to review and revisit its mission, mandate and moral responsibility. This will only be attainable when the church vigorously analyses the policies enacted by government and shows a genuine interest in what is happening in the social sphere. The sad reality is that churches in this country appear to be silent on the issues that affect the lives of its congregants.

The question of choosing who we are is closely accompanied by a second question which is, what kind of a society do we want to become? In Goba's view, this second questions impels us to ask crucial questions, such as who determines what kind of society we want to be? Is it the political order? Is it ordinary citizens struggling to give meaning to their lives?

Goba poses serious questions about our constitution as well as the role of churches that belong to the URCSA. He spells out precisely what the church ought to be doing, reminds churches about a new 'national crime prevention strategy' and asks churches

what they are doing to engage with that policy. It will be a futile exercise on the part of the church to pursue an ethical task without understanding the law in that regard.

The above refers merely to the immediate situation, which makes the theological response of this denomination difficult. All this takes place in a context where this denomination is confronted with the calls for the renaissance of Africa. It will have to ponder a theological response to that as well. The URCSA in Africa will have to work towards eradicating perceptions that Africa is backward, that it lacks the potential to govern itself and that it can only survive with the help of Europe and the West. This denomination and its theology need to pay critical attention to the criticism of many African theologians, politicians, and leaders. It is this frame of reference, which should be kept in mind as the URCSA ponders its calling in a young democratic South Africa.

By focusing predominantly on the URCSA, underlines the fact that this is an independent denomination and although it also has membership to the SACC, it will have to deal with some of these challenges by itself. This opportunity will allow this denomination to review whether it was able to lay the struggle to rest and to undertake a necessary paradigm shift²⁰ to deal with the new challenges at hand. This includes questions such as: Does the URCSA find itself in a state of confusion because it is not able to discern its role clearly in the current young democracy? Has the URCSA recovered fully from its role in the struggle against Apartheid? Does the URCSA have a clear agenda for how it ought to respond to the many challenges that affect its members? If this denomination does have clarity on its calling in South Africa and the world today, does its church order make room to execute such a mandate?

²⁰ David Bosch provides us with significant guidelines to help us in our assessment of paradigm shifts in theology. Cf. Bosch (2001:185ff).

From the above, it is apparent that this new democracy has plunged the church into a sense of confusion. Smit acknowledged this confusion when he maintained:

In our opinion, the first and most important challenge for the church in South Africa today is to obtain clarity on what the most burning tasks and challenges are that it is facing ... We have become insecure and confused, we don't know precisely what we are to do ... the country has been in political, social and economic transition ... we were not prepared for what was happening, and even now we still do not fully understand what actually has happened or how we are to react to it (Smit 1993:5).

As much as it can be argued that theological commentary can and must be applied to the changed context, the issues mentioned above are also political. It is from this backdrop that this study wishes to deal with the Belhar Confession from a new South African perspective. Koopman is of the opinion that the contribution of Belhar lies precisely in its dealing with issues while taking into account the state of theology, and the church (2002:277). Koopman (2002:274) admits that this confession was born within a particular historical situation but he believes that the contents of this confession are not limited to that situation alone but that it can be relevant in other situations. He advocates a reinterpretation of this confession in the light of the new and changed context in which it finds itself today.

While looking at Belhar with refreshed and constructive eyes, it is also important that theologians deal with Belhar as a mere confession, which it is. As a confession, it need not be discarded after a certain objective has been achieved (in this case the demise of Apartheid as both a political system as well as a theological principle) but deserves to be examined as being applicable to different contexts. This study concurs with Koopman that Belhar can help us to identify the new challenges facing our country today. Sadly, this rarely happens in practice. Jonker reminds us that this was especially true of confessions during and after World War II. What he suggests is that the Barmen Declaration is kept strictly for the ecclesiastical debate and refrains from

directly addressing the political situation, thereby indicating that it still belonged to an era in which the European Churches refrained from making direct political statements (Jonker 1996:250-251). In the same way, the Belhar Confession also refrained from making direct political statements.

While commentators agree that the Belhar Confession challenges us to work with conviction towards unity, reconciliation and justice, it is not clear how this should be done. Because politics have become so compartmentalised, it has remained proper for the church to refrain from political commentary.

The accompanying letter (see Appendix A), of the Belhar Confession is apologetic of its political seedbed. There are negative as well as positive intentions to the apology of Belhar. The positive intention needs to be understood against the backdrop of how liberation theology came to be perceived in South Africa. Liberation theology was understood to be only a more nuanced form of the deconstruction of 'pure theology' (a type of theology that is exempted from politics). Because of this negative perception, many adherents of the Belhar Confession thought it necessary to explain the real and true intention of this confession. What we perceive to be negative about Belhar's apology is that such an approach smothers genuine political interaction with this confession.

Although the Belhar Confession is not intended to be a political statement,²¹ it is inevitable that politics are included in it. This explains why the apologetic nature of Belhar is justifiable. Although this confession is regarded as apologetic in defending itself against the accusation of being a residue of 'liberation theology', this study argues that it could contribute to the process of appropriating theological language

²¹ Cf. Appendix A: Accompanying letter.

to political language²². Had the Belhar Confession refrained from adopting a neutral position, this study believes that it would have contributed towards the eradication of the myth that theology should be separated from politics.

We should therefore consider whether the decision to avoid explicitly political reference was helpful, and whether this avoidance would help in rendering this confession adaptable to other contexts in the contemporary situation. In testing the relevance and significance of Belhar, it should be established how realistically this confession relates to unity. While it confesses that unity is indispensable in the church, it does not describe this unity given the socio-economic, cultural and political and in the light of our past.

The discrepancies between South Africans do not only include the divide brought about between black and white people, but *ipso facto* refer to the divisions between black people themselves. The process of unity therefore must deal with the baggage from the past.

The second issue which is enshrined in the Belhar Confession deals with the type of unity that we have achieved in this country. True unity will determine true reconciliation between black and white people, as well as between black people themselves. Much still needs to be done in terms of bringing about true reconciliation between members of these churches that were initially separated because of racial reasons.

A further challenge is that, unlike in the past when most forces rallied against Apartheid as the common enemy, our democracy presents us with a much more difficult challenge, for although it is generally considered the most human type of governance, it also possesses some dangers. This denomination will have to concede

²² Ralf Wüstenberg has made an impressive case for the appropriation of political language into theological language (cf. Wüstenberg 2002:257ff).

that its approach to the state will have to take a different form to the one espoused during the struggle years. As much as this denomination is challenged to work constructively with the government for the enhancement of the people, it also calls on both laity and the clergy to engage with the state and its policies to understand how government decides on policies and legislations. This denomination can only engage with the state meaningfully when it has a clear understanding of how governmental infrastructures operate. This can bring a new understanding of the relationship between church and the state.

The relationship between the state and the church is now more controversial, with all religions being regarded as equal and with the division between state and religion enshrined in the constitution. This church should realise that the Christian community is also called to participate in the ongoing processes of reconstruction and development dealing with, among the many challenges facing the country, (1) the issue of moral disintegration and (2) an inculcated racial division that disturbs the goals of unity and reconciliation set by the constitution.

The fact that South Africans are suddenly confronted with the need to co-operate with each other suggests that some confusion and mistrust is bound to be experienced, making any process towards working together for the enhancement of the South African society a difficult task.

Having said that, the progress that we have made as a nation warrants praise. South Africa has indeed come a long way towards the equality of all races that call this country home. With regard to the difference in the socio-economic and political strata in society, much has been achieved. While it is important for this country to empower those who have been previously disadvantaged, the means utilised to do this have only managed to affirm some individuals, creating a more rigid class structure amongst blacks.

It cannot be denied that, among the many challenges which face South Africa today, economic imbalance, which remains crucial to transformation, must be addressed as a matter of urgency. The South African government cannot address this all by itself. It is for this reason that Botman advises a partnership between the church and the government (Botman 2000:97-104). While this study acknowledges the need to co-operate with government for the enhancement of the socio-economic and political situation in South Africa, such a partnership should not become the result of the situation where churches are co-opted. Partnership with the government is necessary because it affects those within the civil community and *ipso facto* affects those within the Christian community as described by Barth (1989:270):

The Christian community itself exists in this time which is given to humanity, that is, in the space where human temporal life is still protected from chaos—and on the face of it chaos should have broken out long ago.

According to Barth, the question of whether the church should concern itself with politics is a senseless question. He believes that with the responsibility that the church has towards the state, it is self-evident that the church also has a definite obligation to engage in the socio-economic and political issues with which it might be confronted. The crucial question is: In what manner does the church engage itself in the socio-economic and political issues of South Africa?

Barth's definition of the word church has been helpful in answering this question. For Barth, the concept of the Christian community refers to the church:

This is the commonality of people in one place, region or country who are called apart and gathered together as 'Christians' by reasons of their knowledge of and belief in Jesus Christ. The meaning and purpose of this 'assembly' (*ekklesia*) is the common life of those people in one spirit, the Holy Spirit (Barth 1989:266).

Inevitably, the question of the church's participation in the affairs of the state has been greeted with much suspicion. The next section, will deal more specifically with the question of unity within the URCSA.

3.5 UNITY IN BARMEN AND UNITY IN BELHAR

One of the fundamental issues within both church governance and politics is the issue of unity. The creeds and confessions of the Christian church have always emphasised the importance of unity. When Barth (1936:406) claimed that God reveals himself in his 'three-in-oneness', he was clearly in congruence with the many Christian traditions that preceded him. This revelation described the inevitability of unity in a Godhead that wishes the same of his church. The unity of the church is one of *notae ecclesiae* (signs of the church) and when this is not embodied, it puts a question on the essence of a true church.

It is for this reason that this aspect occupies a crucial position in the Belhar Confession. Within the confession (as is the case with the traditions of the church) unity is one of the fundamental issues placed next to reconciliation and justice (Smit 1984:53). The theology which necessitated Belhar was, to a large extent, extrapolated from the response of the confessing church in Germany to Hitler's Nazism and the German Christians, which was confronted with the issue of the unity of the body of Christ. Seen in this light, the confession of Belhar adheres to reformed standards of confessions. Many South Africans, including Smit, have referred to Barth's address on a universal reformed confession given to the Council of Cardiff in 1925:

A reformed creed is the statement, spontaneously and publicly formulated by a Christian community within a geographically limited area, which, *until further action*, defines its character to outsiders; and which, *until further action*, gives guidance for its own doctrine and life; it is a formulation of the insight currently given to the whole Christian Church by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ by the Holy Scriptures alone (Barth 1962:112).

This means that, although a confession is basic to the reformed tradition, it remains merely a commentary on the Word of God and is not the Word of God *per se*. In Barth's view, a confession is not meant to be something that remains in its original form for eternity. Where this happens, it can only be due to the fact that the confessors were not faithful to the reformed tradition of admitting that their 'Yes' might become a 'No' tomorrow.

There is a tendency among theologians to compare the Belhar Confession to the Barmen Declaration (Horn 1984). Although the *status confessionis* was applied in both cases and both were confronted with the awkward position of confessing Christ against those who have assumed his position, the contexts were different. The subject of unity, which is in question here, was not as important in the Barmen Declaration as it was with Belhar. The former did not call for church unity even though the synod that produced Barmen comprised more than one denomination.

While the incident which precipitated a *status confessionis* in Germany during Hitler's era may also be interpreted as a sign that unity was at stake, the *Bekennende Kirche* was blamed for selfishness because it did not oppose Hitler and his ideologies but was opposed to the fact that the state was dictating how the church should conduct its business. George Harinck asserts that '*de Bekennende Kirche was alles behalve anti-national-socialistisch*' (Harinck 2003:9).

