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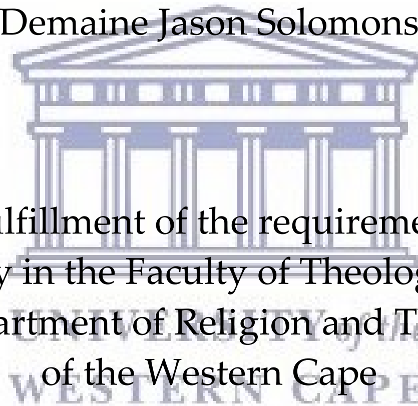
Reconciliation as a controversial symbol

An analysis of a theological discourse between 1968-2010

Demaine Jason Solomons



A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for a joint degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Theology, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and the Department of Religion and Theology at the University of the Western Cape

Supervisor: Prof E. A. J. G. Van der Borght

Supervisor: Prof E. M. Conradie

September 2017

Declaration

I declare that *Reconciliation as a controversial symbol: An analysis of a theological discourse between 1968-2010* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Name of student: Demaine Jason Solomons

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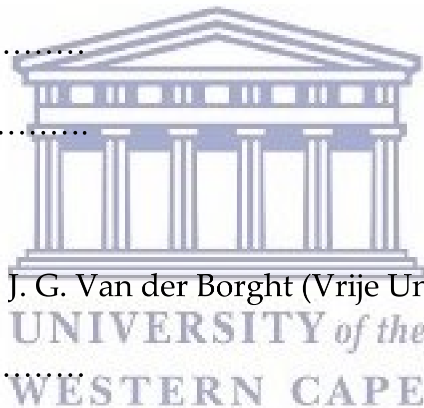
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Name of supervisor: Prof E. A. J. G. Van der Borght (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

Signature……………………………

Date…………………………………

Name of supervisor: Prof E. M. Conradie (University of the Western Cape)

Signature……………………………

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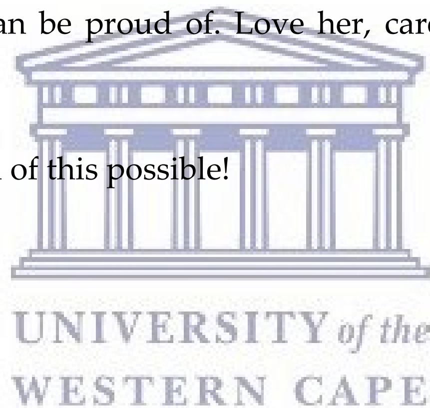

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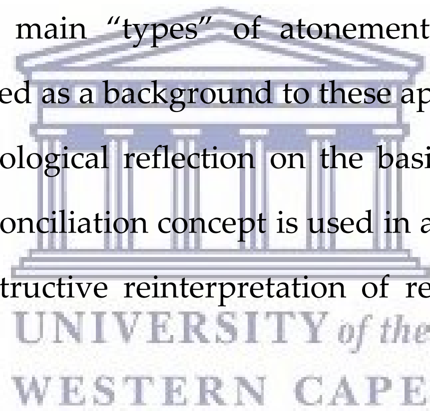
Abstract

This study entails a conceptual analysis of "reconciliation" as one of the guiding concepts in Christian discourse in the South African context. It is abundantly clear from the literature that reconciliation is understood in very different ways. This is observed from publications beginning in the 1960s. Since that time it is often used to offer theological reflection on social conflict in the country. In this study, I propose a framework in which one can identify, describe and assess at least three distinct ways in which the reconciliation concept is understood in theological literature emanating from South Africa. I describe them as a) Justice through reconciliation in Jesus Christ, b) Justice and reconciliation after liberation and c) Reconstruction requires national reconciliation. The famous *Christus Victor* typology of the three main "types" of atonement developed by the Swedish theologian, Gustaf Aulén is used as a background to these approaches. The purpose of this study is to aid continued theological reflection on the basis of a conceptual analysis of creative ways in which the reconciliation concept is used in a Christian context. This study is an attempt to offer a constructive reinterpretation of reconciliation in contemporary South Africa.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Keywords

Apartheid

Atonement

Christus Victor

Church Struggle

Justice

Liberation

Reconciliation

Reconstruction

South Africa

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

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Abbreviations

AACC	–	All Africa Conference of Churches
AFM	–	Apostolic Faith Mission Church
ANC	–	African National Congress
BCP	–	Black Community Programme
BPC	–	Black People's Convention
Christian Council	–	Christian Council of South Africa
Christian Institute	–	Christian Institute of South Africa
CODESA	–	Convention for a Democratic South Africa
ICT	–	Institute for Contextual Theology
IFP	–	Inkatha Freedom Party
NG Sendingskerk	–	Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingskerk
NGK	–	Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk
NHK	–	Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk
NIR	–	National Initiative for Reconciliation
PAC	–	Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania
PCR	–	Programme to Combat Racism
PSC	–	Programme for Social Change
RDP	–	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SACC	–	South African Council of Churches
SASO	–	South African Student's Organisation
SPRO-CAS	–	Study-Project on Christianity in Apartheid South Africa
The Message	–	Message to the People of South Africa

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TRC	–	Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa
UCM	–	University Christian Movement
UDF	–	United Democratic Front
WARC	–	World Alliance of Reformed Churches
WCC	–	World Council of Churches
WCP	–	White Community Programme

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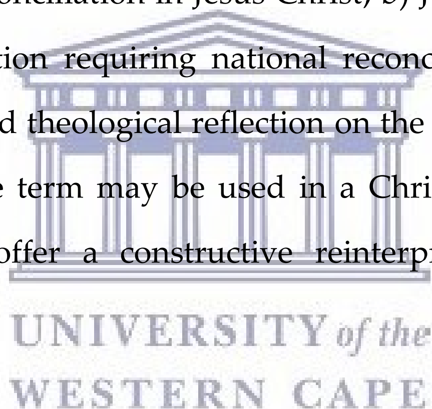
1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This study entails a conceptual analysis of "reconciliation" as one of the guiding concepts in Christian discourse in the South African context. It is abundantly clear from the literature that reconciliation is understood in very different ways. This is observed from publications beginning in the 1960s. Since that time it is often used to offer theological reflection on social conflict in the country.[1] In this study, I propose a framework in which one can identify, describe and assess at least three distinct ways in which the reconciliation concept is understood in theological literature emanating from South Africa. I describe them as a) Justice through reconciliation in Jesus Christ; b) Justice and reconciliation after liberation; and c) Reconstruction requiring national reconciliation. The purpose of this contribution is to aid continued theological reflection on the basis of a conceptual analysis of creative ways in which the term may be used in a Christian context. I conclude this study with an attempt to offer a constructive reinterpretation of reconciliation in contemporary South Africa.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1.2 Context of the study

Violent forms of conflict have continued to erupt in different locations all over the world since the end of World War II. Such conflict may be addressed at various levels, including the need to come to terms with the personal trauma associated with such conflict. Politically, the gross violations of human rights associated with such conflict are typically addressed in terms of criminal law and international law. The (in)famous Nuremberg trials may serve as an apt example. More recently, various forms of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission have been introduced to facilitate the transition from such

[1] For a detailed account on how the term was used in the South African context in the 20th century, see J. W. de Gruchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring justice*, London: SCM Press, 2002, 30-43.

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social conflict to a new dispensation.[2] The introduction and subsequent proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa since 1994 are widely regarded as an outstanding example of such an approach. Frequently held up as the focal point of reconciliation, the TRC has enjoyed premier status in accounts of the South African transition.

While the proceedings of the TRC have elicited much interest outside South Africa, it led to much controversy inside the country. Indeed, the need for and the very symbol of national reconciliation was highly contested. This controversy has to be understood in terms of the years of struggle against apartheid. In the mid-1980s the question was whether political liberation for the poor and oppressed black majority or reconciliation between blacks and whites should have precedence. In the famous *Kairos Document* (1985) the emphasis on reconciliation was severely criticised as a form of "church theology". During the transition to democracy (1990-1994) the need for a negotiated settlement became widely accepted. As part of such a settlement, the need to come to terms with the history and legacy of apartheid became evident. Both the experiences of the victims of apartheid and the gross violations of human rights by the perpetrators simply had to be addressed. The decision to establish the TRC followed upon these developments in 1994. This was soon supported by calls for "national reconciliation", "nation building", the "healing of memories", the rediscovery of humanity (ubuntu) and a celebration of the so-called "rainbow people of God" as popularised by Desmond Tutu.[3] Nevertheless, as the proceedings of the TRC unfolded many criticisms were raised regarding such an emphasis on reconciliation.[4] These criticisms related to various aspects of the process: the very

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2 P. Hayner, "Same species different animal: How South Africa compares to truth commissions worldwide", In: C. Villa-Vicencio and W. Verwoerd (eds.), *Looking back reaching forward: Reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa,* London: Zed Books, 2000.

3 D. M. Tutu, *No future without forgiveness,* London: Rider, 1999.

4 See for instance M. Mamdani, "A Diminished Truth", In: W. James and L. van de Vijver (eds.), *After the TRC: Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa,* Cape Town: David Philip, 2000, 60; M. Mamdani, "Reconciliation without justice", *Southern African Review of Books* 46, 1996, 22-25; W. Soyinka,

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possibility of amnesty, the need for criminal justice, the objectivity of the commission, the understanding of "truth", the emphasis on reconciliation, the leadership role of Archbishop Tutu, the associations with Christian symbolism, the need for compensation for the victims and so forth.[5]

The proceedings of the TRC were concluded in 1998, followed by a set of extensive reports. The legal aspects of the proceedings about amnesty and reparation need not be addressed here. Reflection on the legacy and significance of the TRC has continued unabated since 1998. In this sense, the TRC cannot be reduced to a set of legal proceedings. It provided an opportunity to ordinary South Africans (who were neither perpetrators nor victims of gross violations of human rights) to reflect on their past and future through the publicity around the TRC. Its significance, therefore, has to be understood in terms of calls for national reconciliation and the implications of that in various spheres of society. More than 15 years after the conclusion of the TRC's work it is all too obvious that reconciliation between individuals and groups in South Africa remains a high priority. The South African Reconciliation Barometer of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation gives clear indications how South African citizens remain deeply divided in terms of the categories of race, class, ethnicity and culture.[6]

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Such South African discourse over the symbol of national reconciliation cannot be separated from the influence of Christianity in South Africa. This has to be understood in terms of the allegiance to Christianity in South Africa, the use of the term "reconciliation" in Christian soteriology and the significance of what is aptly described as the *church* struggle against apartheid. The influence of Christianity is also evident with respect to the

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The burden of memory, the muse of forgiveness, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999; A. Jeffery, *The truth about The Truth Commission,* Johannesburg: South African Institute for Race Relations, 1999, 157.

5 For a detailed account on the role of religion (and Christianity in particular) in the TRC, see M. Shore, *Religion and conflict resolution: Christianity and South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission,* Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009.

6 Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, *Confronting exclusion: Time for radical reconciliation*. Cape Town, South Africa: SA Reconciliation Barometer Survey: 2013 Report, 2013.

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TRC. The pivotal role played by Archbishop Tutu, the charismatic chairperson of the TRC needs no elaboration here. One may also mention the leadership roles of several other church leaders (such as Alex Borraine, the deputy chairperson) and theologians (including Charles Villa-Vicencio and Piet Meiring).

1.3 Relevance of the study

The term "reconciliation" was indeed at the heart of the church struggle against apartheid.[7] This is evident at least since the publication of the famous *Message to the People of South Africa* (1968). In the 1980s the term was further used in conflicting ways in the *Belhar Confession* (1982/1986), the *Kairos Document* (1985) and the *National Initiative for Reconciliation* (launched in 1985). The term elicited much controversy, especially in the *Kairos Document*.[8] In the context of local congregations, the theme of reconciliation prompted many further debates, including the criteria for church membership, ordinations, expressions of and structures for church unity and the need for a ministry of reconciliation across the divides of culture, race, and class.

It is therefore not surprising that the term reconciliation came under close scrutiny in Christian theological reflection in South Africa at least since 1968. One may suggest that such theological controversies had to do with the search for appropriate theological models and root metaphors. The symbol of "reconciliation" offered one such concept, but "ecclesial unity", "liberation", "justice", "nation-building", "human dignity" (ubuntu), "reconstruction" and "development" offered alternatives. At the very least the question had to be addressed how these concepts are related to each other. How, for example, is reconciliation related to liberation theologically and methodologically? Should justice and liberation follow upon reconciliation or vice versa? How is reconciliation between

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[7] De Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 33-38.

[8] E. M. Conradie, "Reconciliation as one guiding vision for South Africa? Conceptual analysis and theological reflection", In: E. M. Conradie (ed.), *Reconciliation, a guiding vision for South Africa*? Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2013, 13.

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different social groups related to the reconciliation in Jesus Christ? In other words, what connotations are attached to the symbol of "reconciliation"? While there may well be a general understanding in theological publications on the question what "reconciliation" entails, the controversies over the symbol of reconciliation suggest diverging interpretations of its significance for theological reflection in South Africa.[9] Thus, reconciliation appears to lack a fixed or singular meaning, lending credence to the idea that it is best conceived as an essentially contested concept.[10]

While it easy for academics to overstate the importance of their work, ranging from arguments that an idea has never been studied before, to the significance of the work on a broader scale, this study focuses on the controversial nature of reconciliation as one of the guiding concepts in South Africa. From a South African perspective, the theology of reconciliation is certainly not a new idea. However, because of the lack of conceptual clarity, most would agree that continued work in this area is necessary. In this context, I do think a theology of reconciliation, on a social level, has not been explored extensively enough. Thus, the purpose of this study is to aid the continued theological reflection on the basis of a conceptual analysis of the different ways in which term is used in a Christian context. This also requires reflection on the distinct ways in which the term is used in everyday life, in South African society and discourses in mediation and conflict resolution. As a concept, reconciliation has not always been a useful means of bringing people together in situations of conflict. For the most part, this is related to differing understandings of the concept and the resulting practical application of these considerations. With conceptual clarity comes legitimacy. In this sense, the discourse on reconciliation in South Africa is more nuanced than the way it has been represented in the

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9 De Gruchy suggests the difficulties are heightened as reconciliation come loaded with the weight of Christianity and the problem of how to differentiate between a transformative form of love that may well have useful lessons for secular life and a piety that presupposes the facticity of a divine gift. See De Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 25-26.

10 E. Doxtader, *With faith in the works of words: The beginnings of reconciliation in South Africa, 1985-1995*, Cape Town: David Philip, 2009, 12.

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past. The goal of this study is to interpret the discourse on reconciliation through the eyes of the different stakeholders. This will offer a more comprehensive version of how the reconciliation "narrative" is understood in the country. In theory, this may also provide general insights into the way this theological concept might be understood in other social contexts.

1.4 Reconciliation in the Christian context

The problem underlying conceptual clarification is that the term "reconciliation" is used in quite different ways. Ernst Conradie's reference to "reconciliation as one guiding vision for South Africa?" on the various uses of the term is quite useful here.[11] In his view, the term "reconciliation" may refer to personal relationships that may have become distorted in marriage, personal life, between neighbours or colleagues and so on. Here reconciliation is required to avoid unwanted animosity and to allow the relationship to flourish again.

In the social and political context, the term may be used to describe perceptions, attitudes, and behaviour of individuals and groups towards other social groups. These groups are typically defined through markers such as race, class, culture and sexual orientation, among others. The term "reconciliation" is thus used as a barometer for social cohesion, as a means to establish how members of the different social groups respect, cooperate and tolerate in order to avoid open conflict with each other.

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In addition to this, the Christian discourse on reconciliation presents at least three additional layers of meaning:

a) Reconciliation with God following alienation as a result of sin; this is understood in the light of a broken relationship with God;

b) Reconciliation through being one with Christ in the Body of Christ (the church); and

[11] Conradie, "Reconciliation as one guiding vision for South Africa?", 17-21.

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c) The ministry of reconciliation through the Holy Spirit in church and society.

These additional layers raise questions on how the use of the term "reconciliation" inside the church is related to the use outside of the Christian context. Furthermore, one may also reflect on how the relatedness of these theological, ecclesial and social layers of meaning are understood. Given the history of division in South Africa, one may well ask what the relationship is between the politics of national reconciliation and the Christian doctrine of reconciliation? For obvious reasons, the compartmentalisation of the three layers would be problematic. However, it would be equally problematic to fuse them together and thus confuse the genres.[12] The issue is the subject of much debate because it raises classic theological questions on the relationship between God and the world, text and context, church and society and also faith and science. Moreover, these three layers of meaning bring into play all three articles of the Christian confession in relation to each other.

Conradie suggests that some employ a "deductive" logic, moving from reconciliation with God to the ministry of reconciliation in society. According to this logic, the fruits of reconciliation are dependent upon reconciliation with God. This approach assumes that no lasting solution to social conflict can be found without addressing the deep roots of such social conflict. In this case, social conflict is linked directly to our alienation from God. However, this can be overcome through God's gracious forgiveness of sins. From a classic Reformed perspective, such forgiveness is appropriated through justification, sanctification and the vocation of believers. Furthermore, such reconciliation in Christ enables and requires reconciliation with one's brothers and sisters in Christ regardless of the social markers that may separate them ("We are all one in Christ"). In this way, the church constitutes what David Bosch describes as an "alternative community".[13] The social

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[12] This is the point raised by De Gruchy as quoted in Conradie, "Reconciliation as one Guiding Vision for South Africa?", 18.

[13] D. J. Bosch, "The church as an alternative community", *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 13, 1975, 3-11.

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significance of such ecclesial forms of reconciliation is most evident in the *Belhar Confession* (1982/1986).

According to this "deductive" logic, the ministry of reconciliation in church and society is only possible on the basis of reconciliation in Christ. In this sense the ministry goes beyond the requirements for social cohesion and its primary focus remains firmly rooted in reconciliation with God. It is only through reconciliation in Christ that social conflict can be addressed adequately. Without this, reconciliation remains superficial if not misplaced, thus opening itself to renewed conflict. In other words, reconciliation in society springs from the celebration of the Holy Communion. God's reconciliation in Jesus Christ thus becomes the basis for Christians to reject any social system that assumes the fundamental irreconcilability of people.

By contrast, there are those who employ what may be described to as an "inductive" logic. According to this approach, the "deductive" logic does not account for the process behind the conclusion that was reached, namely that the deepest root of social conflict is rooted in human alienation from God. This conclusion can only be reached through contextual and pastoral reflection on such conflict. It is the result of prior analysis, namely recognising that sin constitutes the deepest roots of the human predicament. In this context, theological perspectives may help in deepening the common understanding of what may be at stake. These views aid reflection by situating personal and social relationships within a wider, cosmic frame of reference. However, it may be limited in the sense that it would not necessarily apply to those outside of the Christian faith.

According to this "inductive" logic, the need for a wider frame of reference follows the argument that any breach in a relationship has broader implications than only for the two parties concerned. If such a breach has almost cosmic ramifications, the final resolution of such conflict has to take into account the widest possible scope of the problem. In this context, reconciliation between two individuals is only possible if the whole of that society is reconciled with itself. Ultimately, reconciliation between two people is possible only

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through reconciliation with God. In turn, this invites reflection on the cosmic scope of God's work of reconciliation. This would include not only human beings and human societies but the whole created order. In other words, everything is included in God's work of reconciliation in Christ. Reconciliation should, therefore, be understood in the context of both God's work of creation and salvation. What is at stake is the tension between Creator and the creature that has emerged because of captivity to the principalities and powers of this world (Colossians 1: 18-23). "God's cosmic reconciling activity precedes and provides the framework within which God's reconciliation of humanity occurs."[14] This "inductive" logic is most evident in the approach of the *Kairos Document* (1985).

Embedded in the "deductive" approach is the danger of using abstract theological language. Here more focus is placed on the church than on social needs. In other words, theological legitimacy is considered more important than social relevance. The "inductive" approach, on the other hand, is confronted with the danger of self-secularisation, of reducing the Christian confession to nothing more than an example of religious affiliation that may be tolerated as long as its particular claims are not foregrounded. The obvious danger is one of being socially relevant without having anything distinct to offer in response to the challenge that one may be confronted with.

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1.5 Research question

Against this background, this study investigates theological discourses in South Africa on the symbol of reconciliation published in the period from 1968 to 2010. It is abundantly clear from the available literature that "reconciliation" is understood in very different ways. I will identify, describe and assess the diverging ways in which this symbol was understood in the literature (ecclesial and academic publications) from this period.

On this basis, the problem that will be investigated may be formulated as follows:

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[14] De Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 53.

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> *How has the symbol of reconciliation been understood in Christian theological literature emanating from the South African context between 1968 and 2010?*

The formulation of the research problem calls for further clarification on a number of aspects:

The English word "atonement" originally meant "at-one-ment", i.e. being "at one" or in harmony with someone else. In the Christian context the word is used with reference to the saving work that God did through Christ enabling reconciliation between God and creation. In De Gruchy's words:

> Scripture and the Christian tradition employ a range of metaphors, symbols and words to express God's saving activity in the world. These reflect the rich and multifaceted character of redemption as experienced and understood by Jewish and Christian believers in a variety of changing historical contexts. 'Reconciliation' is one of the words used in English to describe this experience, though the word 'atonement' has often functioned as its equivalent in theological textbooks. But 'at-one-ment' is a peculiarly English construction coined to describe the reuniting of God and humanity through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. As such, atonement expresses but does not exhaust, the meaning of reconciliation. In Christian doctrine, the word 'reconciliation' carries a range of meaning and is used in two fundamental or primary ways. First of all to express the sum total of what Christians believe about God's saving work in Jesus Christ. As such it is the equivalent of the more comprehensive German *Versöhnung*, and is interchangeable with 'salvation', 'redemption', or 'atonement', each of which has been used to describe the doctrine. Partly for this reason we will sometimes use these metaphors in an interchangeable way to describe the doctrine as a whole. Yet each word gives the doctrine a particular emphasis and character, drawing on different biblical traditions and metaphors. This brings us to the second way in which the word

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is used, namely as the term derived chiefly from the letters of Paul to explicate the meaning of the doctrine.[15]

In this context, the term "reconciliation" may be used both as a theological term (the "reconciliation in Jesus Christ") and as a social term (the need for "national reconciliation"). This study will focus on literature where these are used in association with each other, thus excluding theological literature on theories of atonement without such associations and literature with a socio-political orientation with no overt reference to the religious interpretation of this symbol.

"Reconciliation" is not merely a concept or metaphor but also functions as a symbol with significant connotations. Like other religious symbols in South Africa, "reconciliation" plays a powerful role in the social construction of reality, including the social transformation of reality. However, as Dirkie Smit observed in 1986, the symbol of reconciliation is deeply tied up with ideological conflict in South Africa so that there is little agreement on the very meaning of the symbol of reconciliation itself. Also consider Smit's doubts over the potential of the symbol of reconciliation to transform society, since the term needs clarification, and the moment an idea needs to be clarified, it has already lost its power as a symbol. A symbol is precisely something that needs no explanation but is self-evident and immediately grips the imagination.[16] Because of this, people frequently find it necessary to speak of "true", "real" or "authentic" reconciliation, thereby implying that they reject some other kind of reconciliation, which may be considered "cheap" or "false". This study will focus on literature which is aimed at the South African context where these different, sometimes conflicting notions of "reconciliation" are discussed.

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[15] De Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 44-45.

[16] D. J. Smit, "The symbol of reconciliation and ideological conflict", In: W. S. Vorster (ed.), *Reconciliation and construction,* Pretoria: Unisa, 1986, 88; Doxtader makes a similar point in highlighting the contestability of reconciliation as a concept. See E. Doxtader, *With faith in the works of words: The beginnings of reconciliation in South Africa, 1985-1995,* Cape Town: David Philip, 2009, 2-4.

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This project will entail a historical survey on the basis of the relevant literature. Such literature would include publications of an explicitly theological nature in English or Afrikaans. It would not necessarily include Christian discourse on reconciliation in the form of popular literature, ecclesial magazines, sermons, speeches, newspaper articles or letters to the press. An investigation of the attitudes towards reconciliation among "lay" Christians in South Africa may be highly fascinating but will require empirical research that would go beyond the scope of this study. It will also not survey contributions in the field of African traditional religion or on theological reflections in the context of other religious traditions, such as Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism.

This study will focus on literature which was either published in South Africa itself or on publications which were authored by South African citizens. There is, of course, considerable interest in the South African discourse on reconciliation (and on the TRC) from outside the country. Literature from this perspective will be considered only if this is situated in explicit conversation with South African authors.

