

TO OBEY OR DISOBEY? THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
CHURCH AND STATE DURING THE YEARS OF APARTHEID:  
HISTORICAL LESSONS FROM THE ACTIVITIES OF THE  
*BELYDENDE KRING* (1974-1990)

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*Abstract*

An important source for the development of anti-apartheid arguments within the family of Dutch Reformed Churches was a body that called itself the *Broederkring* (Circle of Brothers or Fraternal) later renamed the *Belydende Kring* (Confessing Circle). The roots of the Belydende Kring (BK) can be traced back to the work of theologians like Beyers Naudé and Allan Boesak – hence the close relationship between the BK, the Christian Institute (CI) and the Alliance of Black Reformed Churches in Southern Africa (ABRECSA). The BK consisted of ministers and members of churches within the family of Dutch Reformed Churches. As a movement it placed a strong emphasis on finding a biblical response to the day-to-day experiences of its members and the citizens of South Africa under the *apartheid* government. This led to confrontations on different levels with various societal organisations including the South African government of the day.

This article examines historical developments within the BK by focusing on the original goals of the BK (1974) as well as on the Theological Declaration of the BK in 1979. From this certain conclusions can be drawn to indicate how movements like the BK, in line with the “black churches”, perceived the role of the State on the one hand; and, on the other hand, how the position and activities of church-based organisations, like the BK, were viewed by the government of the day. Critical questions are asked about the historical lessons that churches can learn from the activities of a movement such as the BK.

# 1 THE REBIRTH OF THE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH IN AFRICA (DRCA) AND THE DUTCH REFORMED MISSION CHURCH (DRMC)

## 1.1 The founding of the *Belydende Kring*

On 15 November 1973 Roelf Meyer wrote an editorial in the *Pro Veritate*<sup>1</sup> entitled “A Christian breakthrough within the NG Kerk in Africa” (DRCA).<sup>2</sup> The article was written subsequent to a gathering where 100 black ministers of the DRCA rejected the *apartheid* system in its totality on the basis of its being unchristian (Meyer 1973:1-3). The significance of this decision was twofold: not only was this the first time in the history of the family of Dutch Reformed Churches that such a strong stand was taken against *apartheid*, but the fact that the decision was taken by black ministers as a Christian witness against an unjust system, was truly momentous (Meyer 1973:1-3; See also Pauw 2007:179). These ministers saw it as their Christian calling to work towards reconciliation, justice and unity in every sphere of the South African society (Meyer 1973:1-3).

This gathering was the start of a movement within the family of Dutch Reformed Churches that officially came into being in 1974 in Bloemfontein, South Africa “following a group discussing fellowship”. The movement was called the *Broederkring*<sup>3</sup> (Mokgoeba 1984:14). Initially it “worked primarily and exclusively targeting the Dutch Reformed Church family”.<sup>4</sup> In 1983 the *Broederkring* changed its name to the *Belydende Kring*.<sup>5</sup> Its main aims were the following:

- 1 To proclaim the kingship of Jesus Christ *over all areas in church and in state*, and to witness for this *kingly rule*.
- 2 *To achieve organic church unity* and to express it practically in all areas of life.
- 3 To take seriously the prophetic task of the church with regard to the *oppressive structures and laws* in our land, as well as the priestly task of the church in respect of the victims and fear-possessed oppressors who suffer as a result of the unchristian policy and practice in the land.
- 4 To let the *kingly rule of Christ triumph over the ideology of apartheid* or any other ideology, so that a more human way of life may be striven for.

- 5 To promote the evangelical liberation from unrighteousness, dehumanisation, alienation, and lovelessness in *church and state*, and to work for true reconciliation among people.
- 6 To support ecumenical movements that promote the *kingship of Christ* on all levels of life.<sup>6</sup>

On reading this it becomes clear that the BK perceived its role as being to promote and establish a truly just society in all spheres of life in South Africa. The foundation and motivation for this was the proclamation of the kingly rule of Christ. This proclamation was set above and against the ideology of *apartheid* and its effect on the people of South Africa. Thus the character of the South African government of the time was challenged.