At the meetings of the Barmen, members who were both opposed to and in favour of Hitler's policies were involved in the deliberations that led to the public declaration against the intervention of the state in the affairs of the church. The situation in Belhar was different because it was a congregation of those who became convinced at a particular time that Apartheid was a heresy and stood in contradiction to the Christian gospel.

3.5.1 Unity in the DRC family with an emphasis on the URCSA: A critical analysis

Although the URCSA remains zealous about unity because it is convinced that this is one of its cardinal goals, it is not clear what type of unity is envisaged. The unified approach against the struggle by some reformed theologians has left the impression that black people (black, coloured and Indian) are now free of the strain put on them in the historical past. This new denomination thought it necessary to preach in favour of national reconciliation and the formation of a government of national unity. It was taken for granted that Black people were united.

But, this denomination did not prepare for and did not thoroughly think through the form that this unity would take when different cultures converged into one denomination. In the spirit of the struggle, all people who were not white thought that they were united. Therefore, nothing was done to address issues like racism and stereotypes within this new denomination.

Most of the leadership of this denomination seems more determined to talk about unity with the DRC instead of dealing with the issues above. This is manifested in the many gatherings that are currently taking place between the leadership of the URCSA as well as some synods of the DRC. Although unification talks in these circles are encouraging, the models suggested appear to be the same ones which many DRCM and DRCA members were opposed to in the 1980s. Their structures are united but their tangible unity is never realised on a congregational level and this cannot be achieved primarily because the socio-economic, political and cultural aspects have not been dealt with adequately. This new denomination must take into account that church unity will always be costly because it requires frank and sincere conversations.

Smit is correct in arguing that 'Church unity' is not simply a well-sounding slogan that can be easily bandied about. On the way to effective unity, 'the pain of unrighteousness will be exposed in a thousand ways' (Smit 1984:55). Smit is aware of

the fact that church unity now will have to take into account the discrepancies in the socio-economic and political facets that were brought about by the Apartheid system but he also does not leave us with a clear impression of how this unity might look once it is realised.

The subject of unity subsequently leads to the issue of reconciliation. From the above statement by Smit, reconciliation and unity are not easy options. Smit believes that it should not be trivialised, as is suggested by some members of the DRC because reconciliation, which is intrinsic to unity, means having good relationships with people across the political boundaries (Smit 2000:162). The position of this study is that church unity is a thorny issue, not only between the DRC and the URCSA, but within the URCSA itself, due to the divisions created by our history.

While not many are willing to concede to or even discuss the socio-economic, cultural and political differences among black and coloured members of this denomination, it remains obvious that these issues will continue to pose a great challenge to it. For genuine unity to be effective, it must be established, not only at a structural level but at a grassroots level as well. While the URCSA is comprised of parts of the DRCA as well as the DRMC, the differences between these two groups are not obvious. Loff (1998:273) reminds us that there was internal resistance against church unity within the early URCSA, however he does not give the reasons for this resistance. What is clear is that resistance against church unity was a mutual affair. Groups in both camps were sceptical of unity.

True unity between the URCSA and the DRC is still at a distance partly due to socio-economic, cultural and political aspects. This includes geographic locations. The same can be said about true unity within the URCSA.

In the past, the Group Areas Act and similar laws structured the geographic boundaries in a manner that inhibited many from worshipping together. Unfortunately, in the new democratic dispensation this is still the case even though

black and coloured people are at liberty to reside wherever they please. Now, economic factors determine where people live and this still confronts the majority of ordinary black and coloured people.

True reconciliation is something which can be achieved without living near to one another, belonging to the same denomination and bearing one another's burdens (Smit 2000:162). Also, this new church will have to deal with racial prejudice and cultural intolerance within its own constituency. Not much has been done to deal with the various cultures and languages which now make up this church. On the other hand, we shall have to be vigilant of the possibility of allowing these facets to be exploited by some who want to deliberately stifle true unity and reconciliation.

It is inevitable that that culture and language are powerful factors; however, these are not the only issues that stand in the way of true unity. The advent of true unity in the URCSA is further held back by the lack of mechanisms to help the process. The political situation is still such that a black congregation is bound to call a black minister to minister to them, as is the case with coloured ministers and coloured congregations.

If ministers can contribute positively to a change in the thinking of the ordinary member at grassroots level, then the church ought to entertain this problem seriously. Just as reconciliation remains essential for both white and black to survive both in church and in society, so is this unity needed and is fundamental to the survival of both blacks and coloureds in church (URCSA) as well as in society.

Smit (2000:170) claims that, in the case of the URCSA which was formed by the amalgamation of the former DRCA and DRMC, the confession of Belhar gave form to unity between these two denominations. The Belhar Confession was also accepted by some of the DRC synods while others only accepted the confession recently. The reasons for the delayed reception advanced by the DRC through the years have always been vague. The fact that Allan Boesak was also associated with the

confession of Belhar provided more excuses for their choice not to entertain the confession of Belhar and subsequent church unity with the URCSA (Loff 1998:268).

What complicates the achievement of unity even more is the way in which the confession is being interpreted today in the URCSA. The interpretation by some ministers in this denomination raises questions as to whether they understand what Belhar was really all about.

It is no secret that the URCSA considers the confession of Belhar as one of its cardinal confessions. Smit (2000:172) argues that the URCSA is Belhar.²³ What he means is that the confession will continue to play an imperative role in this denomination which will carry it into the debate and realisation of church unity.

While Smit contends that the URCSA is Belhar (in relation to unity with the DRC), this study believes that such an approach both to the Belhar Confession as well as to church unity stands in direct opposition to Barth's understanding of a confession (an ideal zealously followed during the rudimentary stages of the Belhar Confession). Smit (1982:61) asserts that

[i]f someone is not willing to go along with this foundation of confession, not willing to accept these truths as a starting point for a discussion—which is of course something totally different from adopting the confession officially—but differs from it, it is clear that true unity and community, which exist only on the basis of the truth are already seriously threatened.

Barth's description of what constitutes a confession is that it is not to be considered to be assuming to be the Word of God itself, but instead it must be interpreted as a commentary on the Word of God. From Barth distinguishes clearly between

²³ In a letter from the URCSA to the DRC, the General Synodical Commission of the URCSA, emphasised that the confession of Belhar is not negotiable as a confession for its new church unity, and that they consider the unconditional acceptance of the Belhar Confession as non-negotiable for unification talks with the DRC. Letter to the DRC, 25 October 1996 (Smit 2000:172).

Protestant and Lutheran traditions of confessions. The difference between these two traditions is that Reformed believers do not expect other Reformed communities to accept their confessional documents as binding and as their own (Barth 2002:11).

A question then arises about those who are not willing to subscribe to the confession. Is this a means of determining membership to the church of Christ? If so, is this not falling into a trap similar to the past when race determined membership to the church of God? Should a confession call for church unity, care should be taken about presenting that confession as the ultimate truth.

The strength of a confession lies in the fact that it admits its fallibility and yet remains bold enough to articulate its terms. The Belhar Confession was born from a situation where others declared with conviction and confidence that Apartheid has biblical underpinnings. It must be careful not to fall into the trap of looking upon itself as the ultimate comment on the Word of God.

The URCSA, as a confessing denomination, finds itself in a complex situation as this section explains. Contrary to the past when bodies such as the URCSA were simply give *carte blanche* to speak for the churches against Apartheid, it is now particularly difficult to entrust the task of speaking on behalf of denominations to this institution. The reason for this is that democracy makes room for a number of opinions and what one may perceive to be an issue which the church should address, can be seen by another as not being urgent.

The subject of where the URCSA stands today in terms of how it engages the public sphere requires further investigation which is not within the limitations of this thesis.

It is self-evident that this new church aspires for unity between itself and the DRC while some feel that the URCSA should focus on ways of uniting with some of its black brothers.

We shall now turn to review the complex nature of the relationship between the church and the public of South Africa. Obviously, the URCSA needs to consider this question in light of the new dispensation of this country.

3.6 REVIEWING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE?

The church and the public sphere have always been interlinked. Any separation between the two is only to be understood as an *ad hoc* plea for emancipation of the state from the church or for liberation of the church from the state in a situation of overt abuse of privileges or oppressive legislation, but never as an ideal to be wished for (Brinkman 1992:268).

It is not our intention to enter into a detailed and critical discussion of the relationship between the church and state. Our concern is to look at how this relationship is to be managed in this new democratic context.

The confessional traditions of our affiliations determine how we interpret the relationship that the church needs to have with the state. Hence it is virtually impossible to design a universal programme of how the church should conduct itself towards the public. Because of the inclination of the church to participate in issues that were traditionally left in the hands of state officials, the church continually has to seek ways of making its presence in this world visible.

The church faces the challenge that the world in which it wishes to become a visible presence has become disenchanted with theology and churches. Brinkman maintains that the difficulty in the state-church relationship has always been the problem of the boundary. This raises questions such as 'where does the power of the state end and where does the realm of the church begin?' The Reformers had sound theological reasons for insisting on the specific spiritual role of the church and, at the same time, recognising the role of the state. The church is God's church and therefore stands on

its own over against the state. That means that the state is not permitted to become the church (Brinkman 1992:269).

Wüstenberg argues that, in Europe, theological discussions concerning the role of the church and the state were conducted chiefly in terms of ethical theories such as Luther's doctrine of the 'two-fold reign of God' (Wüstenberg 2002:257). This doctrine came under considerable criticism when the Nazis misappropriated it during the Third Reich.

Thielicke (1969:565) admits to the incongruity of underlying theological differences between Reformed and Lutheran traditions regarding the relationship between church and state. He presents an oversimplified distinction that explains that Lutherans are politically passive, affording the state a measure of autonomous rule but that Calvinism shows a more religious norm and control. He refers to the church's struggle under Hitler where Reformed theology took the lead theologically and strategically in the struggle against Hitler (Thielicke's 1969:565). Within the Reformed tradition, church and state are two distinct yet equally direct expressions of divine dominion which sets it apart from the Lutheran.²⁴

Thielicke's distinction between the role of Reformed and Lutheran confessions, especially when he refers to the church's struggle under Hitler, creates the impression that only the Reformed tradition protested against the Nazis while Lutheranism refrained from agitating the state. This suggests that the Word of God in which He declares his will sovereign over both kingdoms (that is state and church) and his purpose that both should serve his glory, has been entrusted to the Reformed tradition.

²⁴ The irony here is that of late, church orders in the Reformed churches in South Africa have complicated this by insisting that once a minister of the word take part in party politics, his/her status as minister are to be revoked.

The machinations of the state should not be seen as an *additional* concern of the church beyond that of its proclamation of the Word and its pastoral ministry. Instead, it ought to be seen as a direct part of the church's spiritual responsibility, an area that calls for a forthright Christian stance. This view compels Thielicke (1969:566) to concede that the church should see itself as being called upon for active resistance even to the point of supporting violent revolution should the state become tyrannical and hindering the preaching of the Word.

This thesis argues that the church has a responsibility to confront the state if the state fails in its duty to do justice to those on the margins of society. This shows that the church understands its calling to resist. Barth maintained that

Christians have been given the certainty that God has taken in hand and actualised order in his creation for the good of man and that He will finally manifest and enforce it in its perfection. [Christians] thus revolt against all the oppression and suppression of man by the lordship of lordless powers (Barth 1981:205).

Thielicke was clearly in line with Barth regarding the church's responsibility towards the state. Barth strongly supported the need for the church to engage the state when it had lost its vision. After having seen the way in which capitalism preyed on the weak and poor, Barth became convinced that Christ had a fundamental role to play in the movement for social justice and took it upon himself to resist capitalists who were exploiting the workers.²⁵ This resistance of injustice by Christians was also witnessed in South Africa. The next section will address the involvement of the church within the public sphere.