In this project, I will explore the different ways in which reconciliation has been understood since the publication of the *Message to the People of South Africa* (1968). While this is to some extent arbitrary, it does provide one of the clearest early markers of ecclesial discourse on reconciliation and therefore helps to demarcate the study. Of course, the *Message to the People of South Africa* cannot be understood apart from the events leading to that – which will be addressed in summary form.

In the aftermath of the proceedings of the TRC and the publication of its final reports, theological reflection on the relationship between reconciliation, justice, and restitution has continued unabated. Such theological literature typically seeks to come to terms with the legacy of the TRC. This study forms part of such theological discourse. In order to identify a suitable demarcation date the year in which this study was first envisaged (2010) is used as an again somewhat arbitrary terminus.

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In this study, I will identify, describe, contrast and analyse the different ways in which the symbol of reconciliation has been understood in the available theological literature. This study may, therefore, be understood as a form of contemporary history, in this case, the history of the interpretation of a controversial theological symbol. The study aims to clarify what was at stake in such controversies in South Africa. Such a study would be of ecumenical significance also beyond the South African context itself. It may also facilitate dialogue with notions of reconciliation in other religious traditions.

1.6 Methodological clarification

How has the symbol of reconciliation been understood in Christian theological literature emanating from the South African context between 1968 and 2010? The hypothesis investigated in this study is that one may identify at least three distinct discourses in response to this question. Firstly, there is an approach which may be described as "Justice through reconciliation in Jesus Christ". This approach assumes that the significance of reconciliation with God in Jesus Christ may be explored through a ministry of reconciliation in a divided social context. Such reconciliation will have far-reaching implications for social justice and therefore for restitution. This approach is evident especially in the *Message to the People of South Africa,* the *Belhar Confession*, the *National Initiative for Reconciliation*, and the current discourse on the legacy of the *Belhar Confession*. Rhetorically, this approach was aimed at apartheid theology and its assumptions about the fundamental irreconcilability of people.

Secondly, one may identify an approach which may be labelled "Justice and reconciliation after liberation". In this approach, the need for political, economic and cultural liberation is emphasised. It is assumed that social justice can only follow upon such liberation and that reconciliation is only possible on the basis of (following) justice. This approach is evident especially in the *Kairos Document*, in comments on reconciliation in the context of Black Theology and in critical engagements with the proceedings of the TRC from within the same discourse. It is still found in current forms of prophetic theology. Rhetorically,

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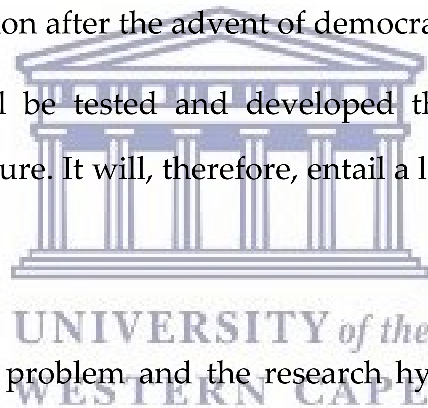
this approach was especially aimed against what the *Kairos Document* described as "church theology".

Thirdly, one may identify an approach where it is maintained that "Reconstruction requires national reconciliation". This approach only became evident after the negotiated settlement reached during the period from 1990 and 1994 in South Africa. This prompted the recognition of the need for a reconstruction of society and social development. However, this required the need for coming to terms with the apartheid past (including amnesty), for national reconciliation and nation building. This was expressed (and legitimised) theologically in diverse ways, including the emergence of a theology of reconstruction, but especially through engagements with the proceedings of the TRC. Rhetorically, this approach is aimed at calling for social and moral responsibility and against a privatisation of religion after the advent of democracy.

This research hypothesis will be tested and developed through a survey and critical analysis of the available literature. It will, therefore, entail a literature-based study.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1.7 Thesis outline

On the basis of this research problem and the research hypothesis as stated above, the following phases and corresponding chapters of the rest of this thesis are envisaged.

Chapter 2: The symbol of reconciliation in Christian theology: An overview

The symbol of reconciliation (or atonement) is a central tenet of the Christian faith. Its social significance has also been widely recognised. The aim of this chapter will be to offer a cursory survey of the ways in which reconciliation (in Christ) has been understood in the history of Christian theology. This obviously provides the background for South African discourse on reconciliation.

Given the enormous scope of the literature available in this regard, the aim cannot be to offer a comprehensive overview. Instead, the famous typology on atonement provided by

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Gustaf Aulén will be used as a point of departure to provide a history of the interpretation of "reconciliation" up to 1930 (the date when *Christus Victor* was published).[17] This will be supplemented by a general reception of Aulén's typology. In order to offer a survey of further historical developments on the symbol of reconciliation outside the South African context a number of South African contributions offering such a historical survey will be used. Although this may well lead to a one-sided survey, this approach will at least demonstrate how the historical background is perceived in the relevant literature.

Chapter 3: Justice through reconciliation in Jesus Christ

The aim of this chapter will be to describe and analyse a particular way in which the symbol of reconciliation has been understood in South African discourse, namely on the basis of an Anselmian, Lutheran and Calvinist notion that the reconciliation of humanity with God in Jesus Christ implies a ministry of reconciliation in a context divided by race, class, and culture and that this necessitates a concern for distributive and restorative justice.

This description and analysis will be done especially on the basis of literature regarding the *Message to the People of South Africa* (1968), the *Belhar Confession* (1982/1986) and the *National Initiative for Reconciliation* (1985).

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Chapter 4: Justice and reconciliation after liberation

The aim of this chapter is similar, namely to describe and analyse the way in which the symbol of reconciliation is understood in the context of liberation theology, in particular, Black Theology in South Africa. One may suggest that the question addressed here is how reconciliation between people relates to the victory established by Christ over the forces of death, destruction, and oppression. This also leads to a different notion of the relationship between justice and reconciliation.

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[17] G. Aulén, *Christus Victor: An historical study of the three main types of the idea of the atonement*, London: SPCK, 1931.

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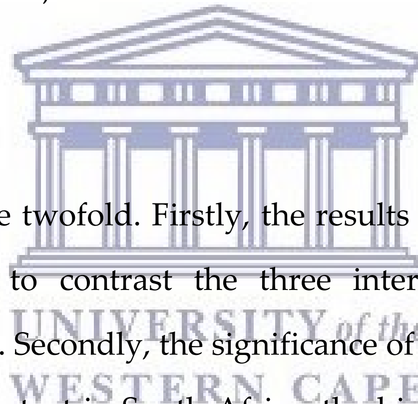
This description and analysis will be done especially on the basis of literature emerging from and responding to the *Kairos Document* (1985).

Chapter 5: Reconstruction requires national reconciliation

This chapter will follow a similar pattern, namely to describe and analyse the way in which the symbol of reconciliation has been understood amongst proponents of a theology of reconstruction and development, by those emphasising the need for national reconciliation and nation-building, by those recognising that the reconciliation is a necessary requirement for processes of social transformation and moral regeneration.

This description and analysis will be done especially on the basis of literature during the period of the transition to democracy (1990-1994) and in the ongoing theological discourse on nation-building, development, social transformation and moral regeneration reflected in the work of the TRC.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Chapter 6: Conclusion

The aim of this chapter will be twofold. Firstly, the results of the previous three chapters will be compared in order to contrast the three interpretations of the symbol of reconciliation identified above. Secondly, the significance of such findings will be explored with reference to the social context in South Africa, the history of Christian discourse on reconciliation, the wider ecumenical context, and dialogue between different stakeholders in South Africa.

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2. The symbol of reconciliation in Christian theology

2.1 Introduction

The symbol of reconciliation (or atonement) is a central tenet of the Christian faith. This view is of particular importance because essentially The Christian Gospel is about overcoming alienation and estrangement between God and humanity. In the light of this observation, the Christian tradition portrays Jesus Christ as the mediator of the broken covenant between God and humanity. Christian reflection on the work of Christ is traditionally discussed with reference to a theology of reconciliation. However, unlike the "person of Christ" in which the ecumenical councils formally stated their position, the question regarding Christ's work on reconciliation does not have a central ecumenical reference point. This makes it difficult to single out any one view as the traditional (Nicene) Orthodox position.[1] In this light, Christ's work on reconciliation has been understood in very different ways throughout the history of Christianity.

Given the enormous scope of the literature available the aim cannot be to offer a comprehensive overview. Instead, the famous typology developed by Gustaf Aulén will be used as a point of reference to provide a history of the interpretation of reconciliation up to 1930 (the date Aulén's *Christus Victor* was published).[2] In *Christus Victor*, Aulén deals with what he postulates as the three main "types" of Christ's work on reconciliation (or atonement). In Christologies developed during the twentieth century, Aulén's analysis of the three main views has become highly influential, although the details of his argument have often been criticised.

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1 See for instance J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian doctrines,* London: A & C Black, 1968, 163-164, 375.; O. Weber, *Foundations of dogmatics*, vol. 2, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983, 177-191.

2 The original Swedish title, *Den kristna försoningstanken* (The Christian Idea of the Atonement) was published in 1930 in the wake of his series of lectures that were delivered at Uppsala University that same year. The English translation appeared in 1931: *Christus Victor: An historical study of the three main types of the idea of the atonement*.

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In reviewing Aulén's analysis, I do not intend to engage in a thorough critique or comparison of the three theories he identified. Instead, the review is primarily intended as a soteriological map to engage with at least three different ways in which Christ's work of atonement may be understood as well as its implications for the discourse on reconciliation in South Africa. So while the review of Aulén's work is directly related to reconciliation in Christ, I appropriate these discussions to make them more fruitful for reconciliation within a pneumatological framework. In other words, this applies less to reconciliation in Christ, and more to implications of Christ's atoning work for the ministry of reconciliation in South Africa. I will also briefly sketch the history of this Christian doctrine as a background to the three main views that Aulén analysed.

2.2 Reconciliation in the Christian Tradition

This section entails a brief survey on a theology of reconciliation from the Old Testament to the post-Reformation period. I will briefly describe the views of some key theologians on reconciliation in Christ. This is done to outline the history of this Christian doctrine as a background to the three main views described in *Christus Victor*.

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2.2.1 The Old Testament

Offering some insight into the idea of reconciliation in the Old Testament, Carmel McCarthy remarks:

> There is in fact no single specific term in Hebrew or Aramaic to express the concept of reconciliation in the Old Testament, even though the underlying reality itself is caught in a variety of shades through terms such as 'shalom', 'atonement' and renewal of 'covenant'. Through many and varied images one of the connecting threads permeating very different Old Testament narratives, stories, psalms and laments is that the human condition is one of limitation and misunderstanding, alienation and estrangement. Not only is this the situation

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on the horizontal level in interpersonal relations of every kind, but the Bible makes it very clear that this situation is but symptomatic of a more fundamental disorder and estrangement between human beings and God.[3]

The term "covenant" as used in the Old Testament refers to the relationship between God and the people of Israel. The five major examples where the term is used include: Adam and Eve (Genesis 1: 26 - 2: 3), Noah and his family (Genesis 9: 8-17), Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 12: 1-3; 17: 1-14; 22: 16-18), Moses and the Israelites (Exodus 19: 5-6; 3: 4-10; 6: 7), and David and the Kingdom of Israel (2 Samuel 7: 8-19).[4] Although the word reconciliation is not used explicitly in these instances, McCarthy explains that its attributes are intrinsically present in covenantal discourses.[5]

Karl Barth goes as far as to say: "The covenant is the presupposition of reconciliation … The fellowship which originally existed between God and man, which was then disturbed and jeopardised, the purpose of which is now fulfilled in Jesus Christ and in the work of reconciliation." Barth explains that the exact meaning of the word covenant is unknown, but that it could have practical origins such as in circumcision and meal ceremonies. "It denotes an element in a legal ritual in which two partners together accept a mutual obligation."[6]

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De Gruchy makes a similar point in highlighting the connection between covenant in the Old Testament and the theology of reconciliation. Because humanity was created in the image of God, he explains, the whole of humankind shares an intimate link with one another while simultaneously existing under the umbrella of God's cosmic intention. This link is often solidified through the use of the term "covenant" in the Old Testament. De

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[3] C. McCarthy, "A Response [to Bible and Reconciliation]", In: M. Hurley (ed.), *Reconciliation in religion and society: Proceedings of a conference organised by the School of Ecumenics and University of Ulster*. Belfast: Institute for Irish Studies, 1994, 43.

[4] L. E. Robinson, "The influence of social context on a theology of reconciliation: Case studies in Northern Ireland", Unpublished PhD. Dissertation, The University of Edinburgh, 2011, 21.

[5] McCarthy, "A Response [to Bible and Reconciliation]", 43.

[6] K. Barth, *The doctrine of reconciliation*, trans. G.W. Bromiley, 2nd ed. London: Continuum Books, 2004, 24.

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Gruchy sees the theology of reconciliation as contingent on this understanding of creation because it explains the actual need, not just the desire, for humanity to be restored both to God and one another when they have been separated. This provides the interpretative framework for the Christian understanding of the mission and fate of Christ as God's anointed mediator of redemption, in and through whose life, death and resurrection, the power of evil, sin and death were overcome. "For those who shared in the renewal of the covenant in Christ through faith and baptism, reconciliation with God and life in the Spirit became a reality."[7]

2.2.2 The New Testament

In the New Testament the Greek word "reconciliation" or "reconcile" appear 15 times, and almost exclusively in the Pauline writings.[8] Paul uses the phrase in different forms throughout his texts: the noun καταλλαγγη, reconciliation (Romans 5: 11, 11: 15; 2 Corinthians 5: 18, 19); the verb α′ποκαταλασσω, to reconcile (Ephesians. 2: 16; Colossians 1: 20, 22); καταλασσω (Romans 5: 10; 1 Corinthians 7: 11; 2 Corinthians 5: 18, 19, 20); συναλασσω (Acts 7: 26); on occasion the word ει′ρηνη is translated reconciliation (Acts 12: 20).[9] The translation of these words is a compound of the Greek αφλλασσω, meaning "to exchange" and deriving from the word αλλοζ, meaning "the other". The words carry with them the sense of exchanging places with "the other", and therefore being in solidarity rather than being opposed to "the other".[10] Christoph Schwöbel observes that the classical Greek writers used this phrase as a metaphor for "exchanging enmity, wrath and war with friendship, love and peace."[11] This particular understanding of reconciliation offers some

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7 De Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 48-49.

8 C. P. DeYoung, "Reconciliation in the Empire: Real, Radical, Revolutionary", In: A. A. Boesak & C. P. DeYoung, *Radical reconciliation: Beyond political pietism and Christian quietism*, Maryknoll, NJ: Orbis Books, 2012, 11-12.

9 De Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 218.

10 De Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 51.

11 C. Schwöbel, "Reconciliation: From Biblical Observations to Dogmatic Reconstruction", In: C. E. Gunton (ed.), *The theology of reconciliation*, London: T & T Clark, 2003, 16.

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insights into how the Greek writers may have understood the passages in which Paul refers to such an exchange with the other. This applies to both the relationship with God and between individuals. Furthermore, in De Gruchy's words:

> Reconciliation literally has to do with the way in which God relates to us, the human 'other', and in turn with our relationship to 'the other', whether understood as an individual person or a group of people. It has to do with the process of overcoming alienation through identification and in solidarity with 'the other', thus making peace and restoring relationships. Reconciliation has to do, if we may put it colloquially, with God making us friends.[12]

This understanding of restored relationships is expanded upon those New Testament texts in which the terms reconciliation is found outside the Pauline Letters, the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5: 23-24: "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled [διαλλασσομαι] to your brother; then come and offer your gift."[13]

The Matthew text, as well as Paul's own teaching, highlights the importance of reconciliation as it relates to personal relationships. The main difference, however, is found in Paul extending the semantic range of the term. According to Paul reconciliation includes not only personal relationships but also connotes God being the subject or agent of reconciliation. In speaking about God in this way, Paul became the first Greek author to portray the person offended as the one who initiates the act or process of reconciliation. This approach differed significantly from other Hellenistic sources, cultures, and languages where reconciliation normally had to be initiated by the person responsible for the alienation and hostility.[14]

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12 De Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 51.

13 Matthew 5: 23-24, New International Version.

14 De Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 52.

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In more general terms, Paul's teaching offers significant insight into the way the term reconciliation is used in the New Testament. Ralph Martin has gone as far to suggest that reconciliation is the overall theme of Paul's theology.[15] This is motivated not by the number of times Paul uses the term but rather in the way it represents the whole of his missionary work. In Martin's words: "Reconciliation provides a suitable umbrella under which the main features of Paul's *kerygma* and its practical outworking may be set."[16] The varied ways in which Paul's understanding of reconciliation develops is observed in the way he uses the term to address different issues and needs in varied contexts.

In 2 Corinthians, for example, Paul links the gospel of reconciliation to the new creation in Christ, the righteousness of God and the mission of the Church.[17] The background to the text revolves around Paul's rejection by the Christian community in Corinth who questioned his authority and motives in writing to them. In responding to this situation, Paul makes use of language that is clearly intended to bring about reconciliation. The words of reconciliation, Erik Doxtader adds, "afford Paul the vocabulary needed to invite his audience to enter the Word of reconciliation."[18] In doing so, De Gruchy adds, Paul, extends the semantic range of the term by connecting the divine act of reconciliation in Christ with the human appropriation of the act.[19]

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The use of reconciliation in Colossians is somewhat different to that found in 2 Corinthians. Here the background revolves around Paul's acute sense of disorder in which the world is portrayed as being held captive by "principalities and the powers of this world". Whatever these cosmic powers may be, these powers are brought under God's

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15 R. M. Martin, "Center of Paul's Theology", In: G. F. Hawthrone, R. M. Martin and D. G. Reid (eds.), *Dictionary of Paul and his letters* , Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993, 94.

16 Martin, "Center of Paul's Theology", 94.

17 R. M. Martin, *Reconciliation: A study of Paul's theology*, Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981, 81.

18 E. Doxtader, "Reconciliation in a state of emergency: The middle voice of 2 Corinthians", *Journal of the Study of Religion* 14(1), 2001, 57.

19 De Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 53.

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control, to the extent that there is now no more hostility and alienation between the Creator and creation. Thus:

> The world is not at the mercy of fate, a world in cosmic free-fall, but one that has been reconciled to God through Christ. As a result, Christians have no need to engage in vain speculation, but rather to live a life that matches up to their reconciliation in Christ. Not only humanity, but the whole created cosmos is included in God's act of reconciliation in Christ, thereby linking redemption and creation.[20]

God's cosmic reconciling activity thus provides the framework within which God's reconciliation of humanity occurs.

In Paul's letter to the Romans, reconciliation is derived from Christ's work of expiation through which humanity is justified by faith. De Gruchy mentions that justification is a key metaphor in Paul's theology, and also that much has been done in order to determine the relationship between justification and reconciliation. He explains that:

> One way of doing so is to argue that whereas justification is interpreted 'in terms of the legal character of the Old Testament covenant of God (Rom. 3. 2-6)' reconciliation is understood 'in terms of the Old Testament covenant of God as electing love (cf. Rom. 9. 11 13; Col. 3. 12)'. Justification is about the expiation of sin; the justification by grace through faith of the sinner before God … reconciliation is God's overcoming estrangement and establishing a new relationship not just with individuals who come to faith, but also with the world in all its complex relationships.[21]

Martin suggests that Paul's use of reconciliation in Romans shifts the focus of Christ's redeeming work from a forensic-cultic idiom of individual guilt, justification, and acquittal

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[20] De Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 53.

[21] De Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 54.

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to a universal, personal and inclusive understanding.[22] Reconciliation thus becomes more than just a theological term for God restoring men and women to himself. Moreover, it refers to a way of life in which Christians are called in the world, sharing in God's work of reconciliation. Thus:

> Just as Paul anchored reconciliation in the historical events of Jesus' passion, so he tied it to the ethical transformation of historical and material conditions. Reconciliation has to do with the breaking down of the walls of enmity that separate Jews and Gentiles, men and women, masters and slaves, thereby creating the conditions on which harmonious relations can be established.[23]

In summary, Paul's reconciliation is grounded in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as well as the life and the mission of the Church. That is, to proclaim the gospel of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5: 11-20) and the eschatological hope of God's restoration and renewal of the whole creation. This includes the ethical responsibility of the Church in the world. The question of how the doctrine of reconciliation has been conceived and constructed in the course of Christian history thus becomes important.

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2.2.3 The early Church Fathers

Irenaeus (130-202 C.E.) postulates that human history is completely subject to the powers of evil. Humanity is enslaved by the powers of darkness and that redemption implies freedom from these evil powers. Furthermore, humanity is unable to compete with these evil powers and is therefore left fully dependent on God. Irenaeus develops this idea further by introducing the notion of Christ's total identification with humankind through his life, death, and resurrection. This is done through asking: "For what purpose did

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22 Martin, *Reconciliation*, 154

23 De Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 55.

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Christ come down from heaven?"[24] Irenaeus begins with the sin of Adam and Satan's continued power over humanity and end with Christ's deliverance of humankind from sin and reclaiming of God's rightful place as ruler of earth.[25] In other words, what humanity lost in Adam, namely, being in the image and likeness of God, is regained in and through Christ.[26] Velli-Matti Kärkkäinen further suggests that the parallels between Adam and Christ are crucial for Irenaeus. "Whereas the former was the beginning of disobedient humanity, the latter brings about redeemed and renewed humanity, thus helping to perfect the image of God."[27] Irenaeus thus anticipates the ransom theory of atonement.

For Clement (150-215 C.E.), if Christ laid down his life for the sake of humanity, a life worth no less than the universe, then Christ demands of humanity, in return, that they offer their lives on behalf of each other.[28] Clement, it may be said, pre-empted the later "moral influence" theory of Abelard.

For Tertullian (160-220 C.E.), it was seemingly illogical that humanity should have forgiveness of sins without any payment in exchange.[29] Later Cyprian (200-258 C.E.) seized upon this idea and developed the understanding of God's wrath as satisfied through the "overplus of merit earned by Christ."[30] Along with the idea of heavenly salvation, the notion of atonement through "satisfaction" is continued on the earthly stage, highlights Cyprian, in the way of "works of righteousness" through the Church.[31] At a later stage, the

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24 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book II, 14.7, trans. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut, The Fathers of the Church Database, Online: http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103214.htm [Accessed 1 October 2014].

25 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book II, 18.7, trans. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut, The Fathers of the Church Database, Online: http://www.newsadvent.org/fathers/0103214.htm [Accessed 1 October 2014].

26 J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian doctrines*. 2nd Ed. San Francisco: Harper, 1960, 375-376.

27 V-M. Kärkkäinen, *Christ and reconciliation: A constructive Christian theology for the pluralistic world*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013, 300.

28 J. K. Mozley, *The doctrine of the atonement*, London: Gerald Duckworth, 1953, 95.

29 Tertullian, *Concerning the resurrection of the flesh*, trans. A. Souter, London: SPCK, 1922, 20-23.

30 J. M. Lochman, *Reconciliation and liberation*, Belfast: Christian Journals Limited, 1980, 88-89.

31 Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatises*, 8.5, trans. Robert Ernest Wallis, The Fathers of the Church Database, Online: http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/050708.htm [Accessed 1 October 2014].

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term "satisfaction" became a keyword in characterising what became the Anselmian position of the atonement.

The views of Tertullian and Cyprian paved the way for later developments of the Latin theory, as was seen in the views of Gregory the Great (540-604 C.E.) and Augustine (324-430 C.E.). Gregory rejected the idea that a ransom was paid to Satan or God. According to Gregory, the Devil simply did not have the authority to demand a ransom consisting of Godself. He also found it inconceivable that God would find satisfaction in the blood of his only Son. The truth is, God accepted the ransom not because God demanded it, or even needed it, "but because in the economy of redemption it was fitting that sanctification should be restored to human nature through the humanity which [Christ] had assumed."[32] Gregory later went on to detail this substitution by highlighting human sin as needing an equal human sacrifice in order to receive God's forgiveness.[33] The notion of "sacrifice" went on to play a major role in Gregory's view of atonement.[34]

For Augustine, God justly committed humanity to the power of the Devil when Adam sinned. He contends, however, that the Devil overextended his reach when he accepted Christ's innocent blood as a ransom for the sinfulness of humanity. As a penalty for abusing his power, the Devil is required to deliver up humanity who because of their sinfulness was in bondage to him. For example, Augustine speaks of Christ's blood as the price which was paid over for humanity and which the Devil accepted, only to find himself enchained, and again of Christ's body as bait by which Satan was caught like a mouse in a trap.[35] Augustine's view can be summarised as follows: (i) Satan owned no

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32 Kelly, *Early Christian doctrines*, 383-384.