Throughout its history the BK played a major role in the process of church (re-)unification within the family of Dutch Reformed Churches and also in prophetically challenging Christians and non-Christians alike on issues regarding justice and human rights. The BK was closely associated with the Christian Institute (CI) and the South African Council of Churches (SACC).

## **2 BOTH PART OF AND SEPARATE: THE POSITION OF THE BK IN RELATION TO THE CHURCHES WITHIN THE FAMILY OF DR CHURCHES**

The membership of the BK consisted of men and women of different cultures, mostly ministers of churches within the family of Dutch Reformed Churches. According to Pauw the BK had a major influence on anti-apartheid arguments in the “young churches” within the mentioned church family (Pauw 2007:179). Pauw (2007:179) further states that

(T)he emphasis on a Biblical response to the day-to-day experiences of apartheid in church and society was prominent in many of the discussions of the BK. In time they organised into different regional bodies and whenever a meeting was held it would start with Bible study, but then specifically to read the Bible from within their context of oppression and struggle against injustice.

The fact that this was done jointly by members of both the DRCA (mostly black members) and the DRMC (mostly coloured members) led to a more united stance. This is of great significance when one considers that interactions across cultural borders were not an everyday occurrence at the time. The BK was in essence a non-racial movement and in this regard not only its theology but also its very nature stimulated stronger relations between the churches within the family of Dutch Reformed Churches. This has had a lasting impact on the above-mentioned churches to this very day.

One can indeed ask why these ministers did not make use of the official church structures in an effort to obtain these goals. Here one should take into account the historical circumstances that strongly influenced these churches. In this regard Pauw (2007:179) states that

(T)he BK came to function as a stage (sic) where black, coloured and white ministers could freely express their true convictions concerning apartheid. While the leadership in the young DR churches included pro-apartheid conservatives who inhibited open dialogue, these gatherings provided a safe environment that operated separately from the formally organised presbyteries and synods.

Another factor that has to be taken into account is the fact that the churches represented within the BK were mostly financially dependant on the (white) DRC for its support and that an open rejection of white rule and *apartheid* would in most instances have resulted in forfeiting this support. In this regard Mokwebo notes that:

(T)he experience of most of our members was also that the black churches, other churches, were also held hostage psychologically and financially by the “Moeder Kerk” (as the DRC was known) so that for those critical in both the white church and the other churches, the experience of being left vulnerable and exposed to the activity of security force officials, some of whom came from the ranks of elders in the NG Kerk.<sup>7</sup>

Members of the BK were also met with a lot of criticism within their own churches. This was the case within individual congregations and within synodical meetings.<sup>8</sup> The editorial in *Die Ligdraer* – the official mouthpiece of the DRMC – of February 1980 entitled “Broederkring en Kerk” makes exactly this very clear (*Die Ligdraer* 1980:4). In this article a strong feeling against the activities of the BK as well as its relation to the churches within the family of Dutch Reformed Churches can be detected. This stood in the light of an article that was published in *Die Burger* in January 1980 highlighting the planned meeting between members of the BK and the Swiss Federation of Protestant Churches. An ambivalent reaction to the article in *Die Ligdraer* can be found in the March 1980 issue of this newsletter. This contains letters by ministers and members of the DRMC stating either their support or resentment of the activities of the BK (*Die Ligdraer* 1980:54-55). It thus becomes clear that the BK faced strong criticism from within the ranks of the DRMC. This was also true for the members of the BK who served in the DRCA. In this regard it is important to note the strong decision taken by the General Synod of the DRCA in 1983 against any association between the BK by the DRCA. The following were given as reasons:

Aangesien die BK mededingend met die Moderatuur optree, met eensydige teologiese beklemtoning van die taak van die kerk opereer, en verwarring en spanning tussen gelowiges skep, besluit die Sinode soos volg: Die Sinode keer die Broederkring se wyse van optrede op kerklike terrein af. Die Sinode versoek amspdraers en lidmate om hulle van die Broederkring se wyse van optrede te distansieer en om die kerk se eie, verkose amspdraers met die nodige respek en lojaliteit te bejeën (Acta Synodi 1983).