²⁵ Cf. The letter written by one Herr W. Hussy to Karl Barth (Barth 1976:37ff).

3.7 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE IN DEMOCRATIC SOUTH AFRICA

Even though the situation in South Africa has become more complex, the church and the URCSA still have a contribution to make. It is obvious that the method of resistance which was advocated during the Apartheid regime will have to be reconsidered. Furthermore, the role of the church is not the same as was the case against Apartheid. Christian theology within South Africa still has to relate to the state given the more complex situation that exists.

In questioning whether theology has a constructive contribution to make to the political process, Villa-Vicencio admits that the track record of theology is questionable in this regard. The history of theology has many examples of theologically legitimised political triumphalism and economic greed (Villa-Vicencio 1994:184). Some are convinced that theology is best served when it confines itself to its 'traditional duties' and should leave the business of politics to the politicians. This study believes that this call seems justified given the ways in which ideologies have been worked into theology.

Van de Beek appears sceptical about the effectiveness of theology in the sphere of politics, since he finds that there have been many instances where theology was abused to further a particular ideology. He draws comparisons between the techniques in which theology was used politically in the Netherlands, Germany, and America as well as in South Africa (Van de Beek 2002:27). Admittedly, there are a number of dangers inherent in a conversation of theology and politics, but South African theology has always opposed those who insisted that they are to be apart from each other. This was not only evident during the resistance era in South Africa, but it is still evident in theological conversations today.

At a convention hosted by the school of theology at the University of Natal, ministers as well as theologians echoed the reciprocity of theology and politics. Zondi, a well

respected minister of the word and national spokesperson for the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) acknowledged that both the local community as well as his friends outside of the South African situation are always puzzled by his involvement in politics. He asked whether Moses was doing religious and secular work when he was sent down to Egypt, and when Jesus healed the blind, made the lame walk and fed the hungry, was it religious or secular work (Zondi 2003:53)? This means that the line between religious and secular tasks is perceived to be very problematic.

Some theologians here do not see a dichotomy between what is perceived to be belonging to the church and what belongs to the state. This indicates that the church is not an island, and that what affects the civil community, in turn, affects the church. If the church is to retreat to its traditional role of preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments, it should be clear as to what it understands by the preaching of the gospel.

Van de Beek's concern for theology in the public sphere suggests that the church should rather confine itself to its realm. Van de Beek suggests that politics should be left in the hands of politicians. He is correct in pointing to the basic conditions that govern the Christian faith which are humility and servitude (Van de Beek 2003:6).

For people who have just come out of a struggle against oppression, who were part of the struggle and identified the church with the struggle, the call for the church to resort to its traditional duties does not make sense. Seen from a liberation perspective, this could be interpreted as an ambulance service, that is not concerned at all with addressing the root of the problems, but wanting to pick up the casualties after the damage is done.

Unlike the European context, the South African context is not perturbed by the fact that state churches might be biased since they receive incentives from the state. Our situation is more complex because of our democratic constitution that guarantees and affirms all religions equally. The convention between churches and theologians in

government was precipitated by the concern (not only among theologians in government, but by laity as well) that the church seems to have arrived at its destiny. The convention served to find ways of reminding the government of its intended purpose, but also probed ways in which those outside of government could continue to make their voices heard, if necessary.

If it engages with the public sphere, the church in South Africa cannot continue with the same methods it used against Apartheid. Both laity and clergy should have a sound understanding of how government infrastructure operates and with policy formation processes so that they are better equipped to challenge government.

A confessing church is not only a church that opposes government but it is a church that reads the signs of time carefully. This means that it is well informed about what happens in parliament. By doing this, the confessing church is not affirming that democracy is the ultimate ideal, but it wants to engage this democratic government so that the Kingdom of God becomes a tangible reality within this democracy, and the voiceless are heard, the poor fed and justice becomes a reality to those who are oppressed. This is not where the public role of the church ends, but the confessing church will also find ways of understanding the role of prayer in the public sphere.

For this to be attained, the confessing church will have to ponder its relationship with the public sphere. Koopman (2003:70-71) explains that, in his view, there are two extreme positions that can influence the relationship we might have with the state. The first is sectarianism. For various reasons, former so-called struggle churches and former so-called *status quo* churches withdrew themselves from the public sphere in post-Apartheid South Africa. This, he continues, happens because churches wrestle with issues like financial survival, the social problems of their membership, structural renewal, re-orientation with regard to their role in a rapidly changing and democratising context.

Within the church's struggle against Apartheid, critical theology had a clear task of countering the idolatry/ideology of racism. Today, within a secular democratic society which is committed to a multi-cultural and religious tolerance, the challenge is to ensure that both the Christian faith and theology remain public and prophetic (De Gruchy 1997:323). De Gruchy believes that the church cannot be regarded simply as some kind of NGO (non-governmental organisation) because of its prophetic witness to the reign of God, and its witness to the gospel of forgiveness, reconciliation and transformation. This requires that it always retains a critical distance from both political and civil society, refusing to be co-opted by either (De Gruchy 1997:330).

3.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter explored how the URCSA became a transforming church, given its history of establishment. The challenges facing this country belong to both the church and the civil community. This is because what affects the Christian community also affects the civil community. While the government of the day is primarily responsible for the rebuilding and reconstruction of this country, this study holds the view that the church in South Africa, and, more specifically, the URCSA, has a particular role to play in this process. The church finds itself in a position where it is compelled to redefine its role as it contributes towards the reconstruction of a new South Africa.

What follows are the hard realities that stare this Christian community in the face. It will be argued that these issues are very much related to ethics and morals. Yet, they are structural as well. The church, because of its symbolism, is able to foster morality and to garner social cohesion. This will only be fully achievable if the Christian community is able to admit that *confessionalism* forces those who believe to get involved in the affairs of the civil community. The next chapter will deal with the various ethical issues for a transformed and transforming congregation such as the URCSA. This chapter has highlighted the context in which the Church and theology

finds themselves in South Africa. The next chapter will name those current challenges.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ETHICS FOR A TRANSFORMED INSTITUTION TODAY IN SOUTH AFRICA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Having dealt with a transformed and transforming church, this chapter will deal with the ethical issues that make the context for transformation even more challenging. It will illustrate issues confronting the civil community. It will also show the gap between church which are confessional and get their brief from a theological perspective, and those that do not. It will refer to the numerous phases of ethics and how they engage with radical theology. This includes issues ranging from globalisation to racism. The objective is to point out the urgency of moving beyond the domain of the church.

Ethics and morality are closely associated with religion. Because religion has become an ever-pervasive phenomenon, it is understandable that ethos and mores have received wide religious justification. The concept of ethics is derived from the Greek word *ethos*, which means 'character' and is related to custom or habit. Ethics can be defined as the study of what is right or wrong in conduct. It is the general theory of conduct and considers the actions of human beings with reference to their rightness or wrongness, their tendency to good or to evil.

Morality or 'mores' refers to the norms and values which are designed to give form to a particular community or society. Properly understood, the word 'ethics' refers to the systematic study, whereas the word 'morals' refers to behaviour patterns. We speak of a moral act or a moral person, and of an ethical system or code. The *ethos* and *mores* of a community distinguish it from others. Norms and values govern the existence of a particular society, thus we have set values and norms in our respective communities and families. Norms and values differ, consequently, there are particular norms and values in the church which might not necessarily correspond with norms

and values in the broader society. Something might therefore be morally right but not legally right and vice versa.

4.2 HISTORY OF ETHICS: MORAL PHILOSOPHY

The history of ethics can be located in Greek philosophy where stems out as a branch of philosophy that is termed as moral philosophy and is based on issues concerning morality, justice, truth, and goodness. At the same time, it deals with the dichotomy that exists between good and evil, right and wrong. Marcus G. Singer (1982:250) asserts that

[e]thics, or moral philosophy, the branch of philosophy concerned with conduct and character, is the systematic study of the principles and methods for distinguishing right from wrong and good from bad. Ethics has various interconnections with other branches of philosophy, such as metaphysics, the study of reality, and epistemology, the study of knowledge; this may be seen in such questions as whether there is any real difference between right and wrong and, if there is, whether it can be known.

It would be inconsistent therefore to speak of ethics without the philosophical background. There is coherence between morality and philosophy as Macintyre asserts:

The suggestion that asking and answering moral questions is one thing, and asking and answering philosophical questions about morality another thing, may conceal from us the fact that in asking questions of certain kind with sufficient persistence we may discover that we cannot answer them until we have asked and answered certain philosophical questions. A discovery of this kind provided the initial impulse for philosophical ethics in Greek society. For at a certain period, when moral questions were asked, it became clear that the meaning of some of the key words involved in the framing of those questions was no longer clear and unambiguous (Macintyre 1998:5).

Macintyre notes that social changes and the nominatives either change or become problematic as shifts occur in society. Shifts necessitate that new concepts are required from a specific context and new moral framework. Within the Greek context, there are social changes, reflected in two contexts, of the Homeric age and the *Theognid* to the Sophists (Macintyre 1998:5).

Moral philosophy is linked to an Aristotelian tradition which is that of human beings having *teleos*, which is defined as purpose. Singer argues that, following Aristotle's view, humans have a *telos*, or goal, built into our nature. 'Human' is therefore a function word, like 'hammer'. Function words pick out both physically identifiable characteristics and criteria for the goodness of function. Thus, the notion of 'hammer' and that of 'good hammer' are interdependent. Ethics deal with experience and with its actions and effects. Ethics raise questions about morality such as 'what does it mean to say that something is right or good? What makes that particular thing the right action and how to go about to solve moral questions' (Singer 1982:250).

This form of questioning is the stronghold of philosophy in relation to moral reflection and thus qualifies to be moral philosophical ethics which differ categorically. Singer (1982:250) argues that

Philosophical ethics is often called normative ethics and distinguished from descriptive ethics. Descriptive ethics is a department of empirical science, akin to sociology, that aims to discover and describe what moral beliefs are held in a given culture. Normative ethics aims rather to prescribe; it searches for norms, not in the sense of authoritative standards of what ought to be.

The history of ethics includes the Sophists i.e. Protagoras who held that no judgment is false, thus all judgments are true. However, in the same line of thought, he suggested that some judgments are more effective than others. Furthermore, he says that man is the measure for all things, what they are and what they are not. It

includes Plato's general and moral relativism which he compares to the wind's effect as experienced by each individual.

To one, the wind might be hot while to others it might be cold. This means that moral judgment is usually reliant on an individual and a context (Macintyre 1998:14f). Ethics are not necessarily universal but are contextual, based on demographics. When dealing with the Sophist, Protagoras view of all judgments being true and trying to locate what is just for an individual, Macintyre (1998:15) asserts that

Plato appears to credit Protagoras with the view that there are some qualities necessary for the continuing social life of any city. But this is quite consistent with maintaining that there are no sufficient criteria for determining what is just or unjust, independent of the particular conventions of each particular city. So what the sophist has to teach is what is held to be held to be just in each different state. You cannot ask or answer the question, What is justice? But only the questions What is justice-at-Athens? And, What is justice-at-Corinth? From this there seems to follow an important consequence, which both reinforces and is reinforced by a new twist that was lent to the distinction between nature and convention.

4.2.1 The distinctions of philosophical ethics

Metaethics

The following five approaches in Metaethics are to be noted:

Naturalism: this is a type of ethic that holds that moral judgment on complex issues can only be achieved through scientific observation and factual investigation (Singer 1982:250). This line of reasoning falls in line with Kantian philosophy of reason and is typical of the era of Enlightenment.