33 Gregory the Great, Morals on the Book of Job, 17.46, trans. Unknown, Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1844, Online: http://www.lectionarycentral.com/GregoryMoraliaIndex.html [Accessed 1 October 2014].

34 It was Gregory who used the (in)famous image of God paying the ransom through deceiving the Devil with the trickery of a fish hook. Hidden under human nature was Christ's deity, which the Devil devoured as a bait and thus helped destroy his own power. Well aware of the potential objections such rhetoric, Gregory defended the divine deception by reminding his readers that it was just recompense because of the Devil's own deceitful nature. See Kärkkäinen, *Christ and reconciliation*, 302.

35 Kelly, *Early Christian doctrines*, 391.

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rights, in the strict sense, over humankind; what happened was that, when humans sinned, they passed inevitably into his power, and God permitted rather than enjoined this; (ii) No ransom as such was therefore due to the Devil, but on the contrary, when the remission of sins was procured by Christ's sacrifice, God's favour was restored and humanity might well have been freed; (iii) God preferred, however, as a course more consonant with his justice, that the Devil should not be deprived of his dominion by force, but as the penalty for abusing his position; (iv) Hence Christ's passion, the primary object of which was of course quite different, placed the Son of God in Satan's hands, and when the latter overreached himself seizing the divine prey, with the arrogance and greed which were characteristic of the Devil, he was justly constrained, as a penalty, to deliver up humankind.[36] Augustine thus represents the release of humanity from the power of the Devil as consequent upon and as presupposing their reconciliation to God. The Devil is conquered precisely because God has received satisfaction and has bestowed pardon. For Augustine, the emancipation from the Devil is regarded as a consequence of, and thus subordinate to, the reconciliation itself. The essence of the redemption lies in an expiatory sacrifice offered for humanity by Christ in His passion.[37]

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Augustine also stressed the importance of the exemplary aspect of Christ's work. He argues that both in His person and what He had done, Christ, the mediator, has demonstrated God's wisdom and love. The spectacle of such love should have the effect of inducing humanity to love Him in return. More particularly, it should inspire humanity to adore the humility of God which, as revealed in the incarnation, breaks human pride. So for Augustine, the humility of the Word revealed in His amazing self-abasement forms a vital part of Christ's saving work.[38] In this way, Augustine anticipated both the "ransom" as well as the "moral influence" view of atonement.

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[36] Kelly, *Early Christian doctrines*, 392.

[37] Augustine, *Contra Faustum* 14.4, trans. Richard Stothert, The Fathers of the Church Database, Online: http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/140614.htm [Accessed on 1 October 2014].

[38] Kelly, *Early Christian doctrines*, 383-384

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Hilary of Poitiers (315-367 C.E.), regards the death of Christ as a classic example of an innocent sufferer, paying the penalty of sins he had not committed. Hilary thereby introduced the thought of penal substitution which was later to occupy the sixteenth and seventeenth-century reformers.

It is Origen (185-254 C.E.), who is credited with being the first Christian theologian to advance the "ransom theory" of atonement explicitly. In his view, the death of Christ is a ransom paid to the Devil in exchange for human souls, forfeited on account of sin. For Origen, when Christ offered his soul as a ransom for human souls, the Devil could not withstand its perfect purity – having found it hazardous to enslave Christ's soul. Origen further asserts that the Devil was deceived into believing that he could overcome Christ. However, the Devil later realised he could not bear the torment of holding Christ.[39] Gregory of Nyasa (335-395 C.E.) seized and further developed Origen's view of atonement.[40]

This very brief overview suggests that at least, the "ransom" and "moral influence" view of atonement emerged during this period. It should be noted that nearly all of the Church Fathers, including Justin, Athanasius and Augustine taught substitutionary atonement. However, specific interpretations of the meaning of the death of Christ differ. Athanasius and Augustine taught that through Christ's suffering on behalf of humanity, he overcame and liberated them from death and Satan. It was particularly Augustine's teaching that continued to be influential during the medieval period.

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2.2.4 The Medieval period

Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109 C.E.), rejected Augustine's view of the ransom view and proposed an entirely different model. Through Anselm, the satisfaction view first came together as coherent doctrine. This view is articulated in his famous *Cur Deus Homo* (Why

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[39] Kelly, *Early Christian doctrines*, 382.

[40] Mozley, *The doctrine of the atonement*, 109.

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did God become human?). The more common ransom view of the atonement held that Jesus died and thereby paid a ransom to the Devil, allowing God to rescue those under his bondage. For Anselm this solution was inadequate. He, therefore, began his research by examining the idea of sin and the implications thereof on humanity's relationship with God. Anselm concluded that sin was a direct dishonouring of God, a betrayal of the Creator by humanity, not a cosmic battle between God and the Devil. He concluded that humankind owed God a debt of honour. For Anselm, the owing of this debt created an imbalance in the moral universe and could not be satisfied by God simply ignoring it. The rebellion of sin required repayment, for if left unpunished it would create permanent disorder in the world that God has created.[41] Anselm thus concluded that the only possible way of repaying this debt was if a being of infinite greatness could act as a human being on behalf of humankind in order to repay a debt of honour owed to God. In this light, Jesus' death is seen not as a payment to the Devil but to God, His Father. Anselm did not specifically state whether Jesus' payment of the debt was for all of humanity or individuals. However, his rhetoric does indicate a stronger disposition for the former.[42] Later, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 C.E.) expressly attributes the scope of the atonement to be universal in nature. Aquinas further argued that Christ's death satisfies the penalty owed by sin and that Christ's passion was specifically needed to pay the debt of the sin of humanity.[43]

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Peter Abelard (1079-1142 C.E.), offered a radical revision of the interpretation of the atonement. Abelard response is a critique of the Anselmian view. Abelard's understanding of atonement was focused not on human rebellion or God's anger, but rather on the loving nature of God. In his view, humanity is sinful, but this does not

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41 Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, trans. A Clergyman, Oxford and London: John Henry and James Parker, 1858, 11-3.

42 For a helpful guide on this discussion, see J. Hopkins, *A Companion to the study of St. Anselm*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1971, 187-214.

43 Kärkkäinen, *Christ and reconciliation*, 305.

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prevent God from caring for creation.[44] He thus rejected both the ransom theory, contending that Christ had come to pay a debt to the Devil, and Anselm's theory that Christ had come to pay a debt to God. For Abelard, it is rather the plenitude of God's love that Jesus exhibited, and this love was ultimately expressed in Jesus' death. Jesus' death and innocent suffering offer a grand model to follow and help orient the will and love of humanity in the right direction. Abelard's position was later labelled as the "moral influence view".[45]

2.2.5 The Reformation Period

The Protestant Reformation saw the many of the "Reformers" reject Abelard's moral influence theory in favour of Anselm's satisfaction theory.[46] The Reformers, particularly Martin Luther (1483-1546 C.E.) and John Calvin (1509-1564 C.E.), appreciated the Anselmian tradition and they used this to develop this particular view of atonement even further. The Reformers' view is often labelled the "penal substitution" view, which implies its Anselmian basis coupled with the need for a sacrificial-expiatory death on the cross as a way to deal with the condemned humanity's lot because of sin. Furthermore, they agree

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[44] Peter Abelard, *Ethics: Book I*, trans. P. V. Spade, Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995, 37-38.

[45] Kärkkäinen mentions that: "This view of atonement was embraced by various later movements and thinkers who rejected the whole idea of vicarious satisfaction or penalty such as the Unitarian Socinians of the sixteenth century. Faustus and Laelius Socinus focused on the prophetic ministry of the early days of Jesus and highlighted his humanity. The Enlightenment thinkers found much to commend in the Moral Example view. It fit[s] well with Immanuel Kant's idea of Jesus as the moral ideal and our duty as human beings to "elevate ourselves to this ideal of moral perfection." Liberal Protestants, similarly, considered this interpretation appealing, as evident in Schleiermacher's theology. While Schleiermacher's view often resembles the patristic position in highlighting the importance of the incarnation, the example motif seems to stand at the forefront. Another Liberal, Albert Ritschl, opposes vocally any notion of penal satisfaction even though he regards the death of Christ as the foundation for the establishment of God's kingdom. One of the most influential defenders of the Moral Example views in the early twentieth century is Hastings Rashdall, who speaks of the "moral ideal which Christ taught by His words, and illustrated by His life and death of love," the only "ideal given among men by which we may be saved". See Kärkkäinen, *Christ and reconciliation*, 304-305.

[46] The "Reformers" in this context refer primarily to Martin Luther and John Calvin. But much could be said for others also considered Reformers. What is presented here as the Reformation period on the atonement also reflects theological development beyond the time of the first and second generation of Reformers. In other words, I am also reflecting on the insights of the Reformed Scholastics.

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with Anselm that the atonement was dependent upon God's initiative. Moreover, that the God-human is the only one who could make atonement. However, they recognise that God did not have to save fallen creation, but once God had committed to doing so, the death of Christ on the cross was the only way to do this. In this context, Christ's death perfectly satisfied the justice of God.

The one area where the Reformers reframed the discussion was by changing the language of sin as an insult to God's honour to sin as the breaking of God's law. Herewith they stressed the guilt that results from the transgressing of the law. They also avoided Anselm's dilemma of the atonement using either satisfaction or punishment by pointing to the biblical teaching that Christ was a penal-substitute for or representative of humanity. Here Anselm's understanding of the satisfaction view should be distinguished from the penal substitution of the Reformers. Both are forms of satisfaction because both refer to the notion that Christ's death was satisfactory. However, Anselm's satisfaction and the Reformers' penal substitution offer different understandings of how Christ's death was satisfactory. For example, Anselm refers to humanity's sinfulness as defrauding God of the honour due to Him. Christ's death, therefore, is seen as the ultimate act of obedience, an act that brings great honour to God because it goes beyond what was required from Christ. Christ gave more than what he was obliged to give. The merit of Christ's act and the surplus achieved from it is, therefore, enough to repay humanity's deficit. It is for this reason that Christ's death is seen as substitutionary; he pays honour to God instead of humanity. Penal substitution, on the other hand, differs because it views Christ's death not as repayment to God for lost honour but rather as paying the penalty of death that had always been the consequence of human sinfulness that was started with Adam. The main difference here is that for Anselm, satisfaction is an alternative for punishment whereas with the Reformers it is the punishment that which satisfies the demands for justice. The classical statement of Luther on the atonement is found in his commentary on Galatians 3: 13. There he insists that Christ was the most cursed of all sinners, seeing that he assumed in his body the sins humanity had committed, to render satisfaction for them by his blood.

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Through the notion of penal substitution, this expression by Luther already indicates a shift from the understanding of the atonement offered by Anselm. However, it is evident that Luther was uncomfortable with the word "satisfaction" as it relates to the death of Christ.

Calvin also reflected on the atonement in two important chapters of the *Institutes*.[47] From this flowed the work of redemption, wherein hatred cannot be denied a place in God's just vengeance on sinful humanity. However, the most distinct aspect of his contribution on atonement involved the idea of election. For Calvin, Christ through his death on the cross did not pay a general penalty for the sins of humanity but suffered a specific penalty for the sins of individuals. This implies that Christ's atonement is limited in its effect only to those whom God has chosen to be saved. Here Calvin draws on Augustine's work on predestination to construct his theory.

Calvin shifted from the idea of Aquinas that satisfaction was penance (which focused on satisfaction) to the idea of satisfying God's wrath, which is propitiated through Christ's death. Like Luther, Calvin also understood the atonement and satisfaction in terms of penal substitution, that is, Christ has borne our punishment through his death. For Calvin, Christ satisfied the demands of justice and appeasing God's wrath in order for God to justly show grace. Calvin employs the language of sacrifice to explain the "how" behind the punishment. Calvin's theory of atonement was affirmed at the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619 C.E.).

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2.2.6 The post-Reformation period

The post-Reformation period debates on atonement were mainly in response to the satisfaction and punishment theories represented by Anselm and Calvin respectively. These theories represented the two widely accepted notions of Western Christianity. The

[47] See D. F. Wright, "The atonement in Reformation theology", *European Journal of Theology* 8(1), 1999, 37-48, for a detailed investigation of all Reformation views, including the Catholic, with a focus on Calvin.

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advocates of these views maintained that Christ died on the cross as a substitute for sinners. Christ did this in full payment for sins, which satisfied the righteousness of God. This was done in order for sinners to be forgiven without compromising God's own righteousness. The sacrifice of Christ could thus be said to have satisfied divine justice.

The key distinction between Anselm and Calvin is that for Anselm satisfaction implies an alternative to punishment. The honour that was compromised must be repaid, or punishment should follow. Humanity avoids punishment through Christ satisfying their debt of honour to God. For Calvin it is the punishment which satisfies the demands of justice; thus he offers a specific explanation for the death of Christ rooted in the notion of substitutionary atonement.

While the idea of substitutionary atonement is prevalent in nearly all atonement theories, the specific idea of penal substitution became dominant only within the Latin Church. Nevertheless, the Reformers' view of penal substitution soon gave rise to opposition. They experienced the first but less important opposition in Germany, among others in the eighteenth-century writings of G. S. Steinbart, I. G. Tollner, G. F. Seiler, and K. G. Bretschneider.[48]

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The most significant opposition occurred during the period of the European Enlightenment where there was a shift to a focus on a rational, human-centred version of reality. Taking the philosophical concepts of the Enlightenment used by Immanuel Kant, René Descartes, and others, the theologians of the nineteenth century looked to find a more relational understanding of the atonement. With the advent of this modernist worldview, critical approaches were adopted towards theories of the atonement, which included transcendent elements. Some of the transcendent elements that were rejected include the idea of a sacrifice that had some impact upon God, Christ dying in order to pay some penalty or of satisfaction required due to sin. In essence, the facets of the Enlightenment's notion of atonement can be summarised as follows: Firstly, the cross has

48 A. E. McGrath, *Christian theology: An introduction*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994, 409.

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no transcendent reference or value; its value relates directly to its impact upon humanity. Thus the cross represents a "sacrifice" only in as far as that it represents Christ offering his life. Secondly, the person who died on the cross was a human being, and the impact of that death is exerted upon other human beings alone. That impact takes on the form of inspiration and encouragement to model the moral example Jesus Christ set for human beings. Thirdly, the most important aspect of the cross is that it demonstrates the love of God for humanity. These approaches became enormously influential in rationalist circles throughout nineteenth-century Europe. Together with this the model of a martyr, rather than a saviour, describes the attitude increasingly adopted towards Jesus within such circles.

Arguably the most significant challenge to the rationalist approach to the crucifixion was expressed by Friedrich Schleiermacher.[49] Schleiermacher appealed for a religious as opposed to a purely moral understanding to Christ's death. In his view Christ did not die to create or endorse a moral system; rather he came so that the supremacy of a consciousness of God could be established in humanity. Schleiermacher's ideas, however, ultimately proved to be capable of being assimilated within a purely exemplarist understanding rather than posing a coherent challenge to that reductionist moralistic notion. In England, the most significant contribution to the exemplarist approach came from Hastings Rashdall in his 1915 Bampton Lectures.[50]

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This brief overview indicates that there are several views on the atonement. These views are often nuanced. However, for clarity and brevity, I will discuss only the three main views as discussed by Gustaf Aulén in his 1931 monograph *Christus Victor*.

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[49] F. Schleiermacher, *The Christian faith*, trans. J. Y. Campbell, H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (eds.), English translation of the 2nd ed., 1821, repr., Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928.

[50] McGrath, *Christian theology*, 409.

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2.3 The three main views of atonement: An overview of Aulén's *Christus Victor*

In this section, I provide some background information on Gustaf Aulén. This will be followed by a summary on the work of Christ that Aulén analysed in *Christus Victor*. The discussion will follow the structure of his analysis.

2.3.1 Background

Gustaf Emmanuel Hildebrand Aulén (1979-1977 C.E.) was Bishop of Strängnäs in the Church of Sweden, a theologian and author of *Christus Victor: A Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement,* first published in 1930 (English translation in 1931). From 1889 to 1915 Aulén was a student of Philosophy and Theology at Uppsala University and received the degree of Doctor of Theology in 1915. He began his academic career as a lecturer in Christian Dogmatics at Uppsala University in 1910 and later occupied the position Professor of Systematic Theology at Lund University in 1913. Aulén was the president of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music from 1944 to 1950. As an avid music composer, he generously contributed to the Swedish hymnbook. Aulén was the author of several books and articles including his most famous work *Christus Victor*, which still exerts considerable influence on contemporary theological discussions on the atonement.

In *Christus Victor,* Aulén distinguishes between what he identifies as the three main types of atonement. First, he highlights the "classic" type (drawing especially on Irenaeus) in which Christ's victory over the powers of evil is emphasised. Second, the "Latin" or Anselmian type in which Christ's satisfaction for guilt incurred by humanity is the focal point. And third, the "subjective" type which draws on Abelard's subjective appropriation of Christ's atonement.[51] Aulén compares and contrasts the three main atonement theories around four key areas, namely sin, salvation, God and reconciliation.

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[51] The names of the different models of atonement identified by Aulén are used in the following manner: the terms are used interchangeably; this, only as it relates to a specific model: First, referring to the

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2.3.2 The Ransom view (*Christus Victor* or classic theory)

The first model Aulén analyses is what he calls the *Christus Victor* view of atonement. This was established by the early Church Fathers, and it centres on the vivid imagery and mythology in much of the New Testament. For Aulén the Christus Victor view of atonement is rooted in the idea of divine conflict and victory. Christ, the victor, battles against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the "tyrants" under whom humankind is in bondage. These evil powers that hold humanity in bondage serve as the executants of God's will.[52] Through Christ's decisive victory God reconciles the world to himself. However, the redeeming work of Christ for humankind is not found in any sort of rational settlement, but in a "drama" in which a decisive event occurs that fundamentally alters the relation between God and humanity.[53]

In what Aulén describes as the "classic" idea of the atonement, sin is depicted as an objective power lurking behind humankind. In his view, the atonement of Christ entails God's triumph over sin, death, and the Devil.[54] Salvation, as it is defined, is a comprehensive term, which highlights humanity's new relation with God. This idea of salvation maintains that Christ gained victory once for all, and also that this victory is continuing in the work of the Holy Spirit. The victory of Christ is a present as well as historical reality. Justification and atonement thus become one. God's love prevails over the curse of sin and death. Justification is simply the atonement brought into the present; thus there is a close and inseparable connection between the incarnation and the atonement. Aulén contends that because salvation is understood in terms of a divine

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"Ransom theory", Aulén also uses the notions such as *Christus Victor*, "dramatic" or "classic" approach to describe the model inspired by Irenaeus. Second, referring to the "Satisfaction theory", he also uses the notions of such as the "Latin" or "objective" view to describe the model inspired by Anselm. Third, when referring to "Subjective theory", he also uses notions such as "moral influence" (or exemplary) to describe the model inspired by Abelard.

52 This is linked to the view (see section of the early Church Fathers above) that God justly committed humanity to the power of the Devil when Adam sinned.

53 Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 4.

54 Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 22-28.

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victory, the incarnation is the necessary presupposition of the atonement. In this context, the atonement completes the incarnation.[55]

For Aulén, Patristic theology is dualistic in its nature. However, this dualism is not absolute. In the classic approach, God is depicted as intervening in conflict with evil on the stage of history. Yet, at the same time, God is also the all-ruler, the Sovereign. The hostile powers which hold humanity in bondage also serve as the executants of God's will, thus within divine control. The deliverance of humankind from the power of death and evil at the same time implies humankind's deliverance from God's judgment. Through the incarnation and death of Christ, God has taken away the evil forces' powers to harm humankind. Thus, God through Christ has overcome sin, evil and death and has reconciled humankind to himself.[56]

Irenaeus, according to Aulén, was the earliest Church father to provide a clear and comprehensive doctrine of atonement and redemption. Unlike some of the smaller writings of the Apostolic Fathers as well as the Apologists who treat the atonement in a relatively incidental way, Irenaeus' approach differed much mainly because in his work the idea of the atonement recurs on a continual basis. In Aulén's words, "[Irenaeus'] basic idea [of the atonement] is in itself thoroughly clear and unmistakable … [marking] out a track which succeeding generations were to follow. [Thus] we may, then, feel satisfied that we have found in Irenaeus our true starting point."[57]

According to Aulén, the inseparability of the atonement and the incarnation is a central feature in Irenaeus' articulation of the doctrine. In this context, the question posed by Irenaeus: "For what purpose did Christ come down from heaven?" becomes important.[58] Aulén contends the purpose of the incarnation is linked to Irenaeus' view that reflects God

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55 Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 28-34.

56 Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 145-158.

57 Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 17.

58 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book II, 14.7, trans. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut, The Fathers of the Church Database, Online: http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103214.htm [Accessed on 7 October 2014].

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in Christ coming down from heaven so "that he might destroy sin, overcome death, and give life to [humanity]".[59] Here the work of Christ is first and foremost a victory over the powers which hold humankind in bondage: this includes sin, death and the Devil. The incarnation, therefore, is a necessary preliminary component of Christ's atoning work. In this sense, there is no trace of the separation between the incarnation and atonement which, as Aulén argues, may be the case with the Latin theory.[60]

For Aulén the divine victory accomplished in Christ stands at the centre of Irenaeus' thought. He contends that this is an essential element in Irenaeus' conception of *recapitulatio* (the restoring and the perfecting of the creation). As well as this being the most comprehensive theological idea presented by Irenaeus. In this context, Irenaeus' recapitulation does not end with the triumph of Christ over the enemies which had held humanity in bondage but continues in the work of the Spirit in the church. This also includes the recapitulation that is not realised in this life; that which is eschatological in nature.[61]

The role of sin, death and the Devil is noted as important in Irenaeus' view of the atonement. Aulén suggests that Irenaeus was opposed to a moralistic view, which would have no other meaning for sin than as separate and individual acts of sin. On the contrary, Irenaeus thinks of sin as affecting the whole of humanity. Sin is from one point of view an objective power under which humanity is in bondage and is not able to set itself free. Moreover, from another perspective, it is something voluntary and wilful, which makes humanity debtors in relation to God. Because of this sinfulness humankind is deemed guilty in the sight of God and it is for this reason that fellowship with God is lost. This enmity between humanity and God for Irenaeus could only be taken away through

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59 Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 19.

60 Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 21.

61 On this point Aulén notes that: "Irenaeus' outlook is strongly eschatological, and the gift of the Spirit in this life is for him the earnest of future glory." See Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 21-22.

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atonement, a *reconciliatio*. Through atonement, the enmity created by the sin of humankind is abolished by God.[62]

According to Aulén, sin and death are inseparably associated in Irenaeus. Death is not merely associated with mortality and the loss of immortality. For Irenaeus, sinfulness is regarded as rebelling against God, and rebelling against God in this context essentially means death. It is for this reason that Aulén points to Irenaeus' interchangeable use of the concepts of sin and death. Thus, when Irenaeus speaks of salvation from death, his thought includes the idea of salvation from the state of sin. This way of thinking, Aulén suggests, is not unique to Irenaeus but, "had already found its full and clear expression in the New Testament, particularly in the Pauline and Johannine epistles, where we find the most definite statements that salvation is life, in direct connection with the thought of Christ as Victor over sin and over death. In fact, the teaching that salvation is the bestowal of life holds the secret of the note of triumph which is characteristic of the Apostolic Christianity." [63]

Aulén also discusses the close connection between the Devil and Irenaeus's thought on sin and death. For Aulén, Irenaeus considers the Devil to be the lord of sin and death. Through deception, humanity has fallen under the Devil's power. In this context humanity is unable escape the Devil's dominion, except through the victory of Christ. This victory, Aulén claims, is especially a victory over the Devil and by implication also sin and death.[64]

On the actual accomplishment of the work of atonement, Aulén observes that Irenaeus "traces a continuous line from the incarnation through the entire earthly life of Christ, and His death, to His resurrection and exaltation, and that no one point in this line claims anything like an exclusive emphasis."[65] In his view, Irenaeus appears to be free from the tendency which became common in theologies that appeared later. Some of these

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[62] Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 23-24.

[63] Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 25.

[64] Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 26.

[65] Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 28.