It is interesting to note that Boesak is of the opinion that precisely because the BK “stands ‘outside’ the ecclesial structures of the family of Dutch Reformed Churches it should cherish its position and stand firm in its objectives and the role that it can play as a sign of hope for the realisation of a new reformed community” (Boesak 1984:74).

The fellowship meetings of the BK clearly provided an environment that was not necessarily present within the churches at that time – a setting where ministers and members of churches within

the family of Dutch Reformed Churches could critically discuss issues related to their goals, in contrast to a setting where, as Mokwebo states “(C)ritical thinking was dangerous and that to be Christian means to be submissive and obedient and quite.”<sup>9</sup>

With this in mind, it is now important to look at the Theological Declaration of the BK (1979). I am of the opinion that the influence of this declaration on the BK itself can and should not be underestimated.

### 3 JUSTICE FOR ALL: THE THEOLOGICAL DECLARATION OF THE BK (1979)

Although the BK was instrumental in bringing about various important mind shifts in the theological environment – both as a movement in its own right and through the involvement of its members within the different churches – without any doubt the most important document published by the BK was the Theological Declaration of the (then) *Broederkring* of 1979.<sup>10</sup> For the purpose of this article I will focus on the content of this document as well as on the original aims of the BK as the basis of my argument. The full document is published as an appendix to this article.

To acquire a better understanding of the way the BK viewed the State, it is important to examine arguably the most significant statement issued by the BK, namely its Theological Declaration of 1979. The Theological Declaration of the BK consists of four articles that can be summarised as follows:

- Art 1 concerns itself with the notion of *justice*. God is depicted as the God of justice who “struggles for his own justice with regard to God and fellow man”.<sup>11</sup> Subsequently a classic formulation within the circles of liberation and black theology at the time follows, namely that God “stands on the side of those who are victims of injustice”.<sup>12</sup>
- The notion of justice is taken further in Art 2. Here the concept of the incarnation takes a central position. Christ is the one “who breaks the power of injustice”.<sup>13</sup>
- In Art 3 God is depicted as the Liberator “who gathers for himself in this world a new people who consist of men and women He has liberated from oppressive powers through Jesus Christ”.<sup>14</sup> This liberated community is gathered in the church

and should testify of their liberation through their unity and with their allegiance to God. Therefore the church “must be busy standing where God stands viz. against injustice and with those who are denied justice”.<sup>15</sup> The church can do this because it aligns itself and shows greater obedience to Christ “than to *human governments, power or ideologies*”.<sup>16</sup>

- Art 4 brings us back to what this means contextually for the church in South Africa. Because of its allegiance to Christ “(T)he church may, in faithful allegiance to its Head, Jesus Christ, come into *conflict with human authorities*. If the church has to suffer in the process we know that this is part of the way God’s people goes through history (sic) and that the word of God remains in force.”<sup>17</sup>

#### **4 SOME REMARKS ON THE RELATION BETWEEN THE BK AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN STATE ON THE BASIS OF THE THEOLOGICAL DECLARATION**

Before looking at specific points in this statement, we need to note that the overall content of the declaration clearly opposes an oppressive system<sup>18</sup> imposed by a government whose wrath scorned certain communities and people, in particular those represented by the membership of the BK. It seems that the BK did not reject the government as such but rather the system that the government represented.

The Theological Declaration of the BK was overtly concerned with the injustices that were characteristic of the South African context of the time. Beyers Naudé noted a clear development within the ranks of the BK. According to Naudé “(T)he *Belydendekring* soon discovered in its attempts to realize the goal of Christian unity and social justice that this would be impossible to achieve without taking a clear stand on the issues of political justice and human rights” (Naudé 2005:128). In line with this one should remember that one of the original goals of the BK clearly stated that Christ is Lord over Church and State (*Die Belydende Kring Bulletin* 1988:1-3).

The Theological Declaration is critical of the State’s perceived incompetency because it conforms to *apartheid* policies and thus denies basic human rights to the majority of the people of South Africa. The BK realised that human rights form part of the Christian witness. In this regard Naudé (2005:129) writes:

... increasingly the *Belydendekring* has discovered that the issue of riches and poverty, of wages and employment, of the relationship between management and labourer, of worker rights and responsibilities are all part of the Christian witness which we need to understand and to address.