Cognitivism: this type of ethic holds that moral judgment can be true or not based on knowledge (Singer 1982:250). This form of ethic is identified with Thomas Aquinas,

Aristotle and Immanuel Kant. All stressed the ethical principles of human beings being rational beings (Sweet 2001:8). This is the opposite of non-Cognitivism identified by Hume and Rousseau who believed that ethics came from a sense of love and justice.

Intuitionism: this form of ethic asserts that, in order to get true judgment, moral standards are at humanity's immediate disposal (Singer 1982:250).

Subjectivism: Issues of right or wrong are strictly subjective and are based on personal views rather than universal truths. Thus, for something to be right or wrong is entirely dependent on personal approval or disapproval (Singer 1982:250).

Normative Ethics: These ethics are those usually attached to natural law, moral law and the maxim of actions by Immanuel Kant (Attfield 2012:18-19).

Endberg-Pedersen (1983:8) argues that 'Aristotelian ethics is *eudaimonistic*. At the top of his ethical system Aristotle placed, as the supreme value, *eudaimonia* (happiness)'. Aristotle is considered to have an invaluable contribution to the history of ethics as Endberg-Pedersen (1983:261) asserts:

One such issue is that of the virtues and vices of Aristotle's type of naturalistic approach to ethics. The importance of this issue is clear. For the naturalistic approach is fundamental to Aristotle's moral philosophy. It is so both in connection with his explication, in the *ergon* argument, of the very notion of the good for man, and in connection with his use of the notion of man's identity at a number of crucial turning-points in his system. And of course it connects closely with his general approach in biology and in metaphysics as centring on the notion of essence.

Endberg-Pedersen also notes the close relationship between the ethics of Aristotle and Immanuel Kant. Kant attacked Aristotle's *eudaimonia* and formulated his (Kant's) ethical opposition to Aristotle. Aristotle's ethics are different from Platonic

philosophy which is both teleological and deontological moral theories that connect to the problem of egoism and altruism. Socratic ethics come through reasoning (Endberg-Pedersen 1983:261).

Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics on self-love is rooted in human beings being rational beings. In line with the view of the Aristotle tradition of human beings having purpose and rationality are actually brought and find coherence in theological ethics. Pope John Paul II believed that moral philosophy is based on anthropology reflecting human conduct. Curran asserts that the Pope's philosophical anthropology is 'personalist metaphysics of moral agent and places emphasis on subjectivity without dismissing or denying objectivity'. Curran argues that

papal moral teachings as such do not delve deeply into the philosophical background. Yet the pope insists time and again that anthropology is the basis for all moral reflection and teaching (Curran 2005:92).

Pope John Paul II, in dealing with morality, believed that Aristotle dealt with humanity and purpose, making humans collectively and individually uniquely God's creation. The pope begins with the creation and God the Creator. Curran (2005:93) asserts that

Genesis testifies to the fact that the human person was created in the image and likeness of God. For John Paul II, that is the ultimate basis for human dignity. 'To create means to call into existence from nothing: therefore, to create means to give existence'. Thus, the human person exists because of God's love. The human person is the only creature created for itself, because the whole of created world is given to humankind. The human being has been given dominion over the earth and all creation with the command to fill the earth and subdue it.

He further points out that

for John Paul II, creation, incarnation, and redemption ground the incomparable and unique value and dignity of the human person—the most basic anthropological assertion. The defence and promotion of human dignity thus

becomes the primary criterion for the development of John Paul II's moral teaching (Curran 2005:94).

Endberg-Pedersen (1983:264f) explains:

The concept of nobility which I ascribed to Aristotle on the basis of the chapter in the *Nicomachean Ethics* on self-love is developed from certain remarks of his in that chapter about the kind of being that man is, viz. that he is a rational being. The line of thought here is basically identical, I believe, with Kant's development of the idea of 'people as ends'. The similarity is perhaps not fortuitous. For the Aristotelian argument, based on man's rationality, for moral and noble behaviour, conceived basically as justice, is taken up, and in a sharper form, in Stoic ethics in the argument of the Stoics for justice and in their connected argument for the claim that moral virtue is the only thing that is genuinely good; and it is known that Kant was studying Cicero's account of Stoic ethics during the period when he was preparing the *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*.

Aristotle, unlike Plato who dealt with teleological and deontological theories on ethics, is subtle on the connection between teleological and deontological ethics. As such, Aristotle's ethics have been charged with self-centeredness and self-assertion. Endberg-Pedersen (1983:265) acknowledges this by arguing that 'Aristotle's eudaimonism does not rule out concern for others, and his account of acting for the sake of noble positively includes the idea of such concern'.

Endberg-Pedersen notes that Aristotle's ethics emphasise *phronesis*, which is the cognitive element for desire and is necessary for motivation. Aristotle's ethics include *phronesis*, *eudaemonia* and *praxis* with *phronesis* being the cognitive instrument which is instrumental in facilitating action (Endberg-Pedersen 1983:265).

With the history of moral philosophy being the backdrop of ethics, it is therefore inextinguishable to divorce philosophy from critical and analytical reflections on

issues of morality. Acting in a moral or ethical way necessitates philosophical rationality, particularly in deciding what is wrong or right. Macintyre (1998:23) notes the following:

Socrates had raised the key philosophical question in ethics. How do we understand the concepts which we use in decision and appraisal? What is the criterion for their correct application? Is established usage consistent? And if not, how do we escape inconsistency?

Further contexts, society, norms and shifts determine the nominatives of ethics based on development and changes, as Macintyre (1998:83) argues:

evaluation with a wider scope is only possible when traditional role behaviour is seen in contrast with other possibilities, and the necessity of choice between old and new ways becomes a fact of social life. It is not surprising therefore that it is in the transition from the society which was the bearer of the Homeric poems to the society of the fifth-century city-state that good and its cognates acquired a variety of uses, and that it is in the following decades that men reflect self-consciously about those uses. Greek philosophical ethics differs from later moral philosophy in ways that reflect the difference between Greek society and modern society.

Greek ethics begin with wanting to know how to farewell. Macintyre (1998:84) notes that 'modern ethics asks, what ought I to do if I am to do right?' The main focus of ethics is concerned with human action beyond bodily movements. Post-Kantian ethics contrasts between duty and inclination. Further ethics are bound to consist of transcendentalism of Plato to go beyond the existing structures. However, for every ethic, there must be a criterion existing to measure for or against. The Stoicism, Zeno, Cleanthes and Chrysippus (in Macintyre) are correct in noting that

morals become unintelligible apart from cosmology. The universe is at once material and divine. The primary material of the universe, fire, is transmuted into

various physical states by the activity of a universal rational principle, the Logos, which is the deity. In the transmutation of the universe a regular cycle recurs, returning again and again to a cosmic conflagration in which the original fire brings to an end one period and begins another. Each of these cyclical periods is identical, and every event in the universe therefore recurs indefinitely often in the future I have written and shall write these words, and you have read and will read them, just as you do at this present moment (Macintyre 1998:104).

Ethics within the theological arena share in the philosophical tradition of ethics though it has a different starting point from simple rationality, purpose, destiny desire and moral judgment in order to establish ethics. Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* emphasised goodness which is fundamental to Christian ethics. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle's ethics are independent from metaphysics instead they are led by experience, common opinions and their critique (O'Meara 2012:65). Contrary to Aristotle, is Plotinus whose ethics are dependent on metaphysics. O'Meara notes that

it seems, however, that in Plotinus the metaphysical background is crucial: the theory of the ultimate first cause above being, the One; divine transcendent intellect's derivation from and relation to the One; the origin of soul in intellect and soul's descent and relation to the body. This background results in a reversal emphasis: the transcendent life of intellect is, and alone is, the good life, happiness; life in relation to the body means taking care of what is necessitated by this relation, involving an administration of these matters inspired by the good life (O'Meara 2012:65).

Plotinus and Plato have similar starting points in establishing their ethics. for Plato, it is the One/Being while, in Christianity, it is God. Aristotle and Plotinus share views on human goodness that are intrinsically involved in Christian ethics.

4.3 THEOLOGICAL ETHICS

The use of ethics in theology as theological ethics/Christian ethics, stems from the history of moral philosophy beginning from Socrates, Stoics, Cynicism, Plato,

Protagoras and Aristotle and St Augustine, Plotinus, St Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther and Immanuel Kant who contributed to Christian theology. Theological ethics differs from moral philosophy based on *teleos* (Aristotle) and reason (Kant).

Theological ethics begins with a different approach based on the fact that the starting point for reflection is God, humanity, corruption, conscience and sin. Patte (2010:379) explains that

‘Christian ethics’ refers to the theological or theoretical study of morality (which takes several forms) and often to the subject matter of this study, ‘morality’ (or one of its specific implementations, e.g. business ethics). Morality is a matter of relationships: right and wrong, good and bad, virtuous and vicious, just and unjust interactions with others.

McClendon (2002:39) believes that

Systematic Christian theology, as a segment of the whole ‘encyclopaedia’ of Christian studies, has often been treated in three parts: one called apologetics (also, *mutatis mutandis*, called prolegomena or philosophical theology or fundamental theology or foundations); a second, designated Christian doctrine (or dogmatics, sometimes misleadingly taken to be ‘theology proper’); and finally Christian ethics (also, and here rightly, called moral theology or theological ethics).

Theological ethics and Christian theology form part of the mandate of the church and describe the relationship of the church to morality and justice. McClendon (2002:43) asserts that

all parts of the system have a common task; they properly constitute one theology. Yet there is a difference in the insight each requires. On the present arrangement, we begin by finding the shape of the common life in the body of Christ, asking how the church must live to be truly the church. That investigation is here named ethics.

Ethics in theology has much to do with God and His desire for humanity. While God has given humanity the ability to be reasonable beings, He still wishes to intervene in the human condition. Thomas Aquinas spoke on the Aristotelian tradition of teleology linked with the ultimate end of human beings with purpose and rationality. Aquinas captures this in-built mechanism of the rationality of human beings in his view of natural law as described by Curran (2005:103):

Natural law for Aquinas is human reason directing us to our end in accord with nature. However, Aquinas's teleology is an intrinsic teleology, as specifically differentiated from an extrinsic teleology, such as utilitarianism or strict *consequentialism* that determines morality solely on the basis of the consequences of the act. Aquinas does not reduce morality only to consequences. Acts contributing to the end must be in accord with our nature, which has its own built-in finalities that must be observed, such as the finality or rational beings to live together in communities.

Natural law is demonstrated in the Old Testament with the Ten Commandments which are basis of ethics in the Old Testament dealing with the primordial idea found in Genesis of the knowledge of good and evil, a theme found throughout moral philosophy and theological ethics. The Ten Commandments are not strictly commandments/laws but rather oracles from God to guard human life and conduct. McClendon (2002:187) asserts:

In the Bible, it means first a particular oracle showing God's direction for conduct, and in time it refers to the entire Pentateuch. So the law, the *Torah*, is the Way—and it is no accident that the chief Hebrew word for sin, *chatah*, means not as we might say to 'break' the law, but literally, to 'miss the way'.

The transition from moral philosophy to theological ethics is distinguished by the fact that God forms part of the reflection on morality in the scope of theological ethics. Contrary to the rationality and philosophical reflection on morality upheld by moral philosophy. Henry Margenau (1964:149) validates this by asserting that

ethics can stand on its own feet, and it should be weaned from religion to gain strength. It can do this without loss of love or disrespect for its mother.