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theologies tended to emphasise the death of Christ in such a way that it would basically ignore the rest of his earthly life. Irenaeus, Aulén argues, attached much significance to the obedience of Christ throughout his life on earth. Irenaeus showed how disobedience of the one man, which inaugurated the reign of sin, is answered by the one man who brought life. Through this obedience Christ "recapitulated" and annulled disobedience. Obedience thus became the means of Christ's victory, annulling "the ancient disobedience that was committed at the tree."[66]

According to Aulén the use of biblical images is another significant feature of Irenaeus' view of atonement. Irenaeus, Aulén asserts, had a special fondness for the image of ransom. This ransom is always paid to the powers of evil, or to the Devil. Through the paying of a ransom the Devil is overcome and his evil power over humanity is effectively brought to an end. For Aulén this is a particularly important aspect of Irenaeus, mainly because once the atonement had taken place a new relation between God and the world was established. In other words, God delivered humankind from the powers of evil, and through this reconciled the world to himself. At this focal point, God is seen to be both the reconciler and the reconciled.[67]

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Aulén observes that the death of Christ is not an isolated occurrence in Irenaeus. Rather, "it is a death seen in connection, on one hand, with the life-work of Christ as a whole, and on the other with the Resurrection and the Ascension; the death irradiated with the light of Easter and Pentecost". Therefore, for Irenaeus, as Aulén further states, resurrection is "first of all the manifestation of the decisive victory over the powers of evil which was won on the cross; it is also the starting point for the new dispensation, for the gift of the Spirit, for the continuation of the work of God in the souls of [humanity] 'for the unity and communion of God and man'."[68]

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[66] Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 29.

[67] Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 30-31.

[68] Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 31-32.

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2.3.3 The Latin view (Anselmian or penal substitutionary theory)

The second model Aulén analyses is what he calls the Latin view of atonement. According to him it is in the work of Tertullian where the main ideas of satisfaction and merit in the Latin theory are to be found.[69] Aulén mentions that the Latin view appeared very early in the patristic period of the Western Church but it never became the dominant view in West. With some opposition it gradually worked its way forward. For the most part, however, it was a silent, unchallenged advance.[70] Eventually it was through Anselm's *Cur Deus homo?* (Why God became a Man), where the first systematic exposition of what became the Latin view of atonement was made.[71] Anselm intended to replace what he regards as the old mythological account of Christ's work as victory over the Devil.

The major limitation of the Latin view, according to Aulén, is the use of images and analogies that are taken largely from the law courts. In this context, the legal order dominates the reconciliation between God and humankind. Aulén does concede that such analogies can also be found in the classic approach. However, he insists that, in the Latin type, legal order dominates the whole conception, and any violation of justice becomes unthinkable. This entails the payment of the required satisfaction. The continuity of divine operation is therefore lost. The satisfaction is offered by Christ as human, the sinless human on behalf of sinful humanity.[72]

Comparing the classic and the Latin types on their conceptions of sin, Aulén contends that the classic type has a wider scope, while the Latin type concentrates only on sin and its accompanying guilt. In the classic type, sin entails a whole series of evil powers; this includes death, the Devil, law, and curse; most constant is the grouping together of sin and death. For Aulén, sin in the Latin type is reduced to a mere moralistic idea and salvation

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[69] F. W. Dillistone, *The Christian understanding of atonement*, London: James Nisbet, 1967, 190.

[70] Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 38.

[71] For a helpful discussion, see Jasper Hopkins, *A companion to the study of St. Anselm*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1971, 187-214.

[72] Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 146.

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becomes a mere remission of punishment. On the other hand salvation in the classic type entails deliverance from sin and death, as well as an entrance into life. Thus, for Aulén the classic understanding portrays salvation as positive as opposed to negative conception of the Latin type.[73]

Aulén also raises questions regarding the materialised view of sin in the Latin theory. The merits of the satisfaction delivered by Christ for humankind are treated by default as transferred onto humankind. Aulén argues that such a view obscures the direct personal relationship between God and the sinner. In this context, the very idea of a satisfaction shows that the justice of God on humankind has not been fully met. So, in the payment of compensation for sin, or the endurance of punishment for sin, God's personal demand on humankind is not adequately expressed, nor is the idea of sin itself seen in its full personal significance.[74]

On the other hand, for Aulén, wherever the classic idea is dominant the idea of sin is always positive, whether the actual terms used are the forgiveness of sins, union with God, the deifying of human nature, or some other. Thus, when Christ overcomes the tyrants who hold humankind in bondage, Christ's victory is accompanied by the divine blessing, justification, grace, and salvation. In respect to the Latin doctrine, the natural tendency is for forgiveness to be regarded negatively. Mainly because the satisfaction made by Christ remits the punishment humanity fully deserved.[75]

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Aulén notes that the penitential system, on which the Latin type is based, is essentially moralistic. It deals with the issue of how a perfect God should deal with individual sinners. For Aulén such an approach removes the atoning death of Christ from its primary context. Christ's atoning work basically meant to restore the broken relationship between God and humankind. The individual human being has sinned against God, against one

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[73] Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 147-148

[74] Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 90-91.

[75] Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 147-148.

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another and nature as a whole. However, to dwell on this as a point of departure for the interpretation of the atoning work of Christ, as the Latin view does, is a distortion of the broader picture.[76]

On salvation, Aulén contends that the Latin doctrine provides a series of acts which are relatively loosely interrelated. The actual atonement consists of Christ's offering of satisfaction and God's acceptance of it. With this act, humanity has no input, except in so far as Christ stands as their representative. Justification is a second act, in which God transfers or imputes to humanity the merits of Christ. Here again, Aulén argues, no direct relation seems to exists between Christ and humanity, with sanctification, the third act, having no organic connection with the preceding two acts.[77]

Aulén accuses the Latin type of failing to explain the connection between the incarnation and the atonement adequately. In this context, God is no longer viewed as the direct agent in the atoning work. Christ, as a human being delivers atonement on behalf of humanity. For Aulén the classic idea of the atonement, as highlighted in the writings of the Church Fathers, is both clear and decisive on this issue. The classic idea is based on the notion that Christ became human, to accomplish God's redemptive work. In this sense, the incarnation is the necessary presupposition of the atonement. Moreover, the atonement is the completion of the incarnation. Aulén contends that incarnation and redemption belong indissolubly together. In other words, it is God in Christ who overcomes the hostile powers which hold humanity in bondage. Also, the incarnation is the manifestation of God's goodness and the fulfilment of Christ's saving work in the flesh, under the conditions of human nature. For Aulén the continuity present in the classic type appears to be missing in the Latin type.[78]

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76 Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 92.

77 Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 90.

78 Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 151-152.

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2.3.4 The subjective view (moral influence theory)

The third model Aulén analyses is called the subjective view of atonement. This approach is generally associated with the work of Peter Abelard. It is also known as the moral influence theory. Like Anselm, Abelard also asks the same question of "why" the incarnation in his "Expositions of the Epistle to the Romans."[79] Abelard disagreed with the ransom theory as well as the Latin theory, and his understanding of atonement focused not on human rebellion and God's anger, but on the loving nature of God. Abelard insists that God indeed has a right of ownership over humanity and that is perfectly appropriate for God to forgive without any "satisfaction" if God so wishes. Jesus' death provides a compelling example to follow. Jesus embodies God's sacrificial love, the perfect example, the ideal human being, and the realisation of human perfection. Rather than focusing on the original sin of Adam or the debt owed to God, for Abelard, sin consists of wrong and mistaken intentions, evil inclinations of the mind.[80] Abelard's emphasis is on true penitence that involves not just empty confessions about wrongdoings but an actual change in moral behaviour.[81]

Aulén notes that the consequence of the subjective type is that God's share in the process of salvation becomes secondary. The moral influence view does not regard the atonement as in any true sense carried out by God. Rather, reconciliation is the result of a process that takes place in human beings, such as conversion and amendment. If the case where Christ is mentioned with regard to the atonement, his efforts are not thought of as God's work for humankind's salvation. Rather, Christ is seen as the perfect example, the ideal human being, and the head of the human race. For Aulén, in so far as Christ's work can affect the

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79 Peter Abelard, "Exposition of the Epistle to the Roman (An Excerpt from the Second Book)", In: E. R. Fairweather (ed. and trans.), *A scholastic miscellany: Anselm to Ochom*, Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1956, 276-278.

80 As explained in Peter Abelard, "Ethics, or Know Thyself", In: B. Rand (ed.), *The classic moralists: Selections illustrating ethics from Socrates to Martineau*, Boston, MA: P. Smith; Houghton Mifflin, 1909, 186-191.

81 Dillistone, *The Christian understanding of atonement*, 324-325.

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relation between God and humankind, it is a matter of "from below upwards", and not an approach of God to human beings.[82]

Furthermore, for Aulén the idea of sin has become altogether weakened in the subjective type. He highlights this weakness in the larger context of the enlightenment theology which regarded sin as little more than infirmity. Aulén also notes that liberal Protestantism, which, he contends, serves as the framework for this type, generally has a truncated sense of sin. In his view, this humanistic interpretation of atonement fails to maintain the radical hostility of God to evil, and God's judgment on sin.[83] For Aulén, although Abelard did not pay attention to the seriousness of sin which occasioned the atonement, he admits that one would still have to appreciate Abelard's renewed emphasis on love as the underlying motive of the atonement.[84]

On salvation, Aulén notes that Abelard stressed the accomplishment of the atoning work through the human nature of Christ. Accordingly the emphasis on human nature becomes exclusive, and Christ is eventually treated simply as an ideal human being. According to Aulén, this ideal human actually becomes in effect a sort of intermediary being between God and humankind. The incarnation ceases to take a primary place in terms of the moral influence theory. Aulén notes that the English theologians, who subscribe to the moral influence theory, interpret incarnation in a semi-Arian rather than a Nicene sense.[85] He further stresses that among continental liberal theologians, God is at most regarded as the ultimate cause of Christ's atoning acts. Through Christ God sees humankind in a new light. In either case the atonement is not in any true sense to be assumed the work of God.[86]

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82 Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 146-147.

83 Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 148.

84 Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 133-44.

85 Semi-Arianism is a name that has been used for identifying a position that held to a version of the Nicene Creed that omitted the formula "of One Substance".

86 Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 153.

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On the concept of God as relating to sin, Aulén argues that the moral influence type does not view any opposition against God. He attributes this to the need to portray a “purified” and “simple” conception of God. In this sense God’s character is rooted in that of unchanging love. However, Aulén surmises that this simplicity is won at the cost of obscuring the hostility of the divine love to evil. According to him the conception of divine love has become humanised, and at the same time rather obvious and stereotyped.[87]

Aulén contends that the subjective view must be seen against the background of the Latin theory. What Abelard proposed was largely a response to Anselm. Above all, what Abelard desired was to uproot the “anthropomorphic” features and “relics of Judaism” from the conception of God, the idea of God that lay behind the Orthodox doctrine of atonement. In his view this was inconsistent with the simple teaching of Christ, and the love of God. Abelard therefore found it intolerable that God should be thought of as needing to be propitiated through a satisfaction offered. For Abelard the death of Christ could not rightfully be interpreted in this way. The death of Christ was among others, a seal set upon Christ’s teaching, a vindication of the moral order of the universe, as a lofty example, as a symbolic expression of God’s readiness to be reconciled.[88]

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The particular weakness of the subjective view, Aulén states, can be summed up in the context that the orthodox theologians may have been right in noting that the only alternative to the satisfaction of God’s justice was love, which spelt laxity. For Aulén it was now clear, that the rejection of the orthodox doctrine of satisfaction actually involved a weakening of the idea of sin, and a toning-down of the radical opposition to the will of God to that which is evil. Aulén thus concludes: “If, then, we, for our part, have refused to accept the orthodox dilemma as valid, we can only do so because we have learnt to

[87] Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 154.

[88] Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 133-134.

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distinguish another idea of the atonement, which both orthodox Protestantism and the enlightenment had left out of count: the classic idea."[89]

To summarise Aulén's analysis, firstly, he contends that the classic view portrays atonement as a movement of God towards humankind. God is intimately and personally engaged in the work of humanity's deliverance. The classic type shows a continuity of divine operation, and discontinuity in the order of merit and of justice, while the Latin view is the opposite in both respects. In the classic type the work of the atonement is accomplished by Godself, yet at the same time the passive form also is used: "God is reconciled with the world. The alternation is not accidental: He is reconciled only because He Himself reconciles the world to Himself and Himself with the world. The safeguard of the continuity of God's operation is the dualistic outlook, the divine warfare against the evil that holds mankind in bondage, and the triumph of Christ. But this necessitates a discontinuity of the legal order: there is no satisfaction of God's justice, for the relation of man to God is viewed in the light, not of merit and justice, but of grace."[90]

Secondly, with the Latin view, God seems to be more distant. Here the satisfaction is paid by a human being, in the person of Christ, to God. In the Latin type the legal order is unbroken to the extent that any violation of justice becomes unthinkable. It is at this point,

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> …in the payment of the required satisfaction, that the continuity of divine operation is lost; for the satisfaction is offered by Christ as [a] man, as the sinless [human being] on behalf of the sinners. At the same time the atonement is still in some sense the work of God, since he is regarded as planning the atonement; therefore, also, the doctrine does not require that there is any change in God's attitude to men, even though this may often be taught.[91]

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89 Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 135.

90 Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 146.

91 Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 146.

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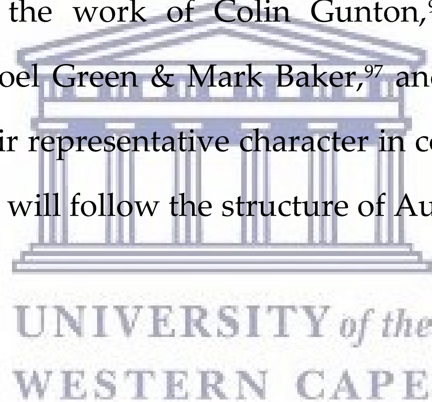
Thirdly, in the moral influence view theory God acts even more distantly. Here, no atonement is needed, and all the emphasis is on human movement to God, and this is accomplished in the human world. In the subjective type, the atonement is no longer regarded as in any true sense carried out by God. Rather, the atonement is the result of some process that takes place in the individual.[92] Thus, in Aulén's *Christus Victor* the essential Christian idea of God reaching out to humans, which dominates the classic type, is weakened in the Latin type, and lost in the subjective type of atonement.

2.4 Responses to the atonement models as outlined in *Christus Victor*

This section entails selected responses to the atonement models outlined. This includes selected theologians, who have responded to this analysis on the victory achieved by Christ. The sources include the work of Colin Gunton,[93] Daniel Migliore,[94] Vincent Brümmer,[95] Gregory Boyd,[96] Joel Green & Mark Baker,[97] and Waldron Scott[98]. Individual theologians are chosen for their representative character in connection with their views on the atonement. The discussion will follow the structure of Aulén's analysis.



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92 Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 146.

93 C. E. Gunton, *The actuality of atonement: A study of metaphor, rationality and the Christian tradition,* Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988.

94 D. L. Migliore, *Faith seeking understanding: An introduction to Christian theology,* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991.

95 V. Brümmer, *Atonement, Christology and the Trinity: Making sense of Christian doctrine*, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishers, 2005.

96 G. A. Boyd, "Christus Victor View", In: J. Beilby & P. R. Eddy (eds.), *The nature of the atonement*, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2006.

97 J. B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and contemporary contexts,* Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 2000.

98 W. B. Scott, *What about the Cross? Exploring Models of the Atonement*, New York: iUniverse, 2007.

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2.4.1 Responses to the ransom view (*Christus Victor* or classic theory)

a) Colin Gunton

Colin Gunton was a British theologian and Professor of Christian Doctrine at Kings College, London from 1984. He was involved in the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom where he had been a minister since 1972. Gunton was the editor of the *Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* and the author of many influential publications including, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition*, published in 1988.

In *The Actuality of Atonement*, Gunton examines the Christian doctrine of atonement through various metaphors. Gunton's immediate focus is the three main views, particularly the classic theory, which he seeks to respond to. For Gunton, the classic theory (or ransom view) in its earliest forms was embedded with freighted accounts of devils and demons which were vanquished by divine stratagems. From Gunton's perspective, Aulén was able to recapture the old theory in a new mode by employing the phrase *Christus Victor* to draw together interpretations of the cross as God's triumph over evil.[99]

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With an emphasis on the use of metaphor as a central feature of theological language, Gunton examines some of the central metaphors for atonement. This includes the examples of the battlefield, the altar, and the law courts, which depict the ministry, sacrifice, and victory of Jesus Christ. He does this in order to demonstrate how some of these metaphors can be embodied in the daily reality of the Christian community. Gunton's examination of biblical material shows that the victory emphasised in the classic theory is not purely a past event or a cosmic battle but that it takes place within human history on an ongoing basis. The victory is seen to be continuous within the life of the

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[99] Gunton, *The actuality of atonement*, 57-59.

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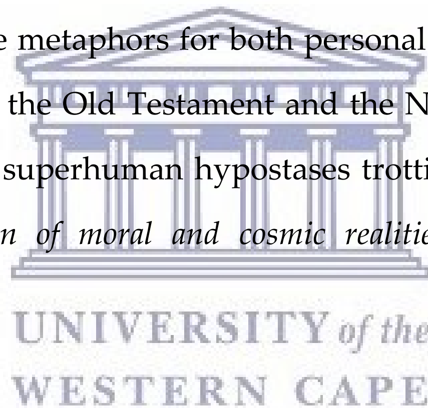
individual Christian as well as the Christian community. Also, this is a victory that is as much human as it is divine.[100]

Gunton suggests that Aulén may have been justified in speaking of the victory of Christ over evil powers. However, it appears that Aulén largely and almost exclusively based his analysis on Colossians 2: 15. Moreover, it is at this point where Gunton disagrees with Aulén. Gunton argues that the emphasis on victory should rather come from broader a New Testament passage as well as an Old Testament background to make a more convincing case. From a New Testament perspective, particularly in the Gospels and Revelation, Gunton cites several passages of Christ's victory over evil forces to support his point.[101]

Also, Gunton believes that the demons conquered by Christ are not mythological creatures to be set aside but appropriate metaphors for both personal and extra-personal aspects of sin. He argues that from both the Old Testament and the New Testament the texts about demons "present us not with superhuman hypostases trotting about the world, but with *the metaphorical characterisation of moral and cosmic realities which would otherwise defy expression*."[102]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100 Gunton, *The actuality of atonement*, 57.

101 Here Gunton refers to "the Johannine literature and especially the book of Revelation, where it is the lamb bearing the marks of slaughter – a clear reference to the crucified and risen Jesus – who is confessed by the elders who stand round the throne of God: 'the Lion of the tribe of Judah … has conquered' (Rev.5.5f). The theme of victory is taken up later in that book, when the birth of the male child is interpreted by a description of a war in heaven in which Satan, in an echo of Luke 10.18 ('I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven'), is thrown down from heaven to earth (Rev.12.7ff). Similarly, though without using military imagery, John's gospel depicts the progress of Jesus to the cross as a movement of victorious conquest, certainly if it is right to interpret 19.30 ('It is finished') in the light of 16.33 ('Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world') as a cry of triumph. It is from such a perspective that we may interpret the encounter with and defeat of evil that are so much a feature of the synoptic accounts of the ministry of Jesus. Whatever we make of the language of demons and demonic possession … it is clear that a kind of victory over forces which hold human life in bondage is being described. When Jesus speaks of a sick women as a 'daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years' (Luke 13.16) it seems clear that he is depicting the enslavement of parts of the world to an evil which it is the calling of Jesus and his followers to destroy." See Gunton, *The actuality of atonement,* 56.

102 Emphasis in the original. See Gunton, *The actuality of atonement*, 66.

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Gunton explains that recent studies have cast doubt upon the use and interpretation of the text in Colossians. 2: 15 (NIR: "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, [Christ] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross") often used by theologians such as Aulén. Gunton cites Wesley Carr, who in his book, *Angels and principalities. The background, meaning and development of the Pauline phrase, 'hai archai kai hai exousiai'* argues that the interpretation of victory in this particular text does not come from the New Testament, but rather from Origen, a major advocate of the ransom theory.[103] According to Gunton, the imagery used has traditionally been understood as a Roman triumphal procession where "powers and authorities" are believed to be Christ's opponents. However, it may be conceivable that the powers and authorities are not Christ's opponents but the "hosts of heaven cheering him on his way."[104]

Gunton concludes that in the light of scripture, Aulén's position of a victorious Christ is correct in terms of it being a victory. However, he contends that the victory of Christ is a passive and not a positive action. In his view the synoptic gospels do not describe the ministry of Jesus as a victory as such, they do, however, see it as part of a conflict between God's authority represented by Jesus and the forces which deny this authority. He further explains that Jesus' victory over temptation was passive, and its outcome was in both the "spiritual" and "physical" worlds. For Gunton, no absolute distinction can be drawn with what may be termed the cosmic as opposed to the moral dimensions of the world.[105]

b) Daniel Migliore

Daniel Migliore is an American and Professor Emeritus of Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. He is an ordained Presbyterian minister and a member of the Presbytery of New Brunswick. Migliore is the author of many influential publications

[103] Gunton, *The actuality of atonement*, 66.

[104] Gunton, *The actuality of atonement*, 55.

[105] Gunton, *The actuality of atonement*, 59.

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including the widely used textbook *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* which was first published in 1991.

In *Faith Seeking Understanding*, Migliore also describes the three theories of atonement. Migliore suggests that the *Christus Victor* theory helpfully emphasises the reality and power of evil that enslaved humanity, as well as stressing the costliness and assurance of God's victory over evil. However, he also refers to a particular weakness in the *Christus Victor* theory. In his view, the theory is particularly misleading if the imagery emphasised is taken literally. This, he argues results in reducing the humanity of Jesus to nothing more than a disguise to fool the Devil. As a consequence, humanity is reduced to mere spectators of a cosmic battle that takes place beyond their reach and influence. This he believes undermines the awareness of humankind to take responsibility for their sinfulness.[106]

However, Migliore maintains that at least two "deep truths" should be highlighted when referring to the *Christus Victor* theory. First, God's victory for the sake of humanity was done not through violent retaliation but rather through the power of God's divine love. God achieved the liberation and reconciliation of the world not by employing coercion or brute force but by the foolish wisdom of the cross. Second, the image of God's method of salvation through deceptive means is misleading, particularly when interpreted literally. The idea of the deception of the Devil by God frequently occurs in the interpretation of this theory. The analogies of the fish and the mousetrap are often used in this regard: the fish (the Devil) unsuspectedly swallows the bait (Christ) on the fishhook. Moreover, the mouse (the Devil) is enticed into the trap by the bait (Christ). Christ is the bait through which the Devil is caught. For Migliore as morally offensive as the idea that God uses deception in the work of salvation may be, what the analogies of this theory intend to

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106 Migliore, *Faith seeking understanding*, 152.

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convey is that God's hidden or "foolish" way of redeeming humanity is by far wiser and powerful than that of the evil powers.[107]

c) Vincent Brümmer

Vincent Brümmer is a South African-born Reformed theologian and was Professor of Philosophy of Religion at the University of Utrecht and Dean of the Theological Faculty until 1988. From 1991 until his retirement in 1997 he was founding director of the Netherlands School of Advanced Studies in Theology and Religion (NOSTER). Brümmer is the author of many influential publications including the *Atonement, Christology and the Trinity: Making Sense of Christian Doctrine,* which was published in 2005.

In *Atonement, Christology and the Trinity*, Brümmer investigates the different theories of atonement. Here he focuses on particularly the patristic theories of recapitulation, ransom, and sacrifice. In his view, the Church Fathers never had an understanding of salvation as personal reconciliation with God. Instead, for them, salvation meant "divinisation". He refers to Athanasius who believed that Christ through the incarnation entered into humanity so that we might be made divine.[108]

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The first patristic theory Brümmer discusses is the recapitulation theory, which he suggests was predicated on the Platonic logic and was subsequently embraced by the early Church Fathers. In Irenaeus' theology of recapitulation, salvation makes humanity partakers of the divine nature of Christ (2 Peter 1: 4). This "divinisation", is achieved by the incarnation of Christ, an act propelled by divine love. Brümmer affirms that, in the context of Platonic logic, the early Church Fathers saw humanity as one entity, in which all individuals participated. The Pauline parallel drawn between Adam and Christ is also understood within the Platonic context. Just as Adam's disobedience plunged humanity as

[107] Migliore, *Faith seeking understanding*, 188.