In line with this Naudé (2005:129) advises that members of the BK should gain knowledge of “an economic system which is more in accordance with the biblical criteria of justice, freedom and human dignity”.<sup>19</sup> Therefore the BK aligns itself against the State and thus urges the Church to take over the role as ascribed by the Lord to the State. The church should do so because it is (more) obedient to Christ “than to human governments, power or ideologies” (Art 3).

Evaluation of the Theological Declaration: it is important to note that these are abstracts of, and remarks about a Theological Declaration by a movement that has its roots within the Reformed Church and specifically within the family of Dutch Reformed Churches in Southern Africa. The BK operates in a context characterised by disunity, injustice, political clampdown,<sup>20</sup> and the apparent irreconcilability of people – all based on biblical principles. Although the members of the BK represented the different churches within the family of Dutch Reformed Churches, the meetings of the BK were not official church meetings comparable to synods. The BK was not a church. As such the Theological Declaration should not be compared to a confession because it was not binding on the different churches within the Dutch Reformed family of churches. However, this declaration bears a strong relation to the later Belhar Confession (1986) that was accepted by the Synod of the DRMC and the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). Without any doubt the workings of the BK, especially its Theological Declaration, had a major impact on the announcement of a *status confessionis* opposed to the theological sanctioning of *apartheid* by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) in 1978 and the former DRMC (1982).<sup>21</sup>

One can also ask many critical questions about the content of this document. There is an apparent lack of the use of Scripture and a strong emphasis on God as he revealed himself in Christ whilst the work of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit seems to be neglected, especially regarding justice.<sup>22</sup> It is also interesting to note

that the notion of reconciliation does not feature in the content of this document. The Theological Declaration is opposed to an oppressive system and it aligns itself theologically against this system. In the light of this, it becomes clear that it is a declaration against a system and not necessarily against the theology and/or scriptural basis behind this system. One should, however, take into account the aim(s) and the audience of this declaration, the context within which the declaration was shaped as well as the context of the broader BK in which this declaration was formulated.

As regards its rejection of injustice it becomes clear that the BK aligned itself against the policies of the government of the day, which were seen as being unjust. The government is portrayed as an entity that has lost its God-given mandate to govern. The wording used in the Theological Declaration is not as strong as that of the *Kairos document* (1986)<sup>23</sup> in its challenge of the legitimacy of the South African government, and not quite as systematic as that of the Belhar Confession (1986).<sup>24</sup> However, the declaration is clear in its stance and direction: it rejects injustice and it rejects governments and ideologies associated with injustice.<sup>25</sup>

Without a doubt it can be said that the outlook, identity, and theology of the BK had a major influence on churches and other organisations around it. It is therefore important to look at the influence that the BK as a movement had on the family of Dutch Reformed Churches. I will pay special attention to this in the following section.

## **5 THE IMPACT OF THE BK AND ITS THEOLOGICAL DECLARATION ON THE FAMILY OF DUTCH REFORMED CHURCHES.**

The role played by the BK within the family of Dutch Reformed Churches, specifically with regard to greater unity within the family can and should not be underestimated. The BK indisputably played a pivotal role in the eventual unification of the DRCA and the former DRMC in constituting the URCSA.<sup>26</sup> Once again it is worth remembering the original aims of the BK. These strongly contradict the rumours of the late 1980s/early 1990s that the BK was opposed to the unification of these churches.<sup>27</sup> The disintegration of the BK in the early 1990s should be read against the backdrop of the imminent unification between the DRMC and the DRCA. By this time the stimuli

within these churches were so strongly in favour of unification that an “outside movement” was no longer necessary to deal with matters that could just as well have been discussed within the official structures of the church.