A point that should not be ignored, with regards to theological ethics is that of context. Context is important in the history of moral philosophy from the Homeric to the Socratic and Platonist age forward. Even Christian ethics are based on context. Macintyre (1998:109f) notes that anthropologists observing the social behavioural patterns and norms of society recognise variations which obviously influence its ethics and what might be considered normal. Christianity, from its birth, and its Hebraic predecessors is not an exception to this fact. Macintyre (1998:110) asserts:

We shall expect to discover a great capacity for coming to terms with quite different sets of moral standards in different times and places. If this is the kind of expectation that we ought to have about religions which have a long history than had the society they outlasted, then it is pre-eminently the kind of expectation that we ought to form of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. We shall not be disappointed. The successive expression of the forms of life of Hebraic tribalism, Hellenistic monarchy, the Roman imperial proletariat, Constantinian bureaucrats, and the long list of their successors result in a theology which accommodates a wide range of views in ethics.

He further adds:

To an age which, like our own, has been continually exhorted to find the solutions to its own problems in Christian morality, it will perhaps come as a relief to consider that the whole problem of Christian morality is to discover just what it is. What bishops and journalists suppose to exist somewhere—if not on tables of stone, at least in materials of undoubted durability—turns out to be almost as elusive as the shark. And yet in speaking of a continuous tradition and of a single religion we appear to presuppose some sort of unity. This unity consists in certain themes which, although they can provide a context for very

different sorts of norms and behaviour, still furnish an entirely distinctive context (Macintyre 1998:110).

It is imperative to consider contexts when reflecting on ethics from a Christian perspective. However what makes Christian ethics distinct and somewhat universal are the themes of God being our father, obedience, and reconciliation (Macintyre 1998:110). In line with the diversity of contexts, cultures and God, Christian ethics has borrowed substantially from moral philosophy to legitimise its relevance to a given context. Macintyre (1998:115f) argues that

[t]he first is the borrowing from feudal social life of concepts of hierarchy and role. When St. Anselm explains man's relationship to God he does so in terms of the relationship of disobedient tenants to a feudal lord. When he explains the different services owed to God by Angels, monastics, and laity, he compares them respectively to the services of those who hold a fief permanently in return for services, of those who serve in the hope of receiving such a fief, and of those who are paid wages for services performed but have no hope of permanence.

The 13th century marks the revisiting of Aristotle's *eudaimonia* in theology beginning with St Augustine in the 4th century with his application of moral philosophy. The Christian theology developed by St Augustine was strongly ethical in orientation and he developed a eudaimonism of his own (Tkacz 2012:67). St Augustine also shares in the philosophical tradition of a good/happy life for all humanity as proposed by Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics though the limitation of the philosopher is of the articulation of the nature of this goodness and happiness. Tkacz (2012:74) argues:

... Again, Augustine makes clear his indebtedness to the philosophical tradition for he repeatedly mentions the right of the Christian thinker to glean from pagan tradition what is true and useful for understanding. This is precisely what he found in the teachings of philosophers. Augustine writes to Dioscorus that what we need to know in life is how to attain happiness and that this is the subject of

pagan philosophy. Indeed, this fundamental question of pagan philosophy is the fundamental question of Christianity as well.

To Augustine, happiness entails the wisdom to examine one's soul. As such, happiness can be accorded to the pursuit of intellectual activity in the quest for the truth as is the case of the root of academic scepticism. This view was held by Augustine's student, Licentius while another student of Augustine differs and insists that happiness is truth found, possessed and enjoyed. Augustine does not only leave happiness in wisdom alone but opens it to investigation, contrary to philosophers, such as Cicero, Aristotle, the Platonists and Stoics (Tkacz 2012:74f). Macintyre (1998:116f) adds that

[t]he Platonic dichotomy between the world of sense perception and the realm of Forms is Christianised by St. Augustine into a dichotomy between the world of the natural desires and the realm of divine order. The world of the natural desires is that of his love for his mistress before his conversion and that of the *Realpolitik* of the earthly as against the heavenly city ('What are empires but great robberies?'). By an ascetic discipline, one ascends on the scale of reason, receiving illumination not from that Platonic anticipation, the Form of the Good, but from God. The illuminated mind is enabled to choose rightly between various objects of desire which confront it. *Cupiditas*, the desire for earthly things, is gradually defeated by *caritas*, the desire for heavenly, in what is essentially a Christianised version of Diotima's message in the *Symposium*.

According to Sweet (2001:20), theological ethics belong to the Thomist and Aristotelian tradition of the foundationalism of ethics. McClendon (2002:42) argues that

ethics, and the morality that ethics is about, lay at the threshold of theology in the oldest seminary of them all. This was expressed in the role of the teacher as a model and in his approach, in friendship, to the student. It was expressed in

the expectation that the student would have converted to a new way of life, and finally it was expressed in the ordering of the curriculum.

Theological ethics compared to the influence of master and student relationships needed to be transformative and morally uplifting. Furthermore, since Aquinas was influenced by Aristotle, he too felt the need for action/praxis informed by rationality as was the case with Aristotle's *phronesis* and *eudpraxis* according to Endberg-Pedersen (1983:265).

The morality of Aquinas required goodness and action. Porter (1995:92) says that

[a]ccording to Aquinas, the concept of goodness, like the concept of being, can be applied to anything at all that has real existence, in so far as in the mode in which it exists. This assertion is immediately qualified, however, with the *provisio* that the focal meaning for the concept of goodness is perfected being, which is equivalent to being that has fully actualised its potentialities ... Thus, the concept of goodness is convertible with the concepts of being and action.

Macintyre (1998:116f) notes that:

[t]he Aristotelianism of Aquinas is far more interesting, for it is concerned not with escaping from the snares of the world and desire, but with transforming desire for moral ends. It differs from the Aristotelianism of Aristotle in three main ways. *Heoria* becomes that vision of God which is the goal and satisfaction of human desire; the list of the virtues is modified and extended; and both the concept of the telos and that of the virtues are interpreted in a framework of law which has both Stoic and Hebraic origins. The natural law is that code to which we incline by nature; the supernatural law of revelation complements but does not replace it. The first injunction of the natural law is self-preservation; but the self which has to be preserved is the self of an immortal soul whose nature is violated by irrational slavery to impulse.

Macintyre (1998:117) also notes that

[t]he key difference between Aristotle and Aquinas lies in the relationship which each takes to hold between the descriptive and the narrative elements of his analysis. Aristotle describes the virtues of the polis, and takes them to be normative for human nature as such; Aquinas describes the norms for human nature as such, and expects to find them exemplified in human life in particular societies. Aquinas cannot treat the descriptive task with the confidence of Aristotle because he has a belief in original sin; human nature as it ought to be, not human nature as it is, is the norm.

It is important to note that this is the case for the history of moral philosophy with social engagement and the need for morality to be based and oriented on society's wellbeing. Theological ethics continues with that tradition but is fundamentally based on what God intended for all humanity, more so, since Christianity is based on the condition of humanity from the fall. McClendon (2002:165) asserts in line with Christianity, sin and society that

[t]here is no solitary Christianity. The moral life of Christians is a social life. Whether this life is the frugal interchange of coenobitic monks bound by a vow of silence, or in another case the immersion in world citizenship of an 'anonymous' Christian such as a Dag Hammarskjöld, it remains essential to Christian existence, under God, to be formed by the social structures of a church engaging its environing culture. If we take its original party spirit, the remembered phrase of Cyprian of Carthage, *extra ecclesiam null salus*, outside the church no salvation remains a monument to the necessary social solidarity of the way of Zion and of Jesus.

Theological ethics aiding Christians must safeguard them from destructive power that exists in the world and threatens the well-being of humanity (McClendon 2002:182). Rudnik (1979:23). states that Christian ethics begins with the problem of humanity

being based on sin that results in evil and that evil is not independent of existence. Rudnik believes that Christianity teaches that evil was pre-existent and has always been at odds with what is good.

Christianity explains that God is the pre-existence of the supreme Good (Rudnik 1979:23). Rudnik asserts that the origin within the Christian framework is mysterious, but what is fundamentally true about evil is that it distorts good (Rudnik 1979:23). He argues that evil is good out of control, pride is originally self-respect, lust is sexual impulse misdirected and greed is the appreciation of material things which become idolatrous (Rudnik 1979:23).

Rudnik (1979:24) asserts that

behind this interpretation of evil as the corrupted good is faith in God as the Creator. We human beings and everything else in the universe have been made by Him. However, He is not responsible for what is wrong with us. He is not the source of cause of the corruption that mars and threatens us. He is only the source of what is right with and about us.

This line of thought follows Aquinas describing what humanity should be, i.e., *Imago Dei*, and what humanity is and has become (Macintyre 1998:117). At the same time, Rudnik argues that all of humanity is created good. Thus, the story of Adam is in the generic sense and God sustains us, not only physically, but psychologically, emotionally, intellectually and in any other way (Rudnik 1979:24). The faculties Rudnik gives of the physical, emotional, psychological and intellectual sustenance of God is linked to the observation of moral philosophy and society.

In the Christian perspective, all humans are created for fellowship with all creation but, more importantly, a fellow with God. This fellowship allows communication, revelation, our minds, hearts, attitudes and in word and deed in relation to God because we are created in His Image for Him. That links to God having an influence over us to be more like Him and to finally mirror Him (Rudnik 1979:25).

Rudnik further argues that human beings are corrupted from birth because of the evil that permeates the world and is intrinsically linked to original sin. At the same time, sin and the corruption go simultaneously with creation (Rudnik 1979:25). While in that state, God seeks at every level and moment to perfect us, though evil is constantly perverting and corrupting us. Rudnik (1979:26-28) explains that corruption is a deficiency in our relationships because of self interest and that it is also true in our fellowship with God and each other. The root cause of the problem is our lack of faith, belief and trust in God.

Within the scope of theological ethics is the belief in corruption, the perversion of goodness. Corruption, which is tied to the creation, has made humanity inclined to evil. Rudnik (1979:28) argues that

corruption is more than the absence of something good and necessary. It is also the presence of something evil and destructive. The corruption of sin manifests itself in revolt against God and lovelessness toward people. We sinful human beings are driven creatures. Not only are we helpless to do the right ... but we are also pushed relentlessly and manipulated constantly to do what is wrong.

Under the burden of corruption, humanity has uncontrollable impulses to rebel against God and society. We are disobedient, disrespectful, exploitative and hurtful, both individually and collectively. Sources of our corruption such as evil, the devil, education and the mass media, are constantly transmitted into our minds, bodies and souls in both adults and children.

There is a level of ethics and morals inherent in human beings, described by Rudnik (1979:31):

A residual sense of God's will remains in fallen human beings. Frequently, this is called a 'natural knowledge of the law', an intuitive (though imperfect) sense of right and wrong. Some men possess the rational realisation but their own well-being and that of society require the exercise of these virtues.

Henry Margenau (1964:147) asserts that '[t]he effectiveness of ethics seems to depend upon the existence of absolute and universal truths'. Theological ethics encourage universalism and pluralism to exist as a reality in our society, Margenau (1964:149) argues that

[t]he principal figures of Judaism and of Christianity performed double duty in laying the groundwork not only of religions but also of ethical codes. Hence both grew side, grew into each other and remained connected in the Western mind. Yet a separation is possible, for there are many Christians who reject religious claims and regard Christ as a successful moral teacher. Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism are basically ethical systems in which the emphasis on religious doctrine is weak, and it is interesting to note that intellectual Buddhists, when they are converted to Christianity, give as the most attractive quality of their new beliefs the profound moral insight of Christ.