[108] V. Brümmer, *Atonement, Christology and the Trinity: Making sense of Christian doctrine*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005, 46.

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a whole into sin, Christ's obedience (the second Adam) brings about a new redeemed humanity.

The second patristic theory Brümmer refers to is the ransom theory. This is based on the idea atonement was done by God and not to God. The question among the Church Fathers that then arose was: to whom was the ransom paid if it was not God? On this point, Brümmer suggests that the "obvious" answer to this question, in this case, would be, to the Devil. He further notes that the ransom theory develops a speculative mythology explaining God's victory over the Devil, in which humanity was freed from the Devil's power. Furthermore, this speculative mythology was rejected by some, especially by Gregory, since the notion of God paying a ransom to the Devil seemed blasphemous. Even though the ransom theory was rejected, Brümmer observes two "intuitions" with regard to the ransom theory. First, the ransom theory perceives sin as an "objective personalized power", something that keeps humanity in bondage. Second, it is God alone who can save humanity from this bondage. Brümmer asserts that in the contemporary context these "intuitions" go against the grain of the notion that the evil actions of humanity not only affect, but are also the source of evil in the world, and also that God's saving action requires the participation of humankind.[109]

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d) Gregory Boyd

Gregory Boyd is an American theologian, pastor and one of the leading figures of the growing Neo-Anabaptist movement. Boyd is known as one of the leading proponents of open theism and noted Christian anarchist. For 16 years he was Professor of Theology at

[109] Brümmer cites Sallie McFague when she observes that, "In an era when evil powers understood to be palpable in contest with God for control over human beings and the cosmos, the metaphor of Christ as the victorious king and lord, crushing the evil spirits and thereby freeing the world from their control, was indeed a powerful one. In our situation, however, to envision evil as separate from human beings rather than as the outcome of human decisions and actions, and to see the solution to evil as totally a divine responsibility, would not be only irrelevant to our time and its needs but harmful to them, for that would run counter to one of the central insights of the new sensibility: the need for human responsibility in the nuclear age." See Brümmer, *Atonement, Christology and the Trinity: Making Sense of Christian doctrine*, 26.

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Bethel University before resigning from this position but is still affiliated with this institution. Boyd is the author of many books and influential publications including the first chapter in an edited volume entitled, *The Nature of Atonement* published in 2006. In the "Christus Victor View", Boyd reflects on the *Christus Victor* theory of the atonement.

Boyd suggests that the *Christus Victor* view of atonement needs to be observed within the broader context of the spiritual warfare motif that runs through the scripture. Boyd notes that the spiritual warfare motif describes the biblical narrative of an ongoing cosmic battle between God and the forces of evil, bringing victory over the hostile powers and human agents, who threaten God's creation. Other atonement theories, he suggests, say very little (or nothing) about the cosmic victory and focus mainly on humanity and sin. Boyd gives a brief overview of the Old Testament depiction of the cosmic battle. It is seen as God waging war against hostile waters and vicious sea monsters who held the world in captivity. The ancient Israelite worldview was based on the notion that the spiritual happenings in the spiritual realm would affect events of history and nature. Therefore, poverty, injustice and natural disasters which befall humanity are considered to be the works of "rebel gods". The mythological imagery of hostile waters, cosmic monsters, and rebel gods, stems from the Ancient Near Eastern language.[110]

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For Boyd, this cosmic language adequately communicates that the earth and creation exist "in a cosmic war zone" and that ancient Israel was dependent on God's continuous battle against the hostile forces in order to preserve Israel. Furthermore, the consciousness of the earth being a war zone between the forces of good and evil intensified among the Jews. This is particularly the case for the two centuries leading up to the birth of Christ. It was in this environment that Jesus came, having one mission, that is, to destroy the Devil's hold on humanity. Everything Jesus was about, was centred on overcoming this empire –

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[110] Boyd, "Christus Victor View", 45-46.

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taking back the world that the Devil had seized and restoring humanity to its position as guardian over the earth.[111]

For Boyd the theme of Christ's victory over cosmic foes pervades the entire New Testament. Psalm 110, he observes, is the most frequently cited passage in the New Testament and is always used in a variety of ways to express the truth that Christ is Lord because he has defeated God's enemies. Furthermore, in contrast to the other theories the *Christus Victor* model is the only model that emphasises the cosmic significance of Christ's victory. Therefore, for Boyd, in order to fully understand and appreciate the soteriological importance of the cross, one needs to understand it in the context of the cosmic significance of Christ's victory. It is for this reason that the Paul discussed the cosmic significance of Christ's work and how He defeated the hostile powers.[112]

Boyd believes that the victory over evil powers brings about reconciliation between God and humanity. Humanity is reconciled because the "rebel powers" have been defeated and because of this humanity can be presented as "holy and blameless unto God". This particular aspect highlights the cosmic significance of Christ's work. In this context, the *Christus Victor* theory is the only view that makes this point explicitly. Also much like Irenaeus' theology of recapitulation, Boyd believes that the divine victory is continuous within the life of the Christian community. The Christian community's personal and social victories are joined in Christ's cosmic victory.[113]

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111 Boyd, "Christus Victor View", 27.

112. Boyd cites Paul in (Colossians 1: 21-22) when he states: "And you, who (like the rebel powers) were once estranged and hostile (to God) in mind, doing evil deeds, He has now reconciled in His fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before Him." See Boyd, "Christus Victor View", 33.

113 Boyd, "Christus Victor View", 33.

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2.4.2 Responses to the Latin view (Anselmian or penal substitutionary theory)

a) Colin Gunton

Gunton describes the Anselmian theory as forensic because it explains the substitutionary sacrifice of the God-man as satisfying the requirements of justice. It demonstrates that there can be no restoration of relationships unless the nature of human sinfulness and universal justice is addressed at its roots. For the advocates of this theory, on the one hand, only a divine being could pay this enormous debt of human sin. On the contrary, only a human being (though also divine) could do so.

One of the problems with the Anselmian theory, as Gunton observes, is the overstressing of Christ's humanity and underplaying the role of the Triune God in history. For Gunton, this view of the atonement is more dipolar rather than Trinitarian. Here Anselm's emphasis on God's power rather than God's love and the seeming equation of salvation with the remission of punishment are highlighted. For Gunton, the Anselmian theory fails to take the suffering of the Trinitarian God seriously and reduces atonement to merely a removal of guilt rather than a renewal of life by transforming humanity. From this perspective, the atonement is reduced to a transaction which remains external to the personal lives of people.[114]

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Also, for Gunton criticism could be added to the non-biblical foundation of Anselm's key term of satisfaction. In his view, Anselm's understanding of cosmic order was based on the feudal structure of the society in which he lived. In this sense, Anselm made the error of mistaking a particular social system for the order of the creation itself. The scandal of the cross thus becomes eclipsed by fitting Christ's death into a pre-existing theological schema. Moreover, Anselm faces more serious questions, such as: "How far is the theology of satisfaction viable in a world which has so different a conception of human freedom ...

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114 Gunton, *The actuality of atonement*, 91-92.

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In what sense may or must we conceive God as the one responsible for universal justice?"[115]

Gunton also highlights what he considers positive aspects of Anselm's conception. In this context, the question of sin, as emphasised by Anselm, serves to broaden our soteriological understanding. For Gunton, Anselm's God is not an egotistical dictator who punishes all offences against God's personal honour. In fact, sin does more harm to the creature than to the Creator. However, sin has to be dealt with because it disrupts the order and beauty of the universe.

Gunton's reading of Anselm indicates that sin cannot harm God because God is the transcendent, impassable Creator. Sin, therefore, has to be understood in a more comprehensive way than a personal offence to God. Because God is impassable, God cannot be offended by sin. In this sense, Anselm contributed significantly in helping to develop the understanding that sin in disrupting the order and beauty of the universe, has repercussions on the whole of the cosmic reality. Thus, for Gunton even though the process of thought begins with a legal metaphor, the argument leads humanity to see that it is more than simply a legal matter, but has to do with a life lived in the world as a whole.[116]

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For Gunton, the broadening of the parameters of the concept of sin tells us more about the nature of salvation. Gunton states: "If sin is cosmic disorder, then salvation is the action of God as he takes responsibility for the whole context of our lives, setting us free to live in the universe he does not allow to go to ruin."[117] In this regard, Anselm with his use of the satisfaction metaphor broadened the parameters far beyond the legal and moral domains. For Gunton, Anselm may concentrate more than many would wish on sin as offence and salvation as remission of penalty.

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115 Gunton, *The actuality of atonement*, 94.

116 Gunton, *The actuality of atonement*, 96.

117 Gunton, *The actuality of atonement*, 96.

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Gunton notes that the concept of justice as conceived by Anselm goes beyond the narrow interpretations of his thought that are often emphasised. The God of Anselm exercises responsibility for the good order of the universe, not through the settling of scores, but by accepting the gift of infinite value offered by the God-man. In this sense, justice, as conceived by Anselm, is not essentially punitive or retributive. It also includes restoration. Gunton suggests that if one continues to conceive of atonement in forensic terms, it is essential to view it not only as a legal transaction but also as the transformation of a relationship. He further argues that this connection is not convincingly made by the advocates of a doctrine of penal substitution.[118]

b) Daniel Migliore

On the Anselmian theory, Migliore explains that Anselm's reflections on justice arise out of the medieval thought and presuppose the then-current understanding of law, offence, reparations and social obligations. For Anselm God and humans are related like feudal lords and their serfs. Any act of disobedience dishonours the lord and satisfaction must be given. In this case, the satisfaction that is due to God on account of human sinfulness is infinite. While humanity must provide this satisfaction, only God can provide it. God, therefore, becomes human in Christ and through his obedience unto death satisfaction is rendered, and justice is done. The end result is forgiveness for sinful humankind.[119]

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The trouble with Anselm's theory, as Migliore further explains, is that it seems to set God in contradiction to himself. Anselm draws from the juridical metaphors of the New Testament in a way that brings mercy and justice into collision. The Anselmian theory renders the act of forgiveness something of a problem for God. Here grace is made to be conditional on satisfaction. Migliore thus questions whether conditional grace is grace at

[118] Gunton, *The actuality of atonement*, 99.

[119] Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 152-153.

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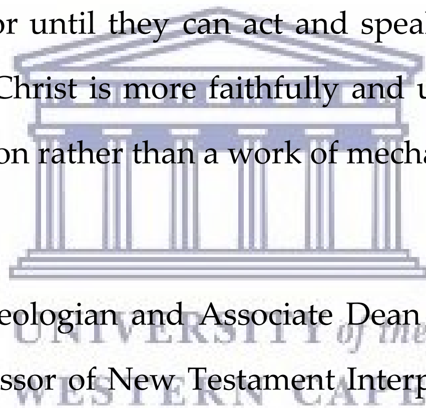
all. In his view, in the New Testament, it is not God but humanity who needs to be reconciled. God is not so much the object as the subject of reconciliation in Christ.[120]

Also, the Anselmian theory does not adequately distinguish between a substitute and a representative. Here, Migliore employs the thoughts of Dorothee Sölle, who in the book, *Christ Our Representative* (1967), highlights the critical distinction between a substitute and a representative.[121] In his view, Sölle makes this point quite convincingly. The world of substitution is the impersonal world of replaceable things. When something wears out, like a machine part, a new part can be substituted. However, representation belongs to the world of persons and personal relationships. For Sölle the representative stands in for humanity on a provisional basis but does not divest humanity of responsibility. Usually the parent-child relationship works on a similar basis. The parent can represent their children until their maturity or until they can act and speak on their own behalf. In this context, the atoning work of Christ is more faithfully and understandably interpreted as an act of personal representation rather than a work of mechanical substitution.[122]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c) Joel Green and Mark Baker

Joel Green is an American theologian and Associate Dean for the Center for Advanced Theological Studies and Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. He is also an ordained elder of the United Methodist Church. He is a prolific author of a range of topics in theology. Mark Baker is an American theologian and Mennonite Missionary. He currently serves as Associate Professor of Mission and Theology at Fresno Biblical Seminary in Fresno, California. Green is the author of numerous publications including the book, *Recovering the Scandal of The Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (2000) which he co-authored with Joel Green.

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120 Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 153.

121 See D. Sölle, *Christ our representative* (1967) as quoted in Migliore, *Faith seeking understanding*, 153.

122 Migliore, *Faith seeking understanding*, 153.

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In *Recovering the Scandal of The Cross*, Green and Baker examine the strengths and weaknesses of Anselm's model of atonement. In their view, Anselm set out to present a logical model of atonement in which he explains the necessity of the death of Jesus on the cross. Anselm managed to achieve this by using imagery taken from the feudal system of his time. This is in contrast to the evidence presented in Paul's letters. Anselm, they argue, gives an interpretation of the cross which could be easily understood by his contemporaries. His experience of medieval life and culture is identified as the framework of this particular atonement model. This is also evident with the examples used such as "vassal" or "satisfaction", which according to Green and Baker come not from biblical language but a medieval conception. Anselm's usage of certain images gives the cross and atonement a meaning that is very different to that which is found in the New Testament, for example.[123]

For Green and Baker, Anselm's emphasis on the debt of sin rather than the removing of sin is another issue that has its roots in medieval life and culture. They believe his view of sin is rather limited. They argue that it may be rational but that it falls short of the view of sin presented in the biblical writings. Here the biblical concept of salvation focuses not so much on the debt of sin but more on the removal thereof. Salvation is rooted in the removal of these sins and the reconciliation of humanity with God. The atonement work of Christ is rooted in the notion of freedom from indebtedness, which includes the New Testament conception of freedom from slavery, including the slavery to sin.[124]

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Anselm's conception presents further problems. Green and Baker argue that since it is a model of atonement which is deeply rooted in his culture and the penance system, he promotes a distorted view of God's character. For Anselm, God assumes the guise of a Lord or King to which the payment of satisfaction has to be made. This distortion they

123 Green and Baker, *Recovering the scandal of the Cross,* 131.

124 Green and Baker, *Recovering the scandal of the Cross*, 133.

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argue leads to a character of God which is likened to a feudal lord. This also diminishes God's active role in reconciling humanity to Godself.

Another problem is Anselm's acceptance of the Greek understanding of an impassable deity. Green and Baker assert that it is this acceptance that causes Anselm to separate Christ's divinity from His human suffering, resulting in Anselm not placing sufficient emphasis on Jesus being a representative of God to humanity. Anselm, they argue, keeps the human Jesus at arm's length from God and this contributes to a sense of division in the Trinity as well as limits the emphasis Anselm can place on Jesus serving as a representative of God to humanity. By basing his model of the atonement on the feudal system and Greek philosophy, Anselm repeatedly reinforces the image of God being an angry, distant and demanding God.[125] Here, Green and Baker employ the thoughts of Leonardo Boff in *Passion of Christ, Passion of the World: The Facts, Their Interpretation, and Their Meaning Yesterday and Today* (1987), when he observes that Anselm's God would bear little resemblance to the father of Jesus. Rather:

> He epitomizes the figure of an absolute feudal lord, the master with the power of life and death over his vassals. God is endowed with the traits of a cruel, bloodthirsty judge, bound and determined to exact the last farthing owed by any debtor in justice. A horrible cruelty prevailed in Saint Anselm's time regarding payment of debts. This sociological context is reflected in Anselm's theological text, unfortunately contributing to the development of an image of a cruel, sanguinary, vindictive God, an image still present in many tormented, enslaved Christian minds.[126]

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For Green and Baker, Anselm seeks to grant understanding to the atonement theory by looking at it not from a biblical point of view, but rather from within a legal and social

125 Green and Baker, *Recovering the scandal of the Cross*, 160.

126 See L. Boff, *Passion of Christ, Passion of the world: The Facts, Their interpretation, and their meaning yesterday and today*, (1987) quoted in Green and Baker, *Recovering the scandal of The Cross*, 160.

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context. It is this rootedness in culture and social context that results in Anselm's theory of atonement having both strengths and weaknesses.

d) Vincent Brümmer

Brümmer interprets the satisfaction theory as a "theology of merit", on the basis that sinners have the opportunity to make satisfaction. The satisfaction required is to restore the balance of rights and duties between God and humanity. Since it is Christ who makes adequate satisfaction on behalf of humankind, restoring the imbalance between God and His creation, all credit goes to him and not humanity. Brümmer adds that salvation still has to be earned but by Christ rather than by humanity. In other words, *Soli Christo Gloria!*[127]

Brümmer notes that Anselm places much emphasis on the condition of humankind and their failure to give honour to God, which constitutes a weight, a debt, a doom upon them. In the light of this notion, the satisfaction theory in today's context appears to be immoral, since it asserts that God punishes the "innocent" on behalf of those who are guilty of sin. Brümmer affirms that the only way to understand this teaching and make moral sense of it is to view it through the eyes of a feudal concept of honour. Christ is, therefore, the only perfect human who could make the required satisfaction in order to satisfy God's honour. For Brümmer, such feudal honour may have been well understood in the twelfth century, but it goes against modern day thinking to view Christ as a feudal lord who demands honour.[128]

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Brümmer believes that in the light of human relationships and love, the theory of penal substitution will go against the understanding of what may be considered modern-day thinking. In his view, many of the human relationships today are based on each person striving to know and serve the true interest of the other. By serving the other's interest as their own, people display a love for the other, which they have for themselves. This

[127] Brümmer, *Atonement, Christology and the Trinity*, 399.

[128] Brümmer, *Atonement, Christology and the Trinity*, 400.

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relationship of love is different from business relationships in which people accept certain rights and obligations from each other. The one renders a service, and the other pays for it. The relationship and value are based merely on the service rendered. Brümmer considers the feudal concept of honour to be like this. God's honour needs to be satisfied. "If this is the type of relationship we have with God", says Brümmer, "then it means that we do not love God for Himself alone, but merely as a provider of eternal happiness. In turn, this means that God values our service more than God values us."[129] Therefore, according to Brümmer, it would not matter to God whether it was humanity or Christ in their place who provided the satisfaction as long as God's honour is satisfied. Also, love cannot be earned or coerced. Modern-day thinking accepts a God who loves people for who they are and not for what they render unto Him. This notion goes against the teaching of penal substitution. The value of humanity is based on the love of God, and not on the service they render to God.

Brümmer identifies another problem with penal substitution, is the view that the "divine-human relationship" is not sufficient for divine forgiveness. The forgiveness of sin according to penal substitution, is seen as treating sin lightly. Similarly, as in the case of damaged human fellowship, the necessary and sufficient conditions for reconciliation with God are not punishment or satisfaction or condemnation, but repentance and forgiveness.[130]

On the issue of God's justice Brümmer considers penal substitution as satisfying the demands of retributive justice, rather than restorative justice. He argues that since sin causes estrangement between God and humanity, retributive justice only removes the guilt of sin. It fails to restore and reconcile humanity with God. Therefore, in his view, this theory is not a theory of atonement "in the sense of at-one-ment."[131]

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[129] Brümmer, *Atonement, Christology and the Trinity*, 401.

[130] Brümmer, *Atonement, Christology and the Trinity*, 400.

[131] Brümmer, *Atonement, Christology and the Trinity*, 401-403.

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2.4.3 Responses to the Subjective view (Moral influence theory)

a) Colin Gunton

For Gunton, the subjective view of the atonement is theologically associated with Abelard, and philosophically with Kant.[132] He contends that this view characterises the attempts of rationalism to reduce Christ to a perfect role model. Christ is presented as the ultimate example of genuine human life in the midst of a fallen world. This view of atonement depicts redemption as an achievement that human beings can reach themselves. Gunton argues that Abelard sought a more humane idea of atonement and rejected Anselm's doctrine of penal substitution that proposed a notion of retributive punishment.[133]

However, for Gunton, the New Testament gives indications why the subjective view is inadequate. First, it takes the biblical message about Christ out of context. This theory tends to emphasise the human character of Christ without taking proper cognisance of his divine nature. The imitation aspect emphasised by Abelard may be more apparent in terms of Christ's human character but hangs in the air with regard to the divine.

Gunton's second critique is implied in the first. Here he argues that Christ is an example because he and he alone is the incarnate Son who by the enabling of the Holy Spirit remained unfallen whereas humanity is flawed in their sinfulness. Christ's humanity is only what it is because it is that of the one sent by the Father through the Holy Spirit. "As the only human victory, the life of the one just man, the only true offering of free obedience to the Father, *this particular* humanity is what it is because it is his who is sent by the Father to save lost [humankind]." Gunton observes that there is no treatment of the person of Christ in the New Testament which does not place it in the context of its end in the redemption of the creation, the reconciliation of all things in Christ.[134]

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[132] This view of atonement fits well with Kant's idea of Jesus as the moral ideal and our duty as human beings to elevate ourselves to this ideal of moral perfection.

[133] Gunton, *The actuality of atonement,* 156-7.

[134] Gunton, *The actuality of atonement,* 158.

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Third, for Gunton, the subjective view is the only model that does not make the death and resurrection of Christ the pivot of events in which the reconciling action takes place. The fact that the ministry and mission of Christ lead to his death dominates the Christian narrative in most of its forms. This is the case to such an extent that no treatment of Christian theology of salvation which wishes to be true to scripture is possible apart from it. Here Gunton insists that the death of Christ is, first of all, to be understood as part of the divine purpose of redemption. All other things associated with Christ are dependent on the divine purpose of redemption. This would include the fact of him becoming human.[135]

b) Daniel Migliore

For Migliore, the subjective view is in contrast with the other two theories. In the subjective type, God reconciles humanity not by some cosmic battle nor by some legal transaction but by showing God's love to humanity in such a compelling way that they are constrained to respond in wonder and gratitude. Migliore mentions that the strength of the moral influence theory lies in emphasising the unconditionality of God's love and in highlighting the importance of the human response. He further mentions that while attending to the subjective side of atonement, this theory might be developed in a way that recognises "the objective power of the revelation of God's sacrificial love that shines into our sin-darkened world."[136]

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Migliore also warns of the serious weaknesses of the moral influence theory. The most important is what he calls the tendency of the proponents of this view to sentimentalise God's love while at the same time underestimating the power and tenacity of evil in the world. This is highlighted in its emphasis on merely following Christ's good example without taking seriously enough the nature of evil and human sinfulness. Gunton employs the work of H. Richard Niebuhr in his book *The Kingdom of God in America* (1959)

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135 Gunton, *The actuality of atonement*, 158-159.

136 Migliore, *Faith seeking understanding*, 154.

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to highlight this point. Niebuhr refers to the subjective type of atonement as falling victim to a naïve form of liberal theology in his country: "A God without wrath brought people without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."[137]

c) Waldron B. Scott

Waldron B. Scott is an American theologian who formerly served as General Secretary of the World Evangelical Alliance. Scott is the author of numerous publications including the book *What about the Cross: Exploring Models of the Atonement*, published in 2007.

Scott suggests that the very subjectiveness of this the moral influence theory appeals to the modern mind. In his view, the classic and satisfaction models acknowledge the love of God as motivating the atoning act. Abelard goes much further in noting that God's love does not merely motivate the atonement, but God's love is the atonement. God's love is what brings the alienated parties together and keeps them together. Also, it is through God's love that true liberty is achieved through the unique gift of grace to humanity. For Abelard, it is Christ's life and death that inspires humanity's love in a way that God is no longer served out of fear. Abelard's conception thus encompasses both justification and sanctification and by implication, ultimate glorification.[138]

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Scott also identifies some problems with Abelard's approach. Here he highlights the view that Abelard does not deal adequately with the holiness of God and the issue of sin. In this model, God does not appear to hold human beings accountable for sin. Here it is believed that original sin has such effects on human character that humanity is unable to respond adequately to the appeals of Christ's example, no matter how powerful it may be. Scott does, however, warn that it is not Christ's inspirational example that atones, but God's active love, which is embodied in the incarnate Word. In his view God's love graciously

[137] See H. R. Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (1959) quoted in Migliore, *Faith seeking understanding*, 154.

[138] W. B. Scott, *What about the Cross?*, 89.

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overpowers the effects of original sin, thus awakening the potential of humanity to change accordingly.