Furthermore I am of the opinion that the theology practised as well as the society envisioned within the meetings and gathering of the BK hugely influenced the theology and outlook of the DRCA and the DRMC. The theological rejection(s) of *apartheid* by these churches, the declaration of a *status confessionis* by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the DRMC, as well as the theology behind the Belhar Confession can indeed be viewed as products of the enormous influence the BK had on especially the younger churches within the family of DR Churches. It had become clear that both the theology behind and the language of the Theological Declaration found a very real expression in, amongst others, the Belhar Confession. The environment within which the discussions and meetings of the BK clearly presented the stimulus for a deeper theological discussion which (especially later) found expression in the synodical meetings of the different churches within the family of Dutch Reformed Churches.

In my opinion the biggest influence of the BK arose from the new/fresh environment that its members found themselves in, especially regarding the theology practised in the different churches within the family of Dutch Reformed Churches. The fact that the members of the BK took part in interactions that truly bridged the deep divide, especially with regard to culture, race, and gender, is in itself something unique. One should remember that this was not at all common within the specific time frame. Furthermore the context of the BK provided a milieu in which the thoughts of the different members could be stimulated. In these formal and informal discussions held by the BK, its members found an arena where their voices could be heard, where they could express their opinions. This was not necessarily the case within the official structures of the different churches represented by the membership of the BK. From these deep and critical theological discussions was born the Theological Declaration of the BK.

If one bears this in mind, one realises that the legacy of the BK is truly embedded within the URCSA and other churches that now constitute the family of Dutch Reformed Churches. This is true of the character, the identity, and especially the theology of these churches.

It is therefore important to look at the specific historical lessons that we can learn from the activities of the BK as well as at the challenges that its legacy poses to churches today.

## 6 HISTORICAL LESSONS FROM THE ACTIVITIES OF THE BK

Before one looks at the lessons that one can learn from the activities of the BK, one should be clear about exactly what the BK was and what it was not. As mentioned in the previous section the BK was an ecclesiastical movement with very specific goals, *within* the family of Dutch Reformed Churches. This is of great importance in evaluating the activities of this movement.

And one should not forget that the BK consisted of individuals each of whom formed a unique part of the full composition of this movement. However, I maintain that the BK should not be defined by the actions of its individual members but by their collective witness. What they stood for, the message they proclaimed, the picture they portrayed - all these were based on the identity of the BK as a movement. This does not diminish individual members' key impact on debates and synodical decisions within their church meetings or within other organisations. However, the transformative stimulus provided by individual members of the BK would not have been possible had it not been embedded within the greater context of the BK as a movement.

Regarding the historical lessons learned from the activities of the BK, I am of the opinion that one of the most important lessons to be learnt is that Christians - and the Church - should take up their prophetic task and stand firm in it even amidst opposition and persecution. However, this should not be done for the sake of being different or simply for the sake of opposing institutions like the State. The Church is prophetic as long as it stays true to its calling and as long as this stays firmly based on the Word of God. This is both an appeal and a challenge to the church of today.

The BK was a religious movement and not a church. Because of this, its activities were not exclusive to a specific church. Its strong influence spread across ecclesiastical structures and borders and led to a growing conscience amongst clergy and members alike, calling for the God of justice to be just - as He calls us to be just. It was precisely through this resilient influence that the BK produced leaders who, on the basis of their faith and their interpretation of Scripture,

carried the struggle for justice to the dawn of a democratic dispensation in South Africa.

The history of a movement such as the BK clearly illustrates how a confessing community outside the official structures of the Church can aid the Church to reform with the Gospel as the criterion. This should be done notwithstanding powers and principalities which may or may not include the government.<sup>28</sup> Steve de Gruchy notes that some of the major challenges that the church in South Africa face today are the challenge of national reconciliation, the concerns about the welfare of the poor, issues of human sexuality and gender justice, and issues relating to just economic policies.<sup>29</sup> I believe that the legacy of the BK presents the churches with the opportunity to deal with these and other issues both inside and outside the ranks of its structures. I believe that the legacy of the BK calls on the Church today to take up these and other challenges.