The above reflects the intolerance of some Christians and even undermines ethics from other belief systems which is quite contrary to Christ as a moral teacher. Davis quotes Williams on the subject:

Williams insisted that religious and moral pluralism was not only a reality, but a necessary reality, an inevitable product of the condition. As long as human beings operated with insufficient reason in an age in which the mysteries of God were not fully disclosed, they would continue to understand and answer the fundamental questions of belief in different ways (Davis 2004:52).

On a practical level, all human beings will face similar situations and all will need answers to those questions. Porter argues that morality has to begin with actions that are considered immoral, such as murder, theft, lying, adultery and fraud. These acts, he said, are not usually accepted by society and this raises our collective effort, universalism and the unity of our diversity (Porter 1995:46). So, theological ethics aid Christians in their lives. Margenau (1964:150) explains that

[e]thics means to guide motives, wills, and actions; hence its axioms naturally speak the imperative voice. We conclude, therefore, that the axioms of ethics are commands, and this conclusion finds universal confirmation in the prevalence of commands among the basic tenets of successful ethical systems. 'Thou shalt' reverberates through history as the greatest moral force; values pale before it, sicken, and remain alive in the nursing homes run by moral philosophers.

4.4 ETHICS TODAY

Throughout this study, it has been clear that the study of ethics and their history is dependent on philosophy and context. That means that new ethics in a new context replace old ethics or give new meaning to those in existence. Christian ethics face the same issues with regards to relativism of the gospel to a specific context. Macintyre (1998:114f) notes:

The paradox of Christian ethics is precisely that it has always tried to devise a code for society as a whole from pronouncements which were addressed to individuals or small communities to separate themselves off from the rest of society. This is true both of the ethics of Jesus and of the ethics of St. Paul. Both Jesus and St. Paul preached an ethics devised for a short interim period before God finally inaugurated the Messianic kingdom and history was brought to a conclusion. We cannot, therefore, expect to find in what they say a basis for life in a continuing society. Moreover, Jesus is, in any case, concerned not to expound a self-sufficient code, but to provide a corrective for the Pharisaic morality, a corrective which is partly a matter of bringing the point of the Pharisaic rules into the picture and partly a matter of showing how the rules must be construed if the coming of the kingdom is imminent.

Ethics cannot have a static position even within the perennial message of the Christian faith because human development results in new successes and failures

which play a significant role when reflecting on ethics. William Sweet (2001:7) argues:

To ask after 'the bases of ethics' rather than the basis or the foundation of ethics may suggest that one has already taken a position on the issue of foundation in ethics. For some would point out, surely, there can be only one basis for ethics, not the 'many' implied by the word 'bases'. Others might say that such a term supposes that there are bases or foundations to be had and that, if there is one thing that post-modern thought has brought to our attention, it is that there are no bases or foundations at all. But the virtue of such a theme and title for this volume is that it follows interlocutors from different philosophical traditions a degree of latitude in addressing the topic of whether one can speak of a foundation or basis or bases in ethics and, if one can, in identifying what this might be. The term 'the bases of ethics' is, of course, also somewhat ambiguous—but, again, this is a virtue, for it enables one to explore a broad range of topics.

Today humanity faces issues of racism, sexism, prejudice, capitalism and many more factors that necessitate an ethical reflection. Some of the ethics of the past cannot be used as a basis today because the society in which they were conceived was regarded as oppressive and even irrelevant when considering their history.

During the era of Enlightenment, it was believed that human reasoning was supreme in matters of making ethical judgments (Sweet 2001:18). Another point which in the modern context has surfaced on the top with regards to ethics and modernity is the issue of what can be termed 'patriarchal heritage of ethic' for a lack of a better term. Sweet (2001:19) asserts that

[a]nother response to modernity and its conceptions of rationality and of ethics can be found in the work of many recent feminist writers. Epistemology and ethics must, feminist argue, reflect experience. They point out, however, that in the history of philosophy, it seems that not everyone's experience and

everyone's way of dealing with the world (what we might call their 'rationality') have been counted. Thus, feminists seek to *traverser le patriarcat*—to go beyond those epistemologies, ethical theories, and social structures that are rooted in male experience.

The theological ethicist, Traci West points out that, even within the field of ethics, there exist some racial and sexist tendencies. This is because, ordinarily, most ethicists were white, male and Christian and that there is a tendency to disassociate these thinkers from their given context which profoundly influenced them. West (2006:3) argues that

[t]hese assumptions about isolating great thinkers produced a further misperception. Members of the communities who are most adversely affected by the social problems being investigated are not considered moral agents who also generate ideas about improving society. As black feminist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins asserts, it is not true that only members of elite groups 'produce theory' while everyone else produces mere thought. Rather, elites possess the power to legitimate the knowledge that they defines as 'theory' as universal and normative. We are trained to accept this understanding of how knowledge is produced.

West's opinion above resonates even in a theological discourse concerning gender issues. Due to the fact that patriarchy is applicable to theology, it requires an urgent re-visitation of ethics, both in philosophy and theology.

The emerging voice of liberation theology necessitates solidarity with the oppressed. Sweet (2001:19) further asserts that

[t]he feminist challenge which is as much an ethical and political one as a narrowly epistemological one aims at overcoming this marginalisation of women and children (and thereby allowing for a greater expanse of self-determination),

recognising the value of the body, and increasing the sense of solidarity among human beings.

West believes that social ethics are required and should be built on communal values and justice (by implication, justice for all). Ethicists should engage both intellectuals and the community members. West makes use of the ideas applied by Niebuhr within the context of Harlem and the effects of the Great Depression. West explains that Niebuhr's understanding of issues of socio-economic justice and exploitation were related to power and underpinned in human nature and sinfulness which, by implication, is the cause of the injustices and imbalances in society (West 2006:4-8).

One of the challenges of the modern era with regards to ethical reflection is that of racism and the dehumanisation of black people abroad and in Africa. The effects of white supremacy, land dispossession and the age of globalisation are overwhelming society. Nothwehr (2008:75) argues that

[j]ust as racialised aggression is operative paradigmatically in colonialism, in the complex relationship of the globalised world; numerous new situations have emerged where similar dynamics play out. One important new set of circumstances is the unprecedented global reality of displaced peoples on every continent in overwhelming numbers.

Globalism comes with bastardisation of culture. Stone and Stivers (2004:17) commenting on the demonstration in November 1999 against economic globalisation and its abuses in Seattle just after the meeting of the World Trade Organisation described the demonstrators by saying that

they decry the many abuses of globalisation: loss of cultural diversity, the spirit-numbing materialism, the environmental destruction, the secrecy of deliberations, the exploitation of labour, the bypassing of those on the margins of society, the increasing mal-distribution of income and wealth, the corruption of governments, and the imbalances of political power.

Business ethics becomes a self-serving justification for whatever practices the business people wish to pursue and becomes a blanket condemnation of capitalism. Russell (2009:20) argues that

In our fractured world and church, the problems of difference are never absent. Economic globalisation forces people to migrate from one place to another to escape war, poverty, sickness, genocide, and more. We are often strangers to one another, but the problem that we face is not that we are different, but that we often fear that difference and reject those outside our church, our community, our nation. This fear of difference has even been used by those in power as an excuse to oppress those who are of a different nationality, race, gender, sexual orientation, or ability. And churches unfortunately reinforce this fear and rejection by becoming 'safe havens' from difference, welcoming only certain groups and misusing theological teachings to exclude those who don't fit.

Black people can relate to Russell's opinion above concerning the effects of globalism and are, in fact, facing the same issues with regards to the bastardisation of their culture, being at the margins of society and the corruption of governments, among other problems. Furthermore, these effects require ethical reflections due to the fact that they can result in new cultures. Regarding blacks in the American context, Oglesby states that racism is a mountain either to be climbed or that is unreachable (1998:21). He explains that

[t]heologically discerned, God did not authorise the church of Jesus Christ to merely set up camp at the foot of the mountain of racism in America but rather to climb the mountain itself; to struggle and suffer together, to conquer and move beyond America's 'original sin'. The tenacity of moral witness against the mountainous evil of racism, I think, the primordial challenge of Christian ministry in today's complex world of multiculturalism and theological diversity. For instance, the experience of racism as a treacherous mountain on the part of black people in America continues to shape our collective vision, self-understanding, and theological construction (1998:21).

But the point which is one of the main subjects for black ethical reflection is that of the terminology used within the black contemporary culture namely 'nigga' or 'Niggerism'. This is linked to the self-understanding of blacks. Oglesby accounts the history of the term which was used by the slavemasters. Oglesby (1998:75) notes that 'the term 'nigger' was undoubtedly used to describe the human cargo as a Dutch frigate attacked a vessel from Portugal and took twenty African slaves'.

Oglesby (1998:71-73) notes that, in Black America today, the term is used in various ways that are dependent on the user. In the context of slavery, the word was used for degrading purposes but today it is used within the socio-culture of black Americans, promoted by Black entertainment TV. Oglesby notes that *Niggerism* is linked with racism emanating from imperialism and colonialism but today *Niggerism* is a subject for ethical reflection based on the experiences of black people. Oglesby (1998:82) asserts that

ethical reflection on the critical and varied problems in contemporary society can take many forms. Therefore, I wish to illustrate these socio-ethical issues by briefly looking at 'black-on-black violence' in our society. Here it is my fundamental moral conviction that both racism and *Niggerism* negatively feed into the phenomenon of so-called 'black-on-black violence'—though not necessarily in the same way.

Theological ethics have a valuable role to play in society, but it should lead to humanity rallying around the issues that confront the present age. Solidarity within the ethical and moral framework necessitates a new starting point of ethics (Sweet 2001:19) that will take knowledge from the history of ethics but will transcend the standards set by it. Sweet (2001:20) records Perron's advocacy of new ethics:

Perron argues that we have to construct a new ethics—one that recognises, on the one hand, the radical and unconditional character of the demands of ethics

while, at the same time, acknowledges the apparent relativity of concrete ethical norms.

This new form of ethics is understood as self-transcendence, according to Perron's view based (on the phenomenologist) Jean Ladriere. Sweet notes that this self-transcendence is a power that is exerted over us. Sweet (2001:20) further comments:

By seeing ethics as that which makes a radical demand of us, without specifically articulating a particular content, we can take account of the claims that ethics evolves and that it is only in historical institutions that ethics requires its effectiveness.

Part of the effectiveness of ethics is that it is constantly engaging society and the church while promoting the well being of humanity and society. Sweet (2001:21) explains how to build up ethics:

We must be attentive to history—to the historical character, not only of particular ethical theories, but of ethical standards and ethical practice. We must also be attentive to the culture in which ethical standards and ethical theories arise and to the conditions which attend their origin. And we must also be attentive to who it is that proposes ethical standards and beliefs.

Sweet gives validity to what has been discussed in this study concerning ethics in culture, history, society and other factors.

4.5 HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND SOURCES FOR RADICAL THEOLOGY

With regard to Liberation theology, McGrath argues that Iberian Catholicism with its medieval and crusading spirit was brought to Latin America through military conquest in the 16th century (McGrath 1999:330). At that time, the church was a constituent of the colonial structure and scholastic theology provided an ideological explanation for the role of Christians in that society. Liberation theology, which was opposed to the

oppression that came with the church, was a means of reacting against this dominant theology which kept the *status quo* intact.

Latin America has become synonymous with Liberation theology that originally had the patronage of the Roman Catholic Church. The evolution of Liberation theology has spread throughout the world, suggesting that it is proper to speak, not of Liberation theology, but of Liberation theologies. It is for this reason that McGrath (1999:330) is correct in arguing that Liberation Theology is now

a variety of Christian movements in different parts of the world [that] have adopted theological positions described as 'Liberation theology', so that any adequate description of this contemporary trend should refer to a plural family of theologies of liberation.