In highlighting another shortcoming Scott employs the work of J. Denny Weaver in *The Non-Violent Atonement* (2001), arguing that the moral influence theory features no change in the order of things until individual sinners perceive the loving death and respond positively to God. According to Weaver, the balance of power between good and evil in the universe has been decisively changed by the atonement and validated by the resurrection of the Christ, whether or not acknowledged by sinful humanity. Scott suggests that scholars like Weaver believe that Abelard's emphasis on inward subjective change is prioritised at the expense of an objective change in the cosmic order.[139]

2.5 Closing reflections

The theories of atonement all carry strengths and weaknesses. As I have already mentioned, it is not my intention to critique or to offer my evaluation of these theories. The aim is to give an overview of the analysis of these main atonement theories as Aulén and others understand them. The review is intended primarily as a soteriological map to engage with at least three different ways in which Christ's work of atonement may be understood as well as its implications for the discourse on reconciliation in South Africa. So while the review of Aulén's work is directly related to reconciliation in Christ, I now appropriate this typology in order to make them more fruitful for reconciliation from a pneumatological perspective. This applies less to reconciliation in Christ, and more to the implications of Christ's atoning work for the ministry of reconciliation in South Africa. In other words, this overview served as a map for the construction of my hypothesis in which I will now identify at least three distinct discourses on how reconciliation is understood in the theological discourse in South Africa.

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139 See J. D. Weaver, *The non-violent atonement* (2001) quoted in W. B. Scott, *What about the Cross?*, 90.

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3. Justice through reconciliation in Jesus Christ

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes and analyses a particular way in which reconciliation has been understood in South African discourse, namely, on the basis of an Anselmian, Lutheran, and Calvinist notion that the reconciliation of humanity with God in Jesus Christ implies a ministry of reconciliation. In this approach, it is assumed that the reconciliation of humankind with God in Jesus Christ entails a ministry of reconciliation in a country divided by race, class, and culture and that this necessitates a concern for social justice and therefore for restitution. This is evident in the *Message to the People of South Africa* (1968), the *Belhar Confession* (1982/86) and the statement of the *National Initiative for Reconciliation* (1985). Rhetorically, this was aimed at apartheid theology and its assumptions about the fundamental irreconcilability of people.

This chapter has three main sections. The *Message to the People of South Africa* in 3.2, the *Belhar Confession* in 3.3, followed by the statement of affirmation for the *National Initiative for Reconciliation* is 3.4. The description and analysis will be done on the basis of literature that emerged as a result of these initiatives.

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3.2 The Message to the People of South Africa (1968)

This section entails a brief survey of literature emerging from the publication of the *Message to the People of South Africa*. Of course, the *Message to the People of South Africa* cannot be understood apart from the events leading to it, and this will be addressed in summary form.

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3.2.1 Cottesloe

"Apartheid" was the electoral slogan which brought radical Afrikaner nationalism to power in South Africa in 1948.[1] This year also marks the beginning of a legislated policy of racial segregation, known as "apartheid", a policy promoted by the ruling National Party after their stunning election victory.[2] While 1948 marks the beginning of the apartheid era, the history of racial discrimination reaches back to the start of the colonial period.[3] At least until 1960 much of the discriminatory practices applied by the apartheid government were mirrored by the country's institutions, including the Christian churches.

However, the year 1960 also marks the beginning of what Saul Dubow calls "seismic upheaval in South Africa". It started with the death of 437 men (all but six were black) in a pit collapse at Coalbrook coal mine south of Johannesburg on 21 January. The cause of the accident is linked to engineering negligence brought about by the reckless pursuit of profit. On 21 March police fired more than 1,000 rounds of ammunition at a crowd of black protesters in what became the infamous Sharpeville massacre. In the end, 69 protestors were shot and killed, and as many as 180 people were wounded. Many of them were shot while running away. In contrast to the Coalbrook disaster, it was the Sharpeville massacre that resonated as an iconic symbol of cruelty and of popular resistance against the apartheid government.[4]

The intensification of protest action resulting from Sharpeville prompted the Nationalist government to declare a state of emergency on 30 March 1960. This gave the security

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1 The "apartheid" concept first emerged in the context discussions by Dutch Reformed Church missionaries in the 1930s, only gaining wider political currency in the 1940s. The word literally translates as "apartness" or "seperateness".

2 S. Dubow, *Apartheid: 1948-1994,* New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, 1.

3 L. Hendriksson, *A Journey with a Status Confessionis: Analysis of an apartheid related conflict between the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 1982-1998,* Uppsala: Swedish Institute of Missionary Research 2010, 28-33.

4 Sharpeville, together with the fatal shooting of protestors in Langa, a black township in the Cape, represents a watershed moment in the anti-apartheid resistance movement. Together with those killed and injured in Sharpeville, in Langa two protestors were killed and as many as 49 were injured. See Dubow, *Apartheid*, 74, 82.

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forces significant powers to arrest and detain. Parliament voted in favour of the banning anti-apartheid organisations like the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), citing their alleged revolutionary objectives. By the month of May, more than 2000 political leaders and activists were arrested, including notable figures like Albert Luthuli (ANC) and Robert Sobukwe (PAC) who were taken into custody under emergency regulations.[5]

Hans Engdahl suggests:

> In addition to a viable opposition holding their moral high ground, the Sharpeville massacre had made the world pay attention to South Africa and her policies. The global impact of media was becoming a reality now, other political leaders worldwide and the United Nations took note and acted, as did also the churches especially through the World Council of Churches (WCC). Finally, the wind of change had reached also the southern tip of Africa, with nation states in Africa already starting to set dates for their independence. The absurdity of the system of apartheid was there for all to see.[6]

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Formal talks between the WCC and its South African member churches took place after Sharpeville in 1960. At this time the WCC General Assembly at Evanston in 1954 had already passed a resolution on race relations, and this undoubtedly had a bearing on the unfolding racial policies in South Africa. Among other things, the resolution at Evanston stated: "that any form of segregation based on race, colour or ethnic origin is contrary to the Gospel and is incompatible with the Christian doctrine of man and with the nature of the Church of Christ."[7] Amidst the tension, the WCC General Secretary, Willem A. Visser't Hooft sent a personal representative to South Africa in order to plan and facilitate a mission of fellowship. What was envisioned was a consultation, if possible, with the eight-

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5 Dubow, *Apartheid*, 81

6 H. S. A. Engdahl, *Theology in conflict: Readings in Afrikaner theology*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2006, 36-37.

7 ' Report on the World Council of Churches Mission in South Africa April – December 1960. Geneva, April 1961, 10, quoted in Engdahl, *Theology in Conflict*, 38.

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member churches and the WCC representatives. This was made all the more significant given the accusations that the white Dutch Reformed churches, the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK) and the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk (NHK) were in cahoots with the apartheid government.[8] The WCC sponsored consultation took place in the Johannesburg suburb of Cottesloe in December 1960. This meeting became known as the landmark Cottesloe Consultation. However, the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, Joost de Blank, almost jeopardised the initiative by sending a letter to the WCC demanding a clear word from the white Dutch Reformed churches regarding apartheid. De Blank demanded: "Unless the Dutch Reformed Churches are prepared to forsake their support for apartheid and to condemn the government for its ruthless action, [they] can no longer remain as fellow members of the World Council of Churches with them. Either they must be expelled or [the Anglicans] shall be compelled to withdraw"[9] The WCC representative, Robert Bilheimer, was utterly dissatisfied with the Anglican response in his report back to the World Council.[10] In the end, the consultation did take place, comprising 80 delegates from the eight South African WCC member churches. This included the Bantu Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Anglican Church, the Congregational Union, the Methodist Church, the NGK Transvaal Synod, the NGK Cape

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8 Since the inception of apartheid, the policy of "separate development" drew support from the white Dutch Reformed churches. At a church conference in Bloemfontein in 1950, the NGK resolved that "total separation" and "separate economic development" could only be achieved by the "gradual movement toward territorial separation between whites and the Bantu". In an effort to mobilise support for the separate development of black nations, the NGK convened a series of conferences during 1951 and 1952. In keeping with the National Party government's policy of "retribalisation", the NGK invited representatives to separate "ethnic" conferences. A conference for the "Sotho" was held in 1951, one for "Xhosa" in 1952 and another for "Zulu" in the same year. Since separate development required the creation of new ethnic and national identities, the NGK represented early experiments in the building of black ethnic nationalisms. See D. Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*, New York: Routledge, 1992, 202.

9 Correspondence Visser't Hooft: De Blank – SA Bishops, 9.4. 1960. World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva, 8, quoted in Engdahl, *Theology in conflict*, 38.

10 Bilheimer reported that, "The Anglican Church, to put it very bluntly, needs a big reform of attitude at the above point (apartheid issue), and in regard to their attitude to the [Dutch Reformed Church]. They speak and act as the Church, not only on theological grounds, but on historical-cultural grounds. They do not try to consult with the [NGK], and are too greatly isolated from them." Billheimer Collection: "Confidential Report from Bilheimer to the WCC", (3.5), 1960. WCC Archives, Geneva. quoted in quoted in Engdahl, *Theology in conflict*, 38.

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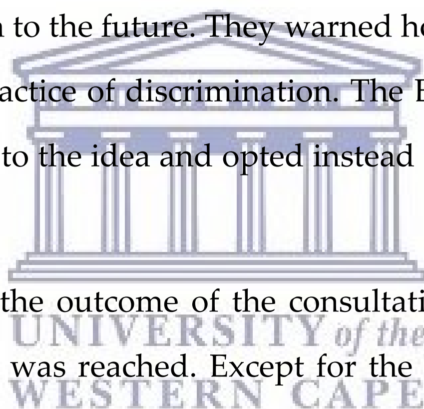
Synod and the NHK. Not including the six WCC representatives, there were 86 participants plus an observer. Peter Walshe critically observes that, although the consultation was ecumenical and multiracial, only 17 out of the 80 delegates were black. In his view, it was essentially a white affair where "a group of anguished white clerics [set] out to listen to each other and to pay polite attention to the small minority of their black colleagues."[11]

Elfriede Strassberger observes that the consultation reflected a clear division between English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking churches.[12] For example, the English-speaking churches showed apartheid to be unacceptable, whereas the Afrikaans-speaking churches showed an implicit acceptance of apartheid if it was implemented fairly.[13] In this sense, Afrikaans-speaking churches supported the principle that each racial group should maintain its own separate path to the future. They warned however that this should not be confused with the negative practice of discrimination. The English-speaking churches, on the other hand, were opposed to the idea and opted instead for a multiracial future within one shared state.[14]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Despite some disagreements, the outcome of the consultation was surprisingly positive, and a high level of consensus was reached. Except for the more conservative NHK who rejected the resolutions, the Transvaal as well as the Cape Synods of the NGK signed the

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[11] P. Walshe, *Church versus state in South Africa: The Case of the Christian Institute*, New York: Orbis, 1983, 36.

[12] De Gruchy observes that the designations, "English-speaking" or "Afrikaans-speaking" churches is "somewhat clumsy and untheological". However in exploring the churches' response to apartheid it seems, as he puts it, "impossible to avoid the phrase or find a satisfactory alternative." Suffice to say that these phrases do not refer in any primary sense to some common doctrinal or liturgical commitment and practice, nor does it include all those churches in the country who use English or Afrikaans as their main language of communication and worship. These terms were devised not by the churches themselves but by the mass media, politicians, other churches, and by the general populace in order to make the distinction among those who opposed or supported apartheid. For example, the English-speaking churches were known to oppose the racial policy of the Nationalist government, whereas the Afrikaans-speaking churches were known to support these policies. See J. W. de Gruchy and S. de Gruchy, *The church struggle in South Africa,* London: SCM, 2004, 84.

[13] E. Strassberger, *Ecumenism in South Africa 1936-1960,* Johannesburg: SACC, 1974, 222-227.

[14] Walshe, *Church versus state*, 12

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final resolution with minor reservations.[15] In fact, most of the Cottesloe resolutions were memoranda prepared by the Cape Synod of the NGK.[16] The resolutions were not far-reaching but were, from an Afrikaner perspective, quite radical. At the end of the consultation, the resolutions (in the form of a statement) in which many of the basic principles of apartheid were rejected were made public.[17] David Chidester adds that: "Although its condemnation of racism would later appear fairly moderate, the Cottesloe resolutions marked a departure from apartheid theology for the delegates of the [NGK]."[18] However, soon after the meeting was concluded, the Prime Minister of South Africa, Hendrik Verwoerd, referred to the Cottesloe Statement in his 1961 New Year's message, in which he rejected and downplayed its significance. Verwoerd stressed that the NGK, the Transvaal, and Cape Synods, in particular, were yet to respond to Cottesloe. In his view the NGK delegations that supported Cottesloe did not have the authority to do so and that it was only with the approval of their respective constituencies that they could support the consensus reached at Cottesloe.[19] He further called on the churches to get rid of the "betrayers" and distance themselves from those who did not repudiate the consultation. In concert with the government, apartheid theologians ensured that the NGK Synods formally rejected the Cottesloe Statement.[20] The NGK delegates who supported Cottesloe were severely reprimanded, and some were even stripped of their synodical responsibilities. Thus, what could have been a breakthrough, the beginning of a process of moving away from apartheid, resulted in the white Dutch Reformed churches separating themselves from the wider ecumenical community in South Africa. This was also the case

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15 Matters of concern were: mixed marriages, migrant labour and job reservation, the right to own land, the right of collaboration in the government of the country and direct representation of Coloured people in Parliament. See A. H. Lückhoff, *Cottesloe,* Cape Town: Tafelberg 1978, 58-63.

16 R. Vosloo, "Christianity and apartheid in South Africa", In: Elias Kifon Bongmba (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Christianity in Africa,* New York: Routledge, 2016, 411.

17 For a detailed description and evaluation of the document, see E. A. J. G. Van der Borght, "Unity that Sanctifies Diversity: Cottesloe Revisited", *Acta Theologica*, 31(2), 2011, 318-320.

18 Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*, 202.

19 Dubow, *Apartheid*, 82.

20 Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*, 202.

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when both the NGK and the NHK withdrew their membership from the WCC in 1961. This self-imposed ecumenical isolation lasted for more than three decades.

Regardless of its outcome, Cottesloe marks the beginning of an important shift in church relations in South Africa. For De Gruchy, this signals the beginning of the period that is commonly referred to as the "church struggle" in South Africa. At the heart of this struggle "is a theology of reconciliation that fundamentally challenged both the politics and theology of racial separation. God's will, as expressed in the gospel of Jesus Christ, was not apartheid but the reconciliation of the people of the country into one nation."[21] Cottesloe's final statement was by no means a radical document. However, it was entirely different from anything that had come from the churches at least before 1960, mainly because it challenged the fundamental basis of apartheid in a new way. Johann Kinghorn's discussion on the significance of Cottesloe is helpful here. Kinghorn mentions that, although the consultation did not plead the course of general integration, its resolutions conflicted with Prime Minister Verwoerd's policy of total, territorial separation of "nations" in South Africa. In this sense, it was quite different from the anti-modern discourse that characterised statements of Afrikaner leaders of that era. As if Cottesloe's resolutions were not bad enough for the ruling establishment, what made matters worse was the fact that most of the resolutions contained in the final statement originated from the NGK Cape Synod.[22]

Eddy Van der Borght mentions that in the Cottesloe resolutions, "justice", for the first time, became the hermeneutical key to evaluating apartheid policies.[23] The insistence on justice is based on apartheid's racial separation and its associated discrimination. From a theological perspective, justice, on the basis of reconciliation in Jesus Christ, became crucial in assessing the situation. With reference to De Gruchy's assessment of the

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[21] De Gruchy, *The church struggle,*, 33.

[22] J. Kinghorn, "Modernization and Apartheid: The Afrikaner Churches", In: R. Elphick and R. Davenport (eds.), *Christianity in South Africa: A political, social & cultural history,* Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1997, 148-151.

[23] Van der Borght, "Unity that Sanctifies Diversity", 318.

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beginning of the "church struggle", Cottesloe is characterised by the belief that "God's will, as expressed in the gospel of Jesus Christ, was not apartheid but the reconciliation of the peoples of South Africa in one nation."[24] This is mentioned in Cottesloe's two references to reconciliation – first, in terms of reconciliation between the churches and second, the call to the ministry of reconciliation in Jesus Christ. However, these ideas are not further developed theologically. It is only in the *Message to the People of South Africa* a few years later where more attention was given to the reconciliation concept.

3.2.2 Cottesloe in perspective

The post-Cottesloe environment proved to be hostile for some of the NGK delegates. Some were ostracised for being "betrayers" of the church and the Afrikaner community. In this context, the WCC encouraged members of the NGK to start ecumenical study groups. One NGK leader, who continued supporting the Cottesloe resolutions, was the acting moderator of the Transvaal Synod, Beyers Naudé. Chidester mentions that "as son of a founding member of the Broederbond [a secret, exclusively male Afrikaner Calvinist organisation, dedicated to the advancement of Afrikaner interests] Naudé had impeccable Afrikaner nationalist credentials. After 1960, however, Naudé resigned from the Broederbond [and] denounced the theology of apartheid."[25] After Cottesloe, Naudé, together with a group of sympathisers started a campaign to promote the Cottesloe resolutions. This was done through organising Bible study groups as well as producing a monthly journal called *Pro Veritate* (For the Truth). *Pro Veritate* first made its appearance in May 1962, with Naudé as its editor. From its very first issue, the journal was instrumental in challenging the theological basis of apartheid. The aim was to debunk the "biblical justification of apartheid by citing biblical texts which emphasised the unity of the Christian Church".[26]

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[24] De Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 33.

[25] Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*, 202-203.

[26] C. Ryan, *Beyers Naudé – Pilgrimage of faith,* Cape Town: David Philip, 1990, 68-70.

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One year later, in December 1963, under the leadership of Naudé, a multiracial-interdenominational institute, called the Christian Institute of South Africa (Christian Institute) was established. Drawing their inspiration from the German church struggle and the witness against Hitler and Nazism of figures such as Martin Niemöller and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and documents such as the Barmen Declaration of 1934, the establishment of the Christian Institute was aimed at creating a type of confessing movement, with Beyers Naudé writing several articles along these lines in *Pro Veritate*.[27] Moreover, it tried to counter apartheid racial separation by promoting "one-ness" both in church and society.[28] Initially, its core function was to foster dialogue between the English and Afrikaans-speaking churches as well as advocating for justice and reconciliation in society. Heeding the call of the WCC, the aim was to "search for a deeper insight into the will of Christ for his church through study circles and discussion groups and to strengthen the witness of the church by holding courses and conferences."[29] Moreover, its task was, as Daryl Balia puts it, "to equip Christians for a life of doing, a life committed to reconciliation and to witnessing more clearly to the Kingdom of God in South Africa." For Naudé and others "the spirit of Cottesloe" was undoubtedly a motivating hope in the formation and work of the Christian Institute.[30] The NGK responded by removing Naudé from his role as a minister, but he continued to pursue an alternative ministry through various study projects, conferences, and publications of the Christian Institute.[31]

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27 Vosloo, "Christianity and apartheid in South Africa", 412.

28 Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*, 203.

29 Ryan, *Beyers Naudé*, 77.

30 D. M. Balia, *Christian resistance to apartheid: Ecumenism in South Africa 1960-1987*, Johannesburg: Skotaville 1989, 21.

31 After years of intimidation by the security police the Christian Institute was banned in 1977. Many of its staff were arrested or fled into exile. Naudé was banned, forbidden by government to write, publish or be in the presence of more than one person at a time. See Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*, 203.

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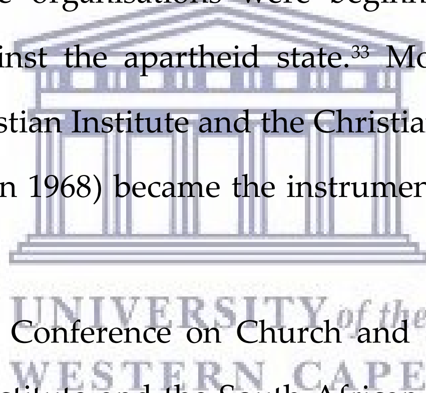
The Christian Institute worked closely with the Christian Council of South Africa (Christian Council).[32] Formed in 1936, the Christian Council was a Protestant ecumenical body for inter-church cooperation, and it was set up mainly as a means for ecumenical coordination in South Africa. Their membership also included the Roman Catholic Church – after Vatican II (1962-1965) the Roman Catholic Church was brought into much more direct contact with other churches, including the Christian Council. As the political situation deteriorated in the country, the Christian Council found itself in the position of increasingly having to mediate the tensions between the South African churches. This continued in the aftermath of Cottesloe. In the absence of a credible political opposition, the partnership between the Christian Institute and the Christian Council became increasingly important. In fact, given the political vacuum left by the banning of the liberation organisations, these organisations were beginning to function more like a movement of opposition against the apartheid state.[33] Moreover, it was through their combined efforts that the Christian Institute and the Christian Council (renamed the South African Council of Churches in 1968) became the instruments for prophetic leadership in South Africa.[34]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The WCC sponsored Geneva Conference on Church and Society in 1966 proved to be important for the Christian Institute and the South African Council of Churches (SACC). The meeting was unique in the history of the ecumenical movement. Not only did it set the agenda for considerable theological debate and social action for the WCC but it also detailed a response to the problem of racism and oppression around the world.[35] The

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32 By the time the plans for Cottesloe was underway the Christian Council was a relatively ineffective organisation. This continued in the aftermath of Cottesloe. The Christian Council changed its name to the South African Council of Churches in 1968.

33 J. W. de Gruchy, *A Theological odyssey: My life in writing*, Stellenbosch: Sun Media 2014, 21-22.

34 De Gruchy, *The church struggle*, 113-115.

35 The Geneva Conference confronted the churches with the reality of millions of oppressed people, particularly those in the so-called "Third World", with a call for justice. It was at Geneva that the question regarding Christian participation in the revolutionary struggles was first raised. This was the first time that this issue was raised at a high-level meeting of the Christian church. It was here where

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conference highlighted the need for the churches to encourage the legitimate aspirations of suppressed majorities and minorities and to "support all practicable measures aimed at changing any political and economic order which reflects the denial of political rights or economic opportunity, segregation, discrimination, or other suppression."[36] This conference was particularly important for the South African delegation. Among them, the director of the Christian Institute, Naudé and the General Secretary of the Christian Council, Bill Burnett, returned challenged by the urgent necessity for the churches to strive for the scriptural demand of social justice and peace. On their return they facilitated regional conferences in Durban, Port Elizabeth, and Cape Town to consider the recommendations of the Geneva Conference. This led to the National Consultation on Church and Society held in Johannesburg in February 1968.

The National Consultation on Church and Society presented Christian activists together with the leaders of the Christian Institute and the SACC with an opportunity to articulate an alternative to what was happening in South Africa. Walshe posits that the hope was that this would be the first, halting attempt to outline an alternative to apartheid – a comprehensive Christian social ethic."[37] An appointed ecumenical committee was tasked to create a theological critique of apartheid. The objective was to create a document that would be irrefutable on biblical grounds as well as something that would serve as a basis for further study and action. The result was a document entitled the *Message to the People of South Africa* (*The Message*). It was issued jointly by the Christian Institute and the SACC. De Gruchy mentions that *The Message* was prepared by people representing a wide variety of theological positions. He further states that "the two dominant theological approaches which influenced *The Message* were Anglican social thought and that of the Dutch theologian A. A. van Ruler, an interesting if a somewhat unlikely blend of two distinct

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the controversial WCC Programme to Combat Racism of 1970 (discussed in the following chapter) was first envisioned.

[36] World Conference on Church and Society, Official Report. 137.

[37] Walshe, *Church versus state*, 58.

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traditions. These traditions found considerable commonality in seeking to relate the gospel to apartheid. What bound the drafters of *The Message* together was not only a common ideological and political enemy but a Christology which stressed our common humanity in both son and redemption, a Christology which confessed the reconciling power of the cross and implications for society."[38]

3.2.3 *The Message to the People of South Africa*: An overview

In *The Message*, like Cottesloe, justice is the hermeneutical key through which apartheid policies are evaluated. However, *The Message* goes further than Cottesloe, by not only identifying apartheid as a social problem but defining it as a false faith, a novel gospel that is built on a theory of racial separation. Using a theology of reconciliation as a starting point, the authors build an argument on the belief that, in Christ, God has reconciled the world to himself and therefore made reconciliation between people both possible and essential to the Christian faith.