## 7 CONCLUSION

When it comes to deciphering the relationship between Church and State during the years of State *apartheid*, it is important to take into account that during this time, there was indeed more than one position held in relation to the State. These range from full support of the powers that be and their activities to a full rejection of the South African government(s). These differences in opinion and understanding of the role of the State were also found amongst religious organisations including the different churches. To illustrate this complexity, Beyers Naudé maintains that one has to know which South Africa you are talking about when entering into a discussion of the meaning of confessing the faith. Naudé directly implies that there is (was) more than one South Africa. For Naudé the same is true for an understanding of faith.<sup>30</sup>

It can be said that the position of the BK in relation to the South African State during *apartheid* is indeed generally comparable to that of most black churches and other ecclesiastical and religious organisations active in South Africa at the time, such as the CI and ABRECSA. The BK saw itself as a community of confessing Christians witnessing against injustice brought about by *apartheid* in South Africa.<sup>31</sup> The more ecumenical stance of the BK in the later years is evidence of a more united position in the struggle against *apartheid* and the injustices brought about by it. The stance taken by

the BK, as was the case with other similar organisations, led to disagreements with the government(s) of the day. Members of the BK, at times, openly defied certain *apartheid* laws and policies.

In short, the relationship between the State and the BK can be described as one characterised by opposition, defiance, repression, and struggle. The BK viewed the government as the custodian of *apartheid* and therefore as unjust. The government – self-defined as Christian – did not represent the people of the country as a whole nor did it take into account the daily struggles of millions of South Africans caused by its policies. In view of this, the BK, along with other church-based movements, rejected *apartheid* and its injustices – the foundation of the government’s policies. Because of their activities, organisations such as the CI were banned (1977). The State in turn viewed the BK and other similar movements as liberal, communist and infected by the disease of liberation theology.<sup>32</sup> The climax of the confrontations between the church and the government in my opinion took place on 29 February 1988 when clergy and laity representing different churches and organisations marched to parliament to object to government’s unlawful restriction of individuals. Wallis and Hollyday (1989:139) describe the mood after the march as follows:

(T)he atmosphere took on the feel of a holy war as Botha appeared almost nightly on South African television in the weeks following the march. Claiming that he, too, is a faithful follower of Christ, Botha lambasted the church leaders, accusing them of betraying the gospel and espousing communist ideology. No air time was given to the other side of this controversy that rocked the nation.

By the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s the BK started to disintegrate into smaller communities actively involved within the structures of the family of Dutch Reformed Churches and the SACC. The fact that the unification of the DRCA and the former DRMC was immanent, introduced a new phase in the history of the family of Dutch Reformed Churches. This was the dawn of a democratic dispensation in South Africa and subsequently the BK had to re-evaluate its goals. As it is clearly acknowledged in the statement of the BK in 1988 “no organisation can hold to its original aims for 14 years without reviewing and reinterpreting them in the

light of the challenges of the ever changing situation” (Dunamis 1988:17). However, the BK saw it as crucial to keep aligning itself with the notion of organic unity within the family of Dutch Reformed Churches and to commit itself to the struggle for humanity and justice within a broader ecumenical framework (Dunamis 1988:17). Changing times would later lead to greater changes within the BK, and ultimately its disintegration as a movement. However, the legacy of the BK still lives on in the theology, identity and structures of the churches within the family of Dutch Reformed Churches.

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## ENDNOTES

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- 1 *Pro Veritate* was the official mouthpiece of the Christian Institute (CI).
  - 2 It is important to note that the churches that form(ed) part of the family of Dutch Reformed Churches were separated on the basis of race and ethnicity. The DRC in Africa (DRCA) was formed in 1963 after the unification of the "black mission churches" namely the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in the Orange Free State (1910), the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in the Transvaal (1932), the Dutch Reformed Bantu Church in South Africa (1952) and the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in Natal (1952). Other churches within the South African family of Dutch Reformed churches were the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa (DRMC) with a predominantly

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coloured membership, the Reformed Church in Africa (RCA) with a predominantly Indian membership, and the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) with a mostly white membership. In 1994 the DRMC and the biggest part of the DRCA united to form the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). For a general overview of the establishment and histories of these churches, see JC Pauw, *Anti-Apartheid Theology in the Dutch Reformed Family of Churches: A depth hermeneutical analysis*. Published Doctoral dissertation, Free University, Amsterdam, 2007. For the full, editorial see Meyer (1973:3-4).