The common denominator of Liberation theology is the position of black people because of poverty and marginalisation which has characterised black people across the globe. McGrath points to Gutierrez who argued that 'liberation theology came as a reflection on that new practice, but it was to be done in the light of God's word' (McGrath 1999:331). This made the point that liberation theology was not anti-God but, on the contrary, wanted to emphasise the real intention of God for humanity by insisting that the Bible be the primary source which informs this practice.

The word 'liberation' has assumed a special significance in ecumenical discussion, providing a touchstone for determining an authentic mode of theologising and a fundamental guideline for ethical reflection and action (Bonino 2002:683). It is defined by Bonino (2002:683) as a process by which a subjugated or marginalised group of people, having gained an awareness of their condition of oppression, take control of their destiny and fight until overthrowing all fetters of bondage.

Liberation theologies are also not perfect and face challenges which are usually clothed in methodology which threatens to dismiss the significance of these

theologies in the world today. It was the views of Paulo Freire, briefly outlined below, that expressed how relevant they continue to be in the present context of a transformed and transforming Christian community.

4.6 PAULO FREIRE ON LANGUAGE AND METHODOLOGIES

In May of 1973, third world theologians convened a symposium at the World Council of Churches' headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. The objective was to carve out ways in which these theologians could collaborate since their struggle was essentially the same. Those in attendance included the father of black Liberation theology, James Cone, and Paulo Freire who expressed his views pertaining to language and methodology. From his experience in Europe and the United States of America, he noticed that

we think knowledge is something we can possess. We divide the world into those who know and those who do not know ... In this way, instead of touching the reality, we touch concepts. And the concepts become empty and lose their dialectical relationship with the facts (Freire 1993:404).

Regarding methodology and language, he observed that scholars from the Third World tended to look at themselves based on their geographic location and do not appreciate the fact that they are, nonetheless, still Third World theologians even though they might find themselves in the USA. Of Cone he writes,

I look at my friend James Cone, whom I admire, as a Third World man—it does not matter that he was born in the United States—it's an accident. He is a Third World man because he was born in the world of dependence—of exploitation—within the first world. So our way of thinking is absolutely conditioned by our existential experience in your context (Freire 1993:404).

He also writes that

another thing that I have perceived on different occasions in Europe is that when we are explaining our position, the Europeans are really curious to understand what we are trying to do, what we are trying to say. But there is a background of ideology which means that behind much curiosity there is a certain paternalistic attitude ... for example, many Europeans listen to us in the same style in which some parents—not good parents—listen to their children: ‘oh yes, lets listen to what little John can tell us’ (Freire 1993:404).

Why is there this inclination for Liberation theologies to want to explain themselves to dominant theologies and to seek the justification of these dominant theologies? Tshaka answers this question by writing that black liberation theology obsesses with methodology because it essentially wants to prove to the dominant Apartheid theology that, although it is using Marxist analytical tools, it remains, at best, pure theology because it is concerned with the material position of the people who are marginalised (Tshaka 2010a:124-135).

4.7 ECONOMIC GLOBALISATION/CAPITALISM AND POVERTY

Economic globalisation is a subject that is relevant to the current situation in this country. The youth of South Africa is calling for a radical overhaul of its neo liberal capitalist system because darker people continue to be on societal margins.

Stellenbosch economist, Sampie Terreblanche argues that ‘the logic of democracy and capitalism is contradictory’. He explains that ‘while democracy emphasises joint interests, equality and common loyalties, capitalism is based on self-seeking inequality and conflicting individual and group interests’ (Terreblanche 2005:16). Terreblanche (2005:17) also notes that

the legal system that protects both democracy and capitalism is based on the principle of equality before the law, but maintains inequality in the distribution of property rights and opportunities in the capitalist system.

For Terreblanche, the logic of capitalism, given the unequal freedoms and unequal rights upon which it is based, goes against the grain of the logic of democracy. Tshaka and Makofane are in agreement with Terreblanche and, for this reason, they argue that black liberation theology remains relevant in the context of the continued disproportionate sharing of this country's wealth (Tshaka & Makofane 2012:532-546).

Terreblanche's depiction of democracy comes very close to Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's depiction of the subject. Chomsky argues that democracies, at best, envision the common masses as people who are incapable of thinking for themselves. He refers to the Walter Lippmann, a major foreign and domestic critic and also a major theorist of liberal democracy. Lippmann, who was involved in propaganda commissions in the USA, argued that what he called a 'revolution in the art of democracy' could be used to 'manufacture consent' (Herman & Chomsky 2002:6).

Manufacturing consent was important for Lippmann because 'the common interests elude public opinion entirely' (Herman & Chomsky 2002:16). Society is thus divided between the small minority elite and the majority who are best left with the least information since knowledge in itself is dangerous for them. The masses are therefore supposed to be mere spectators and not active participants in democracy although they are, from time to time, allowed to vote but are then immediately returned to being spectators of the game.

Lippmann, in Herman and Chomsky (2002:18), argues that the masses are a bewildered herd that is considered too stupid to be able to understand things. The instrument that is used to tame this bewildered herd so that it does not trample and destroy is called democracy (Herman & Chomsky 2002:20). This is a clear example of

the infantilisation of the masses because democracy is nothing but the means of manufacturing consent.

Contributing to the economic debate in South Africa, Terreblanche argues that post-Apartheid South Africa has maintained a version of a democratic capitalist system that is, at best, dysfunctional and fails to address the dismal legacy of inequality, imbalances and injustices accumulated during Apartheid. While acknowledging that language can be evasive, Terreblanche indicates that his understanding of the concept 'system' is informed by Max Weber's views of the concept (Terreblanche 2005:19).

According to Terreblanche, Weber considers a system as a three-dimensional social fabric or an equivalent tetrahedron—a three-sided pyramid with political, socio-economic and ideological sides (Terreblanche 2005:19). A power shift from one system to another does not only question and undermine the legitimacy of each of the three other sides of the Weberian pyramid, but is only completed when a new power constellation has been established, with a reasonable level of agreement between the new elite groups on each of the three sides of the pyramid. Thus, if the new system and the new power constellation prove to be dysfunctional and do not serve the interests of all the subgroups in society, the stability and sustainability of the new system will be threatened (Terreblanche 2005:19).

This new system is a result of the new alliances between the powerful who control the corporate sector and the black political leadership which is yet to prove its functionality given the growing gap between the rich and the poor. Terreblanche argues that, while the poor black majority of citizens are at the receiving end of unemployment, poverty, inequality, violence and criminality, these elements have an indisputable structural or systemic character (Terreblanche 2005:20). They have been shaped and created over a very long period by the power structures on which the system of colonialism, segregation and Apartheid were based. Evaluating the

economic disparity in a democratic South Africa, he asks a profound question: 'why have the conditions of the poor not changed since 1994?' In order to answer this significant question, Terreblanche explains that we must, firstly, concentrate on the nature of poverty and unemployment and the nature of the remnants of systemic exploitation and, secondly, that we focus on the inadequacy of the new government's economic and social policies (Terreblanche 2005:20).

Terreblanche (2005:29) asserts that

the powerful corporate sector forced the new government into accepting a neo-liberal and global oriented economic policy for the new South Africa and this excluded the possibility of comprehensive redistributive measures.

He argues that, in addition to the many elite compromises that were negotiated between the corporate sector and the ANC, an economic system has been institutionalised which systemically excludes the poorer part of the population from mainstream economic and political activity. This is reminiscent of what Fanon observed. Frantz Fanon reminds us of fundamental aspects which are often ignored during a time of political change. He argues that 'the colony's economy is not integrated into that of the nation as a whole. It is still organised in order to complete the economy of the different mother countries' (Fanon 2001:127). This is true also of present day South Africa where the economy continues to be controlled by those who benefitted from the Apartheid engineering system.

There can be no doubt that the ANC was outsmarted by the corporate sector during informal economic negotiations. Terreblanche (2005:35) speaks of the corporate sector's middle-class unsympathetic attitude towards the poor especially in a country which is laden with contradictions such as South Africa. It can also function as a tool to engineer divisions among people such as the rich and very powerful but small, mainly white group as well as the poor and powerless but very large black group in South Africa.

The attitudes of the rich and powerful towards the poor determines the degree of assistance that the poor get from them and the way that this rich group insulates itself from the plight of the poor. The white elite subscribe poverty to the flaws and shortcomings in the character and personality of the impoverished individuals and/or their racial status (Terreblanche 2005:53). He writes that 'in South Africa, members of the white elite often emphasise the virtue of a middle class work ethic, and place a high value on the importance of individual initiative and achievement' (Terreblanche 2005:53). By subscribing to this perspective, the link between poverty and structural factors is intentionally ignored and rendered unimportant. It is therefore not by chance that the structural explanation of poverty has not yet enjoyed its deserved attention in South Africa.

Terreblanche cautions us to remember that the South Africa corporate sector has certain unique characteristics which have always worked in its favour in the past and continue to do so today. These characteristics, he argues, are concentrated in the hands of a small number of mega corporations with formidable financial, organisational, ideological and even political power.

The South African Corporate sector has a strong propensity for myth-making and propaganda in order to legitimise its power, privilege and alleged functionality in promoting the interests of all South Africans (Terreblanche 2005:53). Terreblanche, like Herman and Chomsky, argues that the corporate sector's propaganda has (and still is) disseminated with great sophistication and conviction and that the mining and/or mainstream media has played, and is still playing, a strategic role in doing this (Terreblanche 2005:55).

There are two main categories of ideologies or myths propagated by South Africa's corporate sector to legitimise itself, according to Terreblanche. The first has to do with the alleged capacity of the liberal (or free market) capitalist system to promote the interests of the total population irrespective of whether or not the economic

system in South Africa can credibly be described as such. Second, is the contention that a high economic growth rate in South Africa will—despite deeply institutionalised inequalities—automatically ‘trickle down’ to the poor (Terreblanche 2005:56). Seen in this way, it shows how poverty, as a created entity, remains intrinsic to global power and how, to a certain extent, global issues contribute to the poverty in a particular region.

4.8 RACISM

Herring, Keith and Hayward remind us that much historical work by social scientists such as Drake and Cayton, E. Franklin Frazier, WEB Du Bois, Anna Julia Cooper and others showed that skin tone has been a predictor of educational attainment, occupational status and income. He mentions that more contemporary research has shown that light skin colour consistently signified a higher status than darker colour among African Americans (Herring, Keith & Hayward 2004). The fact that race is a created phenomenon is not considered. Consequently, racism as structured is also ignored. Beverley Tatum links the definition of racism to power. She argues that racial prejudice plus systemic power constitutes racism (Tatum 2007:xiii).

Cornel West argues that ‘the idea of black equality in beauty, culture and intellectual capacity remains problematic and controversial within the prestigious halls of learning and sophisticated intellectual circles’ (1999:70). For West, white supremacy emerges because of the powers within the structure of the modern discourse which are powers to produce and prohibit, develop and delimit forms of rationality, scientificity and objectivity that set perimeters and draw boundaries for the intelligibility, availability and legitimacy of certain ideas (West 1999:71). The same can be said of the current South African situation which remains racialised just as much as the USA. By not linking the definition of racism to structures of power, we fail to equip communities to really work towards the total eradication of racism.

4.9 CONCLUSION

Racism and race are manufactured phenomena. Their construction had the specific intention of justifying the sub-human treatment of those who did not fall within European aesthetics. Since one cannot discriminate without having constructed the other, the construction of the other becomes inevitable.