The document itself consists of five sections. The first, entitled "What the Christian Gospel says", draws out the implications of the atoning work of Christ in terms of the South African society. It suggests that in Christ God has broken down the walls that divide God and humanity, and therefore also that which divides human beings. It further maintains that Christ is the truth which sets humanity free from all false hopes of grasping freedom for themselves and that Christ liberates humanity from a pursuit of false securities. It further states that the crucifixion of Christ had been followed by the resurrection. With this, it is implied that it is God's purpose that shapes history, giving rise to the expectation of a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. This, it maintains, is

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38 J. W. Gruchy, "From Cottesloe to the road to Damascus: Confessing landmarks in the struggle against apartheid," Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Theological Society of Southern Africa held at the University of Port Elizabeth, 29-31 August 1990, In: G. Loots (ed.), *Listening to South African Voices: Critical reflection on contemporary theological documents,* Theological Society of Southern Africa: Woordkor, 8.

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manifested in the kingdom of God that is presented in Christ's atoning work and realised at present through the Holy Spirit.

The second section entitled, "Our Concern", insists that salvation in Christ offers hope and security for all areas of human life. This is to be understood not only in the context of the individual person, or in a sacramental and ecclesiastical sense within the context of the church. However, the salvation in Christ is to be understood in a cultural, social (and therefore political), cosmic and universal sense. It further posits that the Gospel of Christ should not be reduced to an object of hope for the future only. Rather that it should be experienced as a reality in the present. Christians are therefore called to be witnesses to the significance of the gospel in the particular circumstances of the time and place in which they find themselves. On the basis of salvation in Christ, *The Message* proceeds to the South African situation in what it calls the situation where a policy of racial separation is being deliberately imposed with increased rigidity. In the light of the salvation that is to be found in Christ alone, it labels the "doctrine of racial separation" as something that is "truly hostile to Christianity". Such a doctrine of racial separation, it suggests, is based not in Christ but on a "false offer of salvation".

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Furthermore, this false offer of salvation is based on the notion that the separate development of race-groups is a way for the people of South Africa to save themselves. Because it is based on a false offer of salvation, *The Message* labels apartheid a "false faith" – it claims to be offering peace and happiness through "the preservation of racial identity" in the name of Christianity. *The Message* concludes that the hardship derived from the implementation of the doctrine of racial separation "can serve only to keep people away from the real knowledge of Christ". It is for this reason that it is believed that the church has a duty to enable people to discriminate more carefully between what may be demanded of them as subjects or citizens of the state of South Africa and what is demanded of them as disciples of Jesus Christ.

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The third section entitled, "The Gospel's claim" reaffirms the conviction that "The Christian Gospel declares that there is no other name than that of Christ whereby humanity must be saved". It also highlights the belief that salvation in Christ exposes the falsity of hope of salvation through any other means. It notes that first Christians, Jews, and Gentiles alike, "discovered that God was creating a new community in which differences of race, nation, culture, language and tradition no longer had power to separate human beings". It thus stresses that Christians "are under obligation to assert this claim and live by it". It furthermore postulates that Christians "are under an obligation to assert that the most significant features of a human being are not the details of its genetic inheritance, nor the facts of his ancestry but the characteristics that make it a disciple of Christ". It further maintains that an (over)emphasis on racial identity denies the Gospel. In other words, it is in opposition to "the Christian understanding of the nature of human being and community". This, therefore, puts an arbitrary limit on a person's ability, "to obey the Gospel's command to love its neighbour as itself".

The Message attributes the demand for racial separation to human sin. It argues that any scheme which is proposed for the rectifying of human disorders must take account of this essentially sinful element in the divisions between people and between groups of people. Furthermore, any scheme which claims to be Christian must also take account of the reconciliation already made for humanity in Christ. It thus concludes the doctrine of racial separation does not take seriously the gospel truth manifested in Christ. It further states that the doctrine of racial separation promises peace and harmony between the people of South Africa not by a faithful and obedient pursuit of the reconciliation wrought by Christ, but through separation, which, being precisely the opposite of reconciliation. Racial separation, it maintains, is a demonstration of unbelief and distrust in the power of the gospel. In *The Message*, any demonstration of the reality of reconciliation as highlighted in Christ would endanger the doctrine of racial separation, and thus the supporters of apartheid would "inevitably find themselves opposed to the church if it seeks to live according to the gospel and if it shows that God's grace has overcome hostilities". The

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consequence, therefore, is that "a thorough policy of racial separation must ultimately require that the church should cease to be the church". This section is concluded by stating that the doctrine of racial separation rejects as undesirable the good reconciliation and fellowship which God gives to humanity through Christ. It further seeks to limit the limitlessness of God's grace by which all human beings may be accepted in Jesus Christ. In other words, it seeks to confine the operation of God's grace within the barriers of human distinctions. And therefore reinforces divisions which the Holy Spirit is calling the people of God to overcome. *The Message* thus states that the doctrine of racial separation is a form of resistance to the Holy Spirit.

In the fourth section entitled "Our Task", *The Message* is much more introspective. Here the focus is on the role of the church in society. It states that society as a whole should be able to see in the church an inclusive fellowship in Christ. In other words, society should be able to see the power of God at work in the church, changing hostility into love. The problem with this, however, as *The Message* suggests is that "even in the life of the church, there is conformity to the practices of racial separation; and the measure of conformity is the measure of the Church's deviation from the purpose of Christ". Here also *The Message* maintains that the task of the church is to work for the expression of God's reconciliation here and now.

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The final section entitled, "We must obey God rather than men", affirms the conviction that Christ should be at the centre of the life of any Christian. Here *The Message* affirms the position that Christ should be the criterion for everyone, including the different racial or interest groups. *The Message* warns that if the church does not consider this, it too "fails to witness to the true gospel of Jesus Christ". In other words, the church "will find itself witnessing to a false gospel". It states that "if the church seeks to reconcile Christianity with the so-called 'South African way of life,' (or any other way of life) the church shall find that it has allowed an idol to take the place of Christ". In other words, if the church "abandons its obedience to Christ, it ceases to be the church". In this context, the church

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breaks the link between itself and the kingdom of God. *The Message* asserts that those calling themselves Christians "are under an obligation to live by the Christian understanding of human beings and community, even if this is contrary to some of the customs and laws of South Africa". Therefore, Christians in the country will have to face the question: "to whom or to what are you truly giving your first loyalty, your primary commitment? Is it to a subsection of humankind, and ethnic group, a human tradition, a political idea; or to Christ?"

3.2.4 *The Message* in perspective

The Message was officially adopted by several of the member churches of the SACC. Like the Cottesloe resolutions, this also was not radical in its approach. It merely stated that on the basis of the Gospel it is a sin to keep people apart due to social markers such as race. If the church were not allowed to preach and live this Gospel "the church would [essentially] cease to be the Church".[39] Nonetheless, it evoked an immediate reaction from the government. Vosloo indicates that the South African Prime Minister, John Vorster, strongly criticised the document, warning clergy not to delve into politics and not to imitate what Martin Luther King Jr. did in the United States. Church leaders and ecumenical leaders such as the Anglican Archbishop Selby-Taylor, Bishop Bill Burnett, and Beyers Naudé responded by writing an open letter to the Prime Minister, signalling the intensification of the conflict between the churches and the apartheid state.[40]

Moreover, *The Message* was crucial in helping Christians to reflect more critically on the South African situation. However, when compared to Cottesloe, it went a step further by categorically rejecting apartheid as a false gospel. It was not the first church statement to be critical of apartheid, but it was indeed the first extensive theological rebuttal of the system. Whereas apartheid focused on separateness and segregation, *The Message* draws

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[39] J. W. de Gruchy & W. B. de Villiers (eds.), *The Message in Perspective: A Book about 'A Message to the People of South Africa'*, Johannesburg: SACC, 1969, 14.

[40] Vosloo, "Christianity and apartheid in South Africa", 412.

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on the atoning work of Christ as a means of reconciling people to each other. God reconciles the world to himself, and this has implications first of all, for the church, and then by implication also for the society in which it exists. The kerygmatic tone of *The Message* points to the work that has already been achieved in Christ. Thus, when compared to Cottesloe, *The Message*

> was much more of an overtly theological document … with the result that it has much greater theological coherence … [w]hat bound the drafters of *The Message* together was not only a common ideological and political enemy, but a Christology which stressed [their] common humanity in both sin and redemption, a Christology which confessed the reconciling power of the cross and its implications for society, over against an ideology of ethnic division, dominating power and material interests.[41]

Apart from this particular focus on reconciliation, *The Message* reflects a position that stopped short of the understanding the gospel as a call for blacks to take the future into their own hands. While espousing a social gospel of reconciliation, the document was essentially paternalistic. It was a call to whites to establish justice for blacks. From this vantage point, it was largely directed to those in positions of privilege and power.[42] De Gruchy agrees, saying that at this stage in history the discussion was primarily among white Christians, reflecting the theological divide between conservatives and liberals.[43] This is highlighted by the fact that the document was not widely accepted within the white constituency of the SACC member churches. In fact, some white Christians were rather reluctant to mix politics and religion, which, according to Balia, was the standard pretext for avoiding the practical implications of the initiative altogether. In the end, *The Message* offered a clear denunciation of apartheid but failed to provide any ideological

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41 De Gruchy, "From Cottesloe to the Road to Damascus", 8-9.

42 Walshe, *Church versus state*, 54.

43 De Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 34.

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annunciation or direction. Balia thus concludes that it was of little relevance to the black community.[44]

To sum up, at the heart of *The Message* is a theology of reconciliation that rejects apartheid as a false gospel. Apartheid is further branded as false salvation. Over and against apartheid, *The Message* proclaims the Lordship of Christ. It refers to attempts to justify apartheid through the use of scripture, in particular through the idea of an order of creation. It concludes that any political scheme claiming to be Christian has to be based on reconciliation already achieved in Christ. It develops the idea of reconciliation by focusing on the implications for the church. The doctrine of separation when enforced on the churches means the destruction of the church since it is not based on the reconciling work of Christ. For the authors, support for a doctrine of separation implies distrust in the gospel of Jesus Christ. In this context, *The Message* represents the beginning of something that would, as explained in the following section, become the most serious theological judgment against apartheid. For De Gruchy:

> It is important to keep in mind, for the message of reconciliation at that moment in the church struggle against apartheid had a power and significance which it was going to lose. At [this] stage, however, the message of reconciliation was a fundamental rejection of apartheid and not, as it was later described in the theology of *The Kairos Document*, a way of escaping fundamental change in society.[45]

3.3 The Belhar Confession (1982/1986)

This section entails a brief survey of literature emerging from the *Belhar Confession* (1982/1986). Of course, the *Belhar Confession* cannot be understood apart from the events leading to it, and this will be addressed in summary form.

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[44] Balia, *Christian resistance to apartheid*, 35-37.

[45] De Gruchy, "From Cottesloe to the Road to Damascus", 8.

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3.3.1 *Ras, Volk en Nasie en volkeverhoudinge in die lig van die Skrif*

The report, *Ras, Volk en Nasie en volkeverhoudinge in die lig van die Skrif* in 1974, represents the NGK official response to the possible faith relationship between apartheid and a Christ-centred understanding of reconciliation.[46] Johan Van der Merwe observes that the roots of the document can be traced as far back as Cottesloe in 1960. The developments at Cottesloe prompted the NGK, in 1961, to appoint a permanent commission to formulate a response to the race issue. In 1965, this commission tabled a report on race relations and this "became the vehicle which transported the call from the Cottesloe Consultation from synod to synod and kept the discussion about race and relations between races in the [NGK] on the agenda."[47] The work of the commission also formed the basis of a report tabled at the NGK General Synod of 1966, before another revision was tabled at the General Synod of 1969. In between the synodical reports of 1966 and 1974 the Dutch Reformed Church also issued a report entitled, *A Plea for Understanding: A reply to the Reformed Church in America* in 1968.[48] Better known as the as the "Landman Report", this document came in the wake of strong criticism from the Reformed Church in America about the NGK support for apartheid. The response came in the form of a publication. The hope was that the publication would provide American colleagues with an understanding of the desire of the NGK to come to better knowledge of Jesus Christ with regard to the tensions in South Africa. Though admitting the situation was not perfect, the NGK appealed for a more sympathetic understanding of the situation as it strove to listen anew to what the Word of God had to say about race relations in a plural society. In 1970, the General Synod made the decision to appoint a permanent commission for the study of

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[46] It was translated into English under the title "Human Relations and the South African scene in the light of Scripture". For the purpose of clarity, the original Afrikaans title will be used, simply because the English title does not quite capture what exactly is at stake. One may even argue that the English title is not an accurate description of its original Afrikaans version.

[47] J. Van der Merwe, "The Dutch Reformed Church from Ras, Volk en Nasie to Kerk en Samelewing: The struggle goes on", In: M-A. Plaatjies-Van Huffel and R. Vosloo (eds.), *Reformed churches in South Africa and the struggle for justice: Remembering 1960-1990*, Stellenbosch: Sun Press 2013, 53.

[48] W. A. Landman, *A plea for understanding: A reply to the Reformed Church in America*, Cape Town: NG Kerk-Uitgewers 1968.

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race and ecumenical issues. The report of this commission was presented and approved at the General Synod in 1974. In 1975 it was published under the title *Ras, Volk en Nasie en volkeverhoudinge in the die lig van die Skrif*.[49]

The report itself is quite extensive and its authors claim that it is an attempt by the NGK to listen anew to what the Word of God had to say about race relations in a plural society. The authors of the report assume the Bible to be normative on all matters pertaining to race relations. They posit that the concept of race is not well developed in the Bible. The report states that both the Old Testament and the New Testament does not outline the "modern scientific understanding" of terms such as "people", "nation", "population" and "ethnos". It nevertheless turns to the Babel story, in Genesis 11 to build a case.

J. A. (Bobby) Loubser suggests that the Babel story is associated with a significant thread in Dutch Reformed theology. This approach is linked to the work of Stephanus. J. du Toit, an early advocate of "people's theology", who argued that the unity of different nations followed directly from the appearance of distinct tongues.[50] Using this as a starting point, the report states that the scriptural lesson about distinct tongues is not just for language differentiation but a calling for the separate development of peoples. It asserts that God called nations into existence each with their own language, history, and church and that the salvation of all peoples should thus be sought in a sanctified way befitting the particularity of the group. Accordingly, the authors believe that the unity of God's creation marks a divine calling to enact ethnic differentiation which would allow all races to fulfil their own destiny.[51]

They further suggest that human attempts to unify distinct languages were a sign of arrogance by those who sought only to "make a name for themselves". It is therefore concluded that interventions to change the pluriformity of creation could only be effected

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49 Van der Merwe, "The Dutch Reformed Church from Ras, Volk en Nasie to Kerk en Samelewing", 54.

50 J. A. Loubser, *The Apartheid Bible: A critical review of racial theology in South Africa,* Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman 1987, 24.

51 Loubser, *The Apartheid Bible*, 24.

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by God, not by human beings. Humanity should thus be urged to abide by the pluriformity of God's creation. The notion that the Afrikaner people are a select race is rejected. Instead, the authors drew from the story of Babel to claim that language is the natural-historical expression of a complex divine interest of differentiation. It states that: "The diversity of the races and peoples to which the confusion of tongues contributed, is an aspect of reality which God obviously intended for this dispensation. To deny this fact is to side with the tower [of Babel] builders."[52]

The cultivation of difference is held as justification for separate development. However, the authors deny that this would be a warrant for racism. Rather, they declare that the church's responsibility to serve a "prophetic, priestly and kingly function toward the people" and to respect the "intrinsic cultural possessions" that constitutes the "identity of each people."[53] Furthermore, that this obligation does not require a "people's church" but one that allowed every group to give expression to their own identity. With this distinction, the authors were able to shift the focus on separate development away from race and more towards the notion that separate development was an opportunity for all God's creatures to realise their unique potential. The different groups join a larger unity based on Christ but only as a future eschatological reality.

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The authors further claim that separate development is underwritten by the norm of love that holds the potential for reconciliation. The report states that: "The message of Holy Scripture must remain the fundamental basis for the determination of relationships between people. Because [human beings are] created in the image of God, the basic concepts and norms for this life are love, justice, truth and peace. These arise from his reconciliation with God in Christ, by regeneration and renewal (2 Corinthians 5: 17). On this basis, the faithful are called upon to erect the signposts of the kingdom of God even in

52 DRC, *Human relations*, 18.

53 DRC, *Human relations*, 65.

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this dispensation, including the sphere of social relations."[54] When stated differently, the logic of reconciliation appeals to unity in diversity in the social context. It contends that it is only in the next life that various peoples would experience that which unites them. In the present, however, reconciliation is only possible through the adherence to God's created order. In other words, reconciliation is realised only through racial separation in the present. And justice is based on reconciliation in Jesus Christ but concretely separated from each other. The NGK call for reconciliation as presented in the report is thus a promise of a relationship that cannot exist in the present. Rather, it refers to an abstract notion of forging a relationship in the future – an eschatological reality.

3.3.2 *Ras, Volk en Nasie* in perspective

The release of the report proved to be quite controversial. Internationally, Protestant churches were quick to express their disapproval.[55] This included a response from the Gereformeerde Kerken in the Netherlands. The NGK had very close ties with the Gereformeerde Kerken but this relationship was severed when the Dutch denounced the report. This finally led to a break in relations in 1978.[56]

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In South Africa, conservative Afrikaner groupings viewed the report as a "liberal" shift away from the true biblical perspective and the well-known policy of the church. Those with a more liberal perspective criticised the report for its theological endorsement of

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54 DRC, *Human relations*, 63.

55 The main point of critique was the fact that the report sanctioned the political policy of separate development and gave it a biblical foundation. The Swiss Federation of Reformed Churches invited a NGK delegation to a conference in Le Louverain. The conference revealed that the main criticism was linked to the NGK's (i) interpretation of scripture; (ii) the prophetic calling of the church; (iii) separate development; (iv) the dualism between theology and practice as outlined in the report. From Switzerland the NGK Delegation went to Germany to meet with delegates of the Reformierter Bund. The Reformierter Bund responded by declaring, *Ras, Volk en Nasie* as theological confirmation of not only separate development but in actual fact the apartheid system itself. In practice the separation of races (apartheid) meant the dominion of the one and the discrimination, denial of rights and exploitation of the other. See Van der Merwe, "The Dutch Reformed Church from Ras, Volk en Nasie to Kerk en Samelewing", 55-56.

56 De Gruchy, *The church struggle*, 80.

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apartheid. These debates continued in the years following the publication of the report. For example, in the *Koinonia Declaration* (1978), some white Calvinist ministers argued that if separate development had to exist, as the church insists, it had to extend equal rights as well as afford blacks an effective share in negotiating their political future.[57] Prominent theologians made a similar appeal in the *Reformation Day Witness* (1980), a statement appearing in *Die Kerkbode*, the official news organ of the NGK.[58] The *Reformation Day Witness* challenged the church, "to carry out its divine calling of reconciliation on a meaningful and credible basis". The statement also warned against mutual estrangement and exclusivity among Christians. And it encouraged Christians, "to work against the divisions of the church which shame the communion of saints." Members of the church were invited to eliminate "loveless and racist attitudes and actions which cause hurtful incidents" and move towards "a form of church unity in which the oneness of believers adhering to the same confessions can take a visible form."[59] The book *Stormkompas* (1981), co-edited by prominent Dutch Reformed theologians is another attempt that highlights the challenges faced by the church.[60] The 44 statements in the book highlight the injustices against blacks as well as allude to the inevitable collapse of white rule. This initiative was followed by an *Open Letter* (1982) one year later. It was signed by 123 white ministers and theologians of the Dutch Reformed churches and criticised apartheid legislation. It called for reconciliation in Christ to be realised. The authors of the *Open Letter* stressed that "it is the inalienable privilege of the church to proclaim the message of reconciliation between God and [humanity]". It further argued that "it is inalienable privilege of the church to

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[57] This view is most evident in the *Koinonia Declaration*, prepared by a group of white ministers of the Gereformeerde Kerk in Potchefstroom. The statement was privately circulated and also published in the *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, September 1978. The statement received a warm reception in some English-speaking churches but was not well received in the NGK and the Gereformeerde Kerk. See De Gruchy, *The church struggle*, 80-81.

[58] The "Reformed Day Witness" was signed by C. F. A. Borchardt, H. J. B. Combrinck, B. A. Muller, W. P. Esterhuyse, J. A. Heyns, W. D. Jonker, H. W. Rossouw and A. B. du Toit and appeared in *Die Kerkbode* on 5 November 1980.

[59] "The Reformation Day Witness", In: J. H. P. Serfontein, *Apartheid change and the NG Kerk,* Emmarentia: Taurus Publishers 1982, 270.

[60] N. J. Smit, F. E. O'Brien, P. G. J. Meiring, *Stormkompas,* Cape Town: Tafelberg 1981.

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proclaim simultaneously the message of reconciliation between people – even between those who had formerly been enemies". The letter states that "the calling of the church extends beyond the ministry of reconciliation within the four walls of the church … reconciliation includes a prophetic witness in relation to the entire life of society and therefore the church dare not remain silent on those matters of moral decay, family disintegration and discrimination." With a veiled reference to *Ras, Volk en Nasie* it states that "the church will always bear witness that an arrangement of society based on the fundamental irreconcilability of individuals and groups cannot be accepted as a basic point of departure for the ordering of society."[61]

Thus, having to contend with dissident voices inside the church, the NGK leadership was compelled to re-open the discussion on separate development. During its General Synod in 1982, the church made the decision to revisit *Ras, Volk en Nasie* – appointing a commission to start this process and to present its findings at the General Synod of 1986. The new report, *Kerk en Samelewing*, was the result of four years of intense discussions.[62] Most importantly, *Kerk en Samelewing* signals a departure from the extreme views of *Ras, Volk en Nasie*. This includes retracting the theological justification for apartheid.[63]

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For Kinghorn, the difference between *Ras, Volk en Nasie* and *Kerk en Samelewing* is the difference between 1974 and 1986. In his view, this reflects the difference between a self-assured ideology and an ideology under siege. With the new report, there was an awareness not to emulate the extreme doctrinal approach of the past. The end result is a document that takes the theological as well as ethical considerations much more seriously. Kinghorn warns, however, that *Kerk en Samelewing* also has serious shortcomings, noting that this report also fell short of taking the ethical implications of apartheid seriously. He states that:

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61 Open Letter in C. W. Els, "Reconciliation in Southern Africa: The role of the Afrikaans Churches", Unpublished PhD. Dissertation, University of Pretoria, December 2007, 85-86.

62 The English translation of the report is entitled *Church and Society*.

63 De Gruchy, *The church struggle*, 195.

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> Having rejected the 'application of apartheid', [*Kerk en Samelewing*] nowhere, not even remotely, tries to ascertain if and how apartheid was applied in such a way that injustice was done to other people. No consideration is given to even the possibility that apartheid might inherently be a *system* of injustice. It is inconceivable that this fact simply escaped the attention of those who drafted [*Kerk en Samelewing*] … it is impossible that the [NGK] could be unaware of it. The omission…points to the fact that the [NGK] was not prepared to question its own fundamental assumptions, nor was it prepared to question the fundamental assumptions of the policy of apartheid ... Thus the [NGK's rejection of apartheid] was not the system of apartheid, but only some of the *effects* of apartheid.[64]

De Gruchy arrives at a similar conclusion arguing that *Kerk en Samelewing* was nothing more than a theological rationalisation of government's attempt to reform apartheid. Further stating that: "apartheid was beyond reform; it was a heresy that had to be rejected as contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ. There could be no compromise, no 'cheap reconciliation', only the dismantling of apartheid and everything that sustained it".[65]

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Ras Volk en Nasie, and subsequently also *Kerk en Samelewing* had a significant impact on the relationship between the NGK and its so-called "daughter" churches. It should be remembered that the relationship between the NGK and the "daughter" churches was always intertwined, mainly because the "daughter" churches were financially dependent on the NGK. Its superior financial standing granted the NGK significant influence on what was happening in the "daughter" churches. However, following *Ras, Volk en Nasie*, the relationship between the "mother" church and her "daughter" churches became much more strained. This resulted in the "daughter" churches asserting their independence more purposefully. Among other things "daughter" churches joined the SACC as well as

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[64] J. Kinghorn, "On the Theology of Church and society in the DRC", *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 70, 1990, 21-36.

[65] De Gruchy, *The church struggle*, 195.