- 3 On letter heads of the BK the name “*Die Broederkring van die NG Kerke/Fraternal of the Dutch Ref. Churches*” is found.
- 4 Mokwebo’s testimony before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) on the 18<sup>th</sup> of November 1999. East London. 1. <http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/ricsa/trc/belytest.htm>. Accessed on 05/12/07.
- 5 The change in names is quite significant. The reasons behind this change can be traced back to the exclusively male image associated with a name like *Broederkring*. This name is also reminiscent of the Afrikaner organisation called the Broederbond – an organisation closely connected to the Dutch Reformed Church – which was quite active during this time period. It is also reminiscent of a minister’s fraternal, something that the BK shed as it grew in years and in numbers. For an overview of this, see Kritzinger (1984:5-12). See also Mokwebo’s testimony before the TRC on the 18<sup>th</sup> of November 1999. East London. 4. <http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/ricsa/trc/belytest.htm>. Accessed on 05/12/07. Throughout this article I will make use of the name *Belydende Kring* (BK) since this was the last (and standing) name of this particular organisation.
- 6 See in this regard the aims and objectives of the *Belydende Kring* (1988: 1-3). See also ZE Mokgoeba (1984:14-15 – my own italicisation).
- 7 Mokwebo’s testimony before the TRC on the 18<sup>th</sup> of November 1999. East London. 2. <http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/ricsa/trc/belytest.htm>. Accessed on 05/12/07. See also Meyer, A Christian breakthrough within the NG Kerk in Africa, *Pro Veritate* 12 (no.7, 1973), 3.
- 8 Mokwebo’s testimony before the TRC on the 18<sup>th</sup> of November 1999. East London. 1-2. <http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/ricsa/trc/belytest.htm>. Accessed on 05/12/07.
- 9 Mokwebo’s testimony before the TRC on the 18<sup>th</sup> of November 1999. East London. 2. <http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/ricsa/trc/belytest.htm>. Accessed on 05/12/07.
- 10 Here it is important to note that the BK was closely associated to the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and the Christian Institute (CI). As such, the BK hugely influenced decisions and statements made by these (and

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- other) organisations/ecclesiastical structures. For the full text of the Declaration see <http://www.ngkerk.org.za/abid/dokumente/amptelikkestukke/Broederkring%20Declaration%201979.pdf>. Accessed on 03/12/07.
- 11 Theological declaration, 1979, <http://www.ngkerk.org.za/abid/dokumente/amptelikkestukke/Broederkring%20Declaration%201979.pdf>. Accessed on 03/12/07.
- 12 Theological declaration, 1979, <http://www.ngkerk.org.za/abid/dokumente/amptelikkestukke/Broederkring%20Declaration%201979.pdf>. Accessed on 03/12/07. It is interesting to compare the similarities between this article and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Article of the Belhar Confessions on Justice. See in this regard The Belhar Confession. <http://www.vgksa.org.za/who.asp?id=106&sinid=1>. Accessed on 07/01/08.
- 13 Theological declaration, 1979, <http://www.ngkerk.org.za/abid/dokumente/amptelikkestukke/Broederkring%20Declaration%201979.pdf>. Accessed on 03/12/07.
- 14 Theological declaration, 1979, <http://www.ngkerk.org.za/abid/dokumente/amptelikkestukke/Broederkring%20Declaration%201979.pdf>. Accessed on 03/12/07.
- 15 Theological declaration, 1979, <http://www.ngkerk.org.za/abid/dokumente/amptelikkestukke/Broederkring%20Declaration%201979.pdf>. Accessed on 03/12/07.
- 16 Theological declaration, 1979, <http://www.ngkerk.org.za/abid/dokumente/amptelikkestukke/Broederkring%20Declaration%201979.pdf>. Accessed on 03/12/07. (My italicisation.)
- 17 Theological declaration, 1979, <http://www.ngkerk.org.za/abid/dokumente/amptelikkestukke/Broederkring%20Declaration%201979.pdf>. Accessed on 03/12/07. (My italicisation.) This article is reminiscent of the church of Heb. 13:5, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."
- 18 Although it is not explicitly stated in this document, the content and historical setting as well as the aims of the BK clearly point toward a rejection of state *apartheid*.
- 19 Other issues that the BK should take serious note of are the content and curricula for the theological training of ministers, as well as what Naudé calls "educational justice". "If the *Belydendekring* wishes to make a meaningful confession of its faith in South Africa today, part of that confession will inevitably imply our becoming more deeply involved in the struggle of millions of young people to achieve some form of justice for their educational needs and problems." See Beyers Naudé (2005:130).