With regard to global economics, it is not by chance that some communities around the globe are poor while others are rich. Africa remains on the receiving end of injustice because injustice is intrinsically linked to structures and systems.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The Christian community has been perceived as an important contributor to the moral formation of communities. Symbolism also plays significant roles for the fostering of morality so, even within a reformed church tradition such as the URCSAS, Holy community is perceived to be more central to the preaching of the Word. This tendency is informed by the inclination of African Christians to relate better to symbolisms and rituals than to the spoken word.

Many observers of local black communities will agree that church attendance looks remarkably different on the Sunday that Holy Communion is celebrated. This research will probe the reasons why Holy Communion is elevated above the preached word. This is done in order to strengthen the case for why Holy Communion can be used as a strategy for moral regeneration. As the church remains one of the most trusted institutions in Africa today, the church must harness its ability to foster morality and to work towards social cohesion.

This research has shown that a transformed and transforming church like the URCSA is still confronted with many challenges that are located within the structures and systems that still continue to benefit some at the expense of the majority.

The subject of moral regeneration must not be ignored if we are serious about finding ways of bringing sustainable normalcy to our communities in this country and to acknowledge the many challenges that we are faced with as we strive to build an accountable, moral and ethical country. We also need to deal with the many misconceptions about moral regeneration which picture it as some drug which can be dispensed to communities and, when this is done, these communities will miraculously be empowered and all will be well. This suggests that we need to look at our current context with all honesty forcing ourselves to engage with the history that brought us to this point.

Our current dilemma

Almost all sectors stakeholders in society are unanimous in saying that we have a huge challenge to get communities to operate more effectively but that there is no leadership to effect this change in the global capitalist context in which we exist today. This country has opted to be a part of that global neo-liberal capitalist culture which makes us part of a consumerist and materialist culture of dog-eat-dog.

Contrary to the past when a peaceful community was the ultimate goal, the individual has today become the most important entity. Our immediate history reminds us that the South African society is, at best, a very contradictory society because it has vast opulence and vast poverty at the same time. In a context of deprivation and scarcity that characterises South Africa today, leadership is not characterised by principles and scruples, but rather how much more power it can attain. This poses significant challenges for poverty-stricken communities.

In the case of South Africa with its much skewed distribution of wealth, a culture of get-rich-by-all-means becomes entrenched, even in children. This places great strain on the rebuilding of communities after Apartheid. While people deeply appreciated the sacrifices of liberation movements, they now earn for themselves entitlements to govern the 'liberated' masses. It is because of this sense of entitlement to govern that some liberation movements continue to act like other liberation movements across the globe. While political power is made responsible, economic power is left irresponsible in this country. Many in this country still fail to see the link between the vast poverty on the one hand and the opulence on the other hand. It is not by chance that black people seem to be ones that are struggling the most. This was intentionally designed by the racist regimes of the past South Africa. Christian communities must continue to remind our government about our history of exploitation but must also remind it that God identifies especially with those on the underside of history, the exploited and the poor.

Our current dilemma a created dilemma

Moral regeneration will only occur once we sincerely acknowledge some unpalatable issues. One such issue is the fact that moral regeneration ought to be an urgent item, especially in black communities. For moral regeneration in black communities to be effective, it must acknowledge the complexities within the black communities as well as the black experience itself. It was Steve Biko who made a poignant reference to the black community. He observed that, to grow up in a township, takes a miracle.

The mores of our communities, especially black communities, have become eroded by systems that preyed on darker people for their own sustenance. I am very much aware that, to speak about race today, has become rather controversial. I do believe, however, that one of the reasons why we keep on dealing with issues such as the need for moral regeneration, and not getting it right, is because we are asking the wrong questions and not dealing with the real issues.

There are, of course, reasons why we have opted for a more humane and abstract language when we define ourselves as a nation. We have been a beacon to the world, and, as such, we are supposed to behave accordingly. Unfortunately we have become a very dishonest and polite society. We act politely and pretend not to see how deeply the structural injustices of the past are entrenched in our current context. In as much as we might prefer not to think about it, we must agree that there are many different South Africans in this one country. This makes social cohesion almost impossible.

Moral regeneration must have, at its heart, the intention of fostering the accountability of communities to their various constituencies. This must be the goal towards which we all strive. The black experience is still a matter that cannot and must not be ignored by serious leadership in this country and this researcher believes that the Belhar Confession can provide direction. We have a history that encouraged black people to deny themselves and to imitate other cultures. We must admit that

there are things that black people will have to do for themselves, on their own terms, in their communities. It means that, in as much as we acknowledge the histories which had engendered differences among us as a nation, as black people, we need to begin to challenge our various leaderships to be more purposeful in dealing with our problems.

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APPENDIX A: ACCOMPANYING LETTER

1. We are deeply conscious that moments of such seriousness can arise in the life of the Church that it may feel the need to confess its faith anew in the light of a specific situation. We are aware that such an act of confession is not lightly undertaken, but only if it is considered that the heart of the gospel is so threatened as to be at stake. In our judgment, the present church and political situation in our country and particularly within the Dutch Reformed church family calls for such a decision. Accordingly, we make this confession not as a contribution to a theological debate nor as a new summary of our beliefs, but as a cry from the heart, as something we are obliged to do for the sake of the gospel in view of the times in which we stand. Along with many, we confess our guilt, in that we have not always witnessed clearly enough in our situation and so are jointly responsible for the way in which those things which were experienced as sin and confessed to be sin have grown in time to seem self-evidently right and to be ideologies foreign to the Scriptures. As a result many have been given the impression that the gospel was not really at stake. We make this confession because we are convinced that all sorts of theological arguments have contributed to so disproportionate an emphasis on some aspects of the truth that it has in effect become a lie.

2. We are aware that the only authority for such a confession and the only grounds on which it may be made are the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God. Being fully aware of the risk involved in taking this step, we are nevertheless convinced that we have no alternative. Furthermore, we are aware that no other motives or convictions, however valid they may be, would give us the right to confess in this way. An act of confession may only be made by the Church for the sake of its purity and credibility and that of its message. As solemnly as we are able, we hereby declare before men that our only motive lies in our fear that the truth and power of the gospel itself is threatened in this situation. We do not wish to serve any group interests, advance the cause of any factions, promote any theologies, or achieve any ulterior purposes. Yet, having said this, we know that our deepest intentions may only be judged at their true value by Him before whom all is revealed. We do not make this confession from his throne and from on high, but before his throne and before men. We

plead, therefore, that this confession would not be misused by anyone with ulterior motives and also that it should not be resisted to serve such motives. Our earnest desire is to lay no false stumbling blocks in the way, but to point to the true stumbling block, Jesus Christ the rock.

3. This confession is not aimed at specific people or groups of people or a church or churches. We proclaim it against a false doctrine, against an ideological distortion which threatens the gospel itself in our church and our country. Our heartfelt longing is that no one will identify himself with this objectionable doctrine and that all who have been wholly or partially blinded by it will turn themselves away from it. We are deeply aware of the deceiving nature of such a false doctrine and know that many who have been conditioned by it have to a greater or lesser extent learnt to take a half-truth for the whole. For this reason we do not doubt the Christian faith of many such people, their sincerity, honour, integrity, and good intentions and their in many ways estimable practice and conduct. However, it is precisely because we know the power of deception that we know we are not liberated by the seriousness, sincerity, or intensity of our certainties, but only by the truth in the Son. Our church and our land have an intense need of such liberation. Therefore it is that we speak pleadingly rather than accusingly. We plead for reconciliation, that true reconciliation which follows on conversion and change of attitudes and structures. And while we do so we are aware that an act of confession is a two-edged sword, that none of us can throw the first stone, and none is without a beam in his own eye. We know that the attitudes and conduct which work against the gospel are present in all of us and will continue to be so. Therefore this confession must be seen as a call to a continuous process of soul-searching together, a joint wrestling with the issues, and a readiness to repent in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in a broken world. It is certainly not intended as an act of self-justification and intolerance, for that would disqualify us in the very act of preaching to others.

4. Our prayer is that this act of confession will not place false stumbling blocks in the way and thereby cause and foster false divisions, but rather that it will be reconciling and uniting. We know that such an act of confession and process of reconciliation will necessarily involve much pain and sadness. It demands the pain of repentance, remorse, and confession; the pain of individual and collective renewal and a changed way of life. It

places us on a road whose end we can neither foresee nor manipulate to our own desire. on this road we shall unavoidably suffer intense growing pains while we struggle to conquer alienation, bitterness, irreconciliation, and fear. We shall have to come to know and encounter both ourselves and others in new ways. We are only too well aware that this confession calls for the dismantling of structures of thought, of church, and of society which have developed over many years. However, we confess that for the sake of the gospel, we have no other choice. We pray that our brothers and sisters throughout the Dutch Reformed church family, but also outside it, will want to make this new beginning with us, so that we can be free together and together may walk the road of reconciliation and justice. Accordingly, our prayer is that the pain and sadness we speak of will be pain and sadness that lead to salvation. We believe that this is possible in the power of our Lord and by his Spirit. We believe that the gospel of Jesus Christ offers hope, liberation, salvation, and true peace to our country.

The Belhar confession.

1. We believe in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who gathers, protects and cares for his Church by his Word and his Spirit, as He has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end.

2. We believe in one holy, universal Christian Church, the communion of the saints called from the entire human family.

We believe

that 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 [Eph 2:11-22];

that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the Church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought: one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain [Eph 4:1-16];

that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe; that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered,

and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the Church and must be resisted [John 17:20, 23];

that this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways: in that we love one another; experience, practice and pursue community with one another; that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another; that we share one faith, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind; have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptized with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one Name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope; together come to know the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ; together are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity; together know and bear one another's burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ; that we need one another and upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another; that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness; pray together; together serve God in this world; and together fight against all which may threaten or hinder this unity [Phil 2:1-5; I Cor 12:4-31; John 13:1-17; I Cor 1:10-13; Eph 4:1-6; Eph 3:14-20; I Cor 10:16-17; I Cor 11:17-34; Gal 6:2; II Cor 1:3-4];

that this unity can be established only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God [Rom 12:3-8; I Cor 12:1-11; Eph 4:7-13; Gal 3:27-28; Jas 2:1-13];

that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this Church;

Therefore, we reject 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;

which professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace whilst believers of the same confession are in effect alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in despair of reconciliation;

which denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is sin;

which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the Church.

3. We believe that God has entrusted to his Church the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ; that the Church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world; that the Church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the Church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells [II Cor 5:17-21; Mt 5:13-16; Mt 5:9; II Pet 3:13; Rev 21-22].

that God by his lifegiving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity; that God, by His lifegiving Word and Spirit will enable His people to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world [Eph 4:17-6:23, Rom 6; Col 1:9-14; Col 2:13-19; Col 3:1-4:6];

that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity;

that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.

Therefore, we reject 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 and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ.

4. We believe 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 He brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry; that He frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind; that He supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly; that for Him pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering; that He wishes to teach His people to do what is good and to seek the right [Deut 32:4; Luke 2:14; John 14:27; Eph 2:14; Isa 1:16-17; Jas 1:27; Jas 5:1-6; Luke 1:46-55; Luke 6:20-26; Luke 7:22; Luke 16:19-31; Ps 146; Luke 4:16-19; Rom 6:13-18; Amos 5];

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, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;

that the Church as the possession of God must stand where He stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the Church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

Therefore, we 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.

5. We believe that, in obedience to Jesus Christ, its only Head, the Church is called to confess and to do all these things, even though the authorities and human laws might forbid them and punishment and suffering be the consequence [Eph 4:15-16; Acts 5:29-33; I Pet 2:18-25; I Pet 3:15-18].

Jesus is Lord.

To the one and only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be the honour and the glory for ever and ever.