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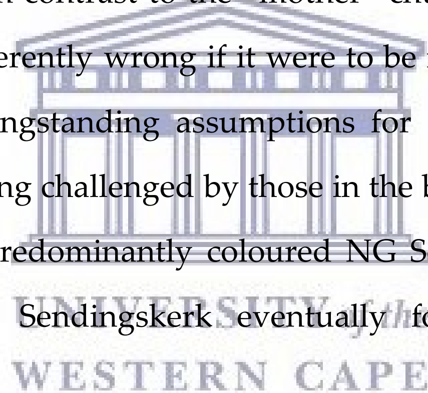
establish informal links with the Christian Institute. The development of anti-apartheid arguments in the "daughter" churches came especially from an organisation called the *Broederkring* established in 1974.[66] This organisation was formed mainly by black ministers of the NG Kerk in Afrika as a means to facilitate anti-apartheid responses within the Dutch Reformed family of churches. They were soon joined by colleagues of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingskerk (NG Sendingskerk). With close ties to the Christian Institute, the reasons for the formation of the *Broederkring* included the establishment of "a seriously considered and concerted effort to organise for a biblical, Reformed and relevant witness in the struggle for justice, liberation and reconciliation within the DRC family context."[67] In a show that symbolises a break in relations between the Dutch Reformed family of churches, the "daughter" churches through organisations like the *Broederkring* publically rejected apartheid. This was in contrast to the "mother" church who maintained that the apartheid system was not inherently wrong if it were to be implemented honestly. In this context, even some of the longstanding assumptions for terms such as "mother" and "daughter" churches were being challenged by those in the black missionary churches.[68] It was especially those in the predominantly coloured NG Sendingskerk, who challenged this relationship.[69] The NG Sendingskerk eventually formulated an anti-apartheid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[66] The *Broederkring* was later renamed the the *Belydende Kring* in 1983.

[67] Z. E. Mokgoebo, "Broederkring. From 1974 to ….?", In: S. P. Govender (ed.), *Unity and Justice. The witness of the Belydende Kring*, Braamfontein: Die Belydende Kring 1984, 14.

[68] In a series of interviews with black NGK clergy conducted by Walshe, he observes that for some it appeared as if it was the "mother" church rather than the "daughter" churches that was in need of guidance. Among other things, those in the "daughter" churches "were asking whether black churches did not have a missionary responsibility to convert the white DRC's from their corrupting racism … Whites were often in black pulpits; why not a regular flow of preachers in the opposite direction? How could segregated churches witness common humanity? Why were black and white, African, Coloured and Indian congregations not sharing *nagmaal* (communion) together? Why was there not a Federal [NGK] Synod that was more than advisory, a Synod in which black churches, under black control, would exercise considerable power? Why was the [NGK] cutting itself off from the wider Christian community, from the SACC, the WCC and even isolating itself within the Alliance of Reformed Churches? Why was the Christian Institute being persecuted by white [Duth Reformed churches] and the state? Was apartheid a blasphemous attack on the process of building Christian fellowship? Was the segregated structure of the [NGK] itself blasphemous?" See Walshe, *Church versus state*, 187-188.

[69] Pauw traces the problematic of the relationship between the NG Sendingskerk and the NGK to a much earlier date. Already at the establishment of the NG Sendingskerk In 1881 the missionary Paulus Teske

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response aimed at greater unity within the Dutch Reformed family of churches. This started with the NG Sendingskerk, General Synod of 1978, where for the first time since *Ras, Volk en Nasie*, the mission church officially opposed apartheid policies, both in church and society.

Christoff Pauw mentions that the NG Sendingskerk General Synod of 1978, declared that the Church ought not to design or prescribe party political policy. Moreover, that the Church is obliged to criticise and object when the state follows a policy that is contrary to the demands of the gospel – especially when the state claims to be inspired by Christian values. The General Synod further expressed the conviction that apartheid (or separate development) is contrary to the gospel:

> a) Because over and against the Gospel of Christ's directness on the reconciliation of human beings with God *and* with one another, the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and colour is based at the deepest level of the conviction of the fundamental irreconcilability between people who are thus separated;
>
> b) Because the system that has arisen out of such a policy necessarily had to and did lead to an increasing polarisation between people, especially since the practice has irrefutably shown that within the system one population group, namely the whites, is advantaged and that consequently the gospel's demand of justice for all is not fulfilled; and
>
> c) Because thereby the human dignity of not only the disadvantaged

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of Beaufort West objected to the constitution of the NG Sendingskerk as it endorsed submission to the NGK. *Ras, Volk en Nasie* was thus not the sole reason why the NG Sendingskerk challenged its relationship with the NGK but rather the culmination of what Chris Botha calls a "century-old protest". See J. J. C. Pauw, "Anti-apartheid theology in Dutch Reformed Family of Churches: A depth-hermeneutical analysis", Unpublished PhD. Dissertation, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2007. 163; C. J. Botha, "Belhar: a century-old protest", In: G. D. Cloete and D. J. Smit (eds.), *A Moment of Truth: The Confession of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, 1982*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984, 67.

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populations but the human dignity of all involved is affected.[70]

The General Synod final determination was that apartheid (or separate development) could not stand the test and requirements of scripture, and was, therefore, a sin.[71] This eventually led to the 1982, World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) assembly in Ottawa, officially rejecting apartheid. The WARC statement read: "We declare with black Reformed Christians in South Africa that apartheid ("separate development") is sin, and that the moral and theological justification of it is a travesty of the Gospel and, in its persistent disobedience to the Word of God, a theological heresy."[72] For those at the WARC assembly, the theological justification of apartheid meant that the credibility of the gospel itself was at stake and that this necessitates the declaration of a *status confessionis*. Holding out for something more progressive than *The Message*, prominent figures within the NG Sendingskerk, including Allan Boesak, argued that racism was a sin which apartheid had entrenched within a "system of domination". Its antidote, therefore, is a struggle orientated towards reconciliation. This was done on the basis of the theological conviction that the sin of apartheid called the church to work towards the realising the reconciling work of Christ. This meant calling the church to confession.[73]

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Boesak's role in these developments cannot be overstated. Some black theologians from the Dutch Reformed family of churches studied in the Netherlands, among them was Boesak, who upon his return was instrumental in articulating a theology of resistance

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[70] *Acta Synodi NGSK* 1978, 399-400; 559; 618-619 quoted in Pauw, "Anti-apartheid theology in Dutch Reformed Family of Churches", 185.

[71] *Acta Synodi NGSK* 1978, 399; 505 quoted in E. Fortein, "Allan Boesak and the Dutch Reformed Mission Church between 1976-1990", In: M-A. Plaatjies-Van Huffel and R. Vosloo (eds.), *Reformed Churches in South Africa and the struggle for justice: Remembering 1960-1990*, Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2013, 305-306

[72] J. W. de Gruchy & C. Villa-Vicencio (eds.), *Apartheid is a heresy,* Cape Town: David Philip, 1983, 170.

[73] In the 1980s, Boesak was a popular figure of the liberation movement. Among other things he was the Moderator of the NG Sendingkerk as well as the President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC). It was during the WARC assembly in 1982 where Boesak called the ecumenical body to take a "more active role in the struggle against racism" by issuing a broad-based condemnation of apartheid. More precisely, it was Boesak who urged the WARC assembly to declare a *status confessionis* and suspend churches that failed to denounce the apartheid state. See Allan Boesak, "He Made Us All But…" In: De Gruchy & Villa-Vicencio, *Apartheid is a heresy*, 3-4.

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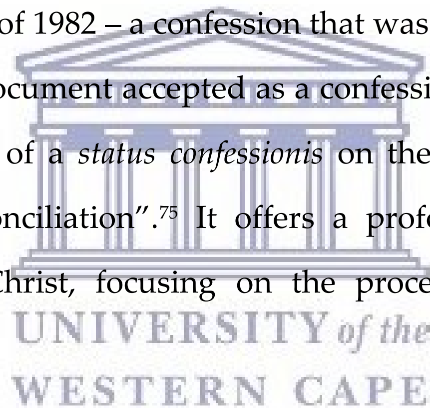
against apartheid. Drawing on the insights of Black Theology and his own Reformed tradition he played a leading role in the establishment of the Alliance of Black Reformed Christians (ABRECSA) formed in 1981, which urged the WARC to scrutinise the NGK justification of apartheid carefully, and see where it contradicted the truth of the gospel. Boesak was elected President of the WARC in 1982, further urging the alliance and its members to disassociate themselves from such false interpretations of the gospel.[74]

Among other things, the WARC assembly had two significant consequences for the Dutch Reformed family of churches. Firstly, it led to further ecumenical and international isolation of the NGK and the NHK. And secondly, WARC affirmed the conviction by some prominent figures in the NG Sendingskerk that the sin of apartheid prompted the need for a *status confessionis*. This led to the drafting of the *Belhar Confession* at the NG Sendingskerk, General Synod of 1982 – a confession that was ratified by the General Synod of 1986 (thus being the first document accepted as a confession since the 17th century) and which declared the existence of a *status confessionis* on the grounds that apartheid was "diversity in despair of reconciliation".[75] It offers a profound theological articulation affirming the Lordship of Christ, focusing on the process on the notions of unity, reconciliation, and justice.[76]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74 For Boesak's autobiographical accounts see Allan Boesak, *Running with horses: Reflections of an accidental politician,* Cape Town: Joho Publishers, 2009.

75 The full text of the *Belhar Confession* can be found in De Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio, *Apartheid is a Heresy*, 175-182; G. D. Cloete & D. J. Smit (eds,), *A moment of truth: The Confession of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984, 1-6; J. W. Hofmeyer, J. A. Millard and C. J. J. Froneman, *History of the church in South Africa: A document and source book,* Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1991, 342-349.

76 On the origin, reception and relevance of the *Belhar Confession*, see Cloete and Smit (eds), *A Moment of Truth*; J. Botha, and P. Naudé, *Good news to confess: The Belhar Confession and the road to acceptance*, Wellington: Bible Media, 2011; P. J. Naudé, *Neither calendar nor clock: Perspective on the Belhar Confession,* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010; M-A. Plaatjies-Van Huffel on "Reading the Belhar Confession as a historical text" in M-A. Plaatjies Van Huffel & R. R. Vosloo, *The Reformed Churches in South Africa and the Struggle for Justice*, 329–345.

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3.3.3 The *Belhar Confession*: An overview

According to Piet Naudé, the Accompanying Letter of the *Belhar Confession* is crucial in understanding the contextual nature of the document itself. The letter consists of four paragraphs in which: a) the need for a *status confessionis* is explained; b) Christ is highlighted as the central motive in making the confession, including calling for humility in doing so; c) personal confrontation is allayed, stressing that it is an ideology and not a particular person or church that is confronted and d) the implications of the confession are underlined, warning that repentance, remorse, and confession may involve pain and fear, but that the aim is reconciliation and unity, and ultimately salvation – it stresses that the process of reconciliation demands the pain of repentance, remorse and confession.[77]

The confession itself is relatively short – less than 1,200 words – consisting of five articles in which articles 2-4 deal with the issues of "Unity", "Reconciliation" and "Justice" respectively. Article 1 is a short introduction that describes how the confession relates to faith in the Triune God. Article 5 highlights that in obedience to Christ the church has to confess in this way, and to live according to it, regardless of what the authorities' response will be.

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The article on "Unity" says that unity rooted in Christ's work of reconciliation has to become visible and manifested in many ways, but that can only be established in a situation characterised by freedom. It states 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 (Ephesians 2: 11-22)." Here the emphasis is on the work of Christ, reconciling people with God as well as those considered enemies, i.e., Jews and Gentiles, circumcised and uncircumcised, as highlighted in the Ephesians text. According to this text, these parties are now reconciled "in one body" through the cross of Jesus Christ.[78] Among other things the confession "rejects any doctrine which absolutises either natural

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77 Naudé, *Neither calendar nor clock,* 1-5.

78 Naudé, *Neither calendar nor clock,* 8.

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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." It further states that this unity is "both a gift and an obligation". It is a gift of the Holy Spirit, built on the unity of and in God (Ephesians. 4: 4-6). Moreover, it is a mission and an obligation to which the church should apply itself, something that must be earnestly pursued and sought (Ephesians 4: 3-4). From this perspective, the unity motive is at the very core of the commission of the church, whereas disunity contradicts the very nature of the church. Thus, in this article, the unity of the church is inextricably tied to and is a manifestation of, Christ's reconciliation. Smit, on the logic of this article, suggests that credible unity in the church presupposes true reconciliation. In his view, it was impossible for the NG Sendingskerk to accept the structural or organisational unity in the Dutch Reformed family (and more widely) without true reconciliation. Credible church unity implies that the Dutch Reformed family become reconciled with one another; this means that they have to get to know one another and learn to accept one another. In light of their painful history, this includes the reconciliation with their past. Church unity on which the past is silenced and where fellow believers are kept at a distance so that true reconciliation cannot take place will not suffice. The many ways in which the unity must be made visible, evoked by biblical associations in the first article, contradict any unity that is merely administrative or institutional.[79]

The next article, on "Reconciliation", calls the church to take up the message of reconciliation "in and through Christ" to share it in a country "which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity." Russel Botman mentions that here the authors of the confession develop an understanding of reconciliation that goes beyond

[79] D. J. Smit, "Reformed Confession and Ecumenical Reception?: On the Confession of Belhar and Reconciliation", In: R. Vosloo (ed.), *Essays on being Reformed: Collected essays 3,* Stellenbosch: Sun Media, 2009, 367.

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ecclesiological divisions and connected it directly to the notion of justice.[80] Reconciliation is placed at the very centre of its critique against the injustices of apartheid. Moreover, the church is challenged to assume its responsibility as the reconciling community in the world. For example, the article refers to 2 Corinthians 5, where the church is entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation. Christ's work on reconciliation must be implemented in practical terms. How? "By being the salt and the light of the world (Matthew 5: 13-16), by being peacemakers (Matthew 5: 9), by living in the world with godliness and dedication (2 Peter 3) so that the promises of the future – the righteousness in particular (Revelations 21-22) may be realised in the present." Thus, the reconciliation invoked, has both a soteriological as well as eschatological dimension. It is further maintained that God, by his life-giving Word and Spirit, has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity. The ministry of Jesus illustrates how he struggled against these forces and how he conquered them on the cross (Colossians 2: 13-19). Through this victory, he is Lord "of all creation" (Colossians 1: 15), and Christians are exhorted to put on the armour, even while they know that the victory has already been attained (Ephesians 6). The powers of irreconciliation and hatred bitterness and enmity therefore no longer have a hold over humanity because of the victory of the cross. This victory enables humanity for new possibilities in life, society, and the world. The church is therefore called to play a central role in providing hope to a society in search of meaning beyond the confines of irreconciliation, hatred, and bitterness.

With an indirect reference to the situation in the country, the article challenges the legitimacy of any authority claiming to be Christian especially when its policies suggest otherwise. It states that "the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity" which, if taken seriously, contradicts Christ's victory on the cross. Instead through the enforced separation of people on a racial basis,

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[80] H. R. Botman, "The church partitioned or the church reconciled? South Africa's theological and historical dilemma", In: W. E. Van Vught and G. D. Cloete (eds.), *Race and reconciliation in South Africa: A multicultural dialogue in comparative perspective,* Maryland: Lexington Books, 2000, 110.

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the "forces of estrangement" that were conquered in Christ are kept alive. The article, therefore, rejects any doctrine which 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. This, it posits, weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ. Any ideology that contradicts Christ's reconciliation in the name of the gospel must be considered a false doctrine. Such a doctrine it maintains cannot be based on the victory in Christ because it is based "out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief" and therefore denies the reconciling power of the gospel. Without mentioning apartheid explicitly, the article concludes that any approach that presents enforced racial separation as gospel or as the will of God must be rejected because it fundamentally undermines the church's ministry of reconciliation in the world.

The final article of the main section, "Justice" and peace are introduced as central in defining the character and purpose of God. This justice, it suggests, is granted especially to the vulnerable and those from whom justice is withheld in society. In this context, the church is called to follow God in bringing justice to practical effect in the world. Much of what follows in the article tries to capture the nature of God as outlined in Bible verses. This includes scriptural references such as He brings justice to the oppressed (Isaiah 1: 16-17). He gives bread to the hungry; he frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind (Psalms 146: 7-8). God raises those who are bowed down (Psalms 146: 8) and exalts the lowly (Luke 1: 52). God showers the poor with good things (Luke 6: 20; 16: 19-31).

Regarding the practical implications for the church, the following guidelines are suggested. First, the church must make a choice to stand where Christ stands because he is the source of justice – and because he stands with the victims of injustice. As followers of Jesus, as people in the service of God (Romans 6: 13), the church is called to uphold the year of grace, the year of reparation. Second, the church is called to testify against injustice and for that which is right. Here the article refers to the church having a responsibility to witness against the powerful and privileged that selfishly seek their own interest and thus

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control and harm others. Third, for the church to be faithful to its calling, it must reject any ideology that legitimates any form of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.

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

3.3.4 The *Belhar Confession* in perspective

Erik Doxtader's analysis on the reception of the *Belhar Confession* is helpful. While it is deemed virtually "impossible to differ" with the conclusions of the confession, there are some issues that remain unresolved. For example, the *Belhar Confession*'s call to recover reconciliation did not resolve the question on whether its significance simply replicates the divisions that it opposes. The confession produced a call for reconciliation that appeared both to oppose and constitute identity. Doxtader notes that:

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> For the present, reconciliation's potential was a (be)coming into relation, an event that refigured individual experience in the name of forging collective identifications that could turn the differentiations of separation toward unity of difference. Against the heresy of law's emergency, this exceptional potential was a fragile power; synthesis risked a lapse back to the very identitarian logic of the system being opposed. For its faith to work, reconciliation had to stand and pivot between the creation of self-certainty and the creative contingency of collective (inter)action.[81]

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81 Doxtader, *With faith in the works of words*, 70.

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Jaap Durand further observes that with the reception of the *Belhar Confession* one does get the impression that a parting of ways within the Dutch Reformed family was inevitable.[82] In a sense, *Ras Volk en Nasie* and the *Belhar Confession* represent the culmination of what could be interpreted as two irreconcilable positions. The confession represents a turning point in what essentially became a contest for the Reformed identity in the country.[83] Whereas previously the NGK had regarded itself the custodian of the true Reformed faith, it was now accused of supporting injustice as well as having become heretical in the process.[84] Durand further argues that:

> The new confession presents a hitherto unknown challenge for the [NGK] which put its very being in the balance. Its ecclesiastical policy and practice in respect of racial and national relations are rejected confessionally as being in conflict with some of the central tenets of Christianity. If it were to persevere in its policy, the result could only be that the [NG Sendingskerk] severs its ecclesiastical ties with the [NGK], if, that is, the [NG Sendingskerk] is true to the gospel and to itself. The original communications gap between the [NGK] and the [NG Sendingskerk thus becomes] a confessional one.[85]

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Under increasing ecumenical and social pressure, the NGK was compelled to review its policy on race. As mentioned above, the official response came a few years later, but at this point, the church was still not ready to accept the *Belhar Confession*.[86] Piet Naudé's analysis suggests that the acceptance of the *Belhar Confession* is hampered by a few aspects (or theses) as he calls it. Firstly, this includes the persistence of an intensified "hermeneutic of

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[82] J. J. F. Durand, "Crisis in the Dutch Reformed Church", In: G. D. Cloete, and D. J. Smit (eds.), *A moment of truth*: *The confession of the Dutch Reformed Mission* , Grand Rapids, MI : Eerdmans, 1984, 119.

[83] See for example, J. W. de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate,* Cape Town: David Philip, 1991.

[84] J. W. de Gruchy, "The Contest for Reformed Identity in South Africa during the struggle against apartheid", In: M-A. Plaatjies-Van Huffel and R. R. Vosloo (eds.), *In Reformed Churches in South Africa and the struggle for Justice: Remembering 1960-1990*, 26-36.

[85] Durand, "*Crisis in the Dutch Reformed Church*", 119.

[86] As mentioned previously, the official response came in 1986 with the policy statement entitled *Kerk en Samelewing* in which the church changed its stance on apartheid.

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suspicion". He argues that for many in the NGK, the *Belhar Confession* is not a deviation from the existing confessions of the church. Yet, what functioned more explicitly from the start is the perception that the confession and its rejections were aimed at the NGK specifically. This is despite the fact that the Accompanying Letter suggests that the *Belhar Confession* is not directed against specific persons, church or churches. Given the circumstances the confession is often interpreted to be a direct attack, thus explaining the defensive stance of the NGK. This may also be attributed to the deep suspicion that still exists today. The second aspect is linked to the "pietistic spirituality" in the NGK. Naudé mentions that issues such as "reconciliation", "justice" and "unity", so explicitly addressed in the *Belhar Confession*, were in direct contrast to a worshipping trend among many Afrikaans-speaking minsters. Here this "pietistic spirituality" is associated with the strict separation of politics and church. In this context, the distance between this "pietistic spirituality" and the *status confessionis* was too much of a divide, thus contributing to its rejection as a common confession. Thirdly, Naudé suggests that church unification where the dialogue partners operate from different social locations, hamper the possibility for a common confession. He argues that: "Confessions like Dort, which addresses Arminian heresies, and the Belgic Confession, which deals with Marcionism, Arianism, Epicureanism, and Pelagianism, are by implication closer to the heart of the [NGK] faith than a contemporary expression in simple language about unity, reconciliation, and justice." In this context, the NGK revealed "a theological stance in contrast to the continued reformation of the church and a fundamental orientation toward European theology, specifically its anti-liberal tradition, where debates sounded more like sixteenth – or rather seventeenth-century Europe, than the twentieth century in Africa". And lastly, the acceptance of the confession is further hampered because the dialogue partners understand themselves as ecumenically isolated "denominational" churches. In this context, the problem has less to do with confessional differences. Nor does it derive from major or minor disagreements over the content of the confession. Instead, it has more to do with the preservation of Afrikaner identity. This becomes even more problematic in the

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context where an ecumenically isolated church is struggling to preserve its identity. In this sense, the *Belhar Confession* served as a counter-narrative that could not be accommodated in the identity of the NGK. The cumulative effect of these factors led to what Naudé suggests is its non-reception in the NGK.[87]

The *Belhar Confession* also had a notable effect on relations between the missionary churches. In 1987 the NG Kerk in Afrika and the NG Sendingskerk met a number of times to prepare for the unification of the churches. The remaining missionary church, the Reformed Church in Africa never responded to the invitation. And the NGK only attended initial discussions but later withdrew from the process.[88] Thus, unification talks consisted of the NG Sendingskerk and the NG Kerk in Afrika only. By 1990 a proposed church order was drafted and after deliberation, it was decided to include the *Belhar Confession* as the fourth confession of the new church. The NG Kerk in Afrika was requested to make the necessary changes to its own church policy to accommodate the confession and to circulate it among its congregations for further study. In doing so, it became the first church to include the *Belhar Confession* in its Standard of Faith.[89] Later in April 1994, the NG Sendingskerk and the NG Kerk in Afrika signed the charter of unification and with this, the Verenigende Gereformeerde Kerk in Suider-Afrika was formally constituted. The name was chosen to express the fact that the seats of the other two in the Dutch Reformed family of churches, the NGK and the Reformed Church in Africa, were still empty.[90]

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87 Naudé, *Neither calendar nor clock*, 139-148.

88 Pauw, "Anti-apartheid theology in Dutch Reformed family of churches", 96.

89 M-A. Plaatjies-Van Huffel, "The Belhar Confession: born in the struggle against apartheid in southern Africa', *Studia Historicae Ecclesiasticae*, 39(1), 2013, 17.

90 The unification of the NG Sendingskerk and the NG Kerk in Afrika has since been met with some resistance from (former) NG Kerk in Afrika congregations. The congregations from both the Phororo Synod and the Free State Synod have since disassociated themselves from the newly constituted Verenigende Kerk in Suider-Afrika. Both claim to be a continuation of the NG Kerk in Afrika and that there were legal problems with the unification process that justified them continuing as such. The NGK as well as the Reformed Church in Africa remained separate churches. The Reformed family of churches have in the meantime started the process of unification initiated by the leadership of

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To sum up, the *Belhar Confession* represents a theological deepening of the reconciliation concept. This was prompted by the theological justification of apartheid in *Ras, Volk en Nasie*. It places reconciliation at the theological centre of its critique against apartheid. And then develops an understanding that goes beyond ecclesiological divisions and connects it directly to the issue of justice in society. Reconciliation is seen as God's work in and through Christ. In turn, 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. That which was done through Christ's work of reconciliation must now be the guiding principle of unity in the church and towards working for justice in society. The authors of the *Belhar Confession* assume that the reconciliation of humanity with God in Jesus Christ entails a ministry of reconciliation.

3.4 The *National Initiative