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- 20 In this regard one must remember that the sister organisation of the BK, namely the CI, was banned in October 1977.
- 21 For a critical evaluation of the influence of the BK and ABRECSA on ecclesiastical relations in South Africa with specific reference to the family of Dutch Reformed Churches, see D Crafford (1986:13-23). For an excellent overview of the Belhar Confession, its history and the declaration of a *status confessionis* by the DRMC see Daan Cloete & Dirk Smit (eds), *A moment of truth: The confession of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church 1982*. 1984. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- 22 Here one should take into account the fact that, with regard to the work of the Spirit, Art 2 declares that "(B)y His Spirit He gives people the possibility to again live in obedience to his Word." See the Theological declaration, 1979, <http://www.ngkerk.org.za/abid/dokumente/amptelikkestukke/Broederkring%20Declaration%201979.pdf>. Accessed on 03/12/07.
- 23 See in this regard *The road to Damascus: kairos and conversion*, 1989. Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers.
- 24 See <http://www.vgksa.org.za/who.asp?id=106&sinid=1>. Accessed on 07/01/08.
- 25 Note that, as is the case with the Belhar Confession, *apartheid* is never explicitly mentioned in the declaration.
- 26 In 1994 the DRMC and the largest part of the DRCA united to form the URCSA. With this unification the DRMC ceased to exist – hence I refer to it as the former DRMC. The fact that the majority of the congregations of the DRCA united in the URCSA does not take away the fact that the DRCA exists as a legal entity to this very day.
- 27 "So let it be heard clearly: firstly the BK supports the unity talks, and will do everything to further our coming together. We will do and have done nothing to sabotage these talks." See the article on "Uniting the Reformed Churches", in the *Belydende Kring Bulletin*, vol. 6 (no. 2, 1988) 1. In this article it is clearly stated that the BK is committed to organic unity, "not make-belief unity" and as such the position taken by the BK in the process of church unification within the family of Dutch Reformed Churches is described as "a critical solidarity". "Uniting the Reformed Churches", in the *Belydende Kring Bulletin* (1988:15).
- 28 It is interesting to note that Walshe is of the opinion that the South African phenomenon of prophetic Christianity "involved ordinary folk and political leaders who entered protest organisations *quite independently of parish or church structure*". Peter Walshe, *Prophetic Christianity and the liberation movement in South Africa*, 121, 1995. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications (my italicisation).

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- 29 Steve de Gruchy, "From Church Struggle to Church Struggles" in JW de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*. 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition, 2004, 223-260.
- 30 See in this regard Beyers Naudé (2005:127).
- 31 Here it should be noted that the involvement of the BK brought about the establishment of what was known as the National Assembly of Confessing Congregations (NACC) – an ecumenical body whose main aim was to promote and to strive for justice. See in this regard the Statement of the BK on its future direction, in *Dunamis* no. 1 (1988:17); The Statement of the Confessing Movement in *Dunamis* no. 2 (1988:17-18); The letter of invitation with regard to the establishment of the NACC in the *Belydende Kring Bulletin*, nos. 3 & 4, (1978:1).
- 32 The state also manipulated religion to support its policies. In illustration of this, Peter Walshe mentions that "(W)hen the Christian League of South Africa was launched in 1977 to discredit the SACC and any strain of liberation theology, it was fuelled with at least R340,000 from a government slushfund. Three years later, a white Catholic Defence League was established to support the South African Defence Force in its 'heroic struggle' against communism." Walshe also mentions the name of the American evangelist Jimmy Swaggert who was used by the government of the day as a puppet whose task it was to proclaim its message. See in this regard Peter Walshe, *Prophetic Christianity and the liberation movement in South Africa*, 110-11, 1995. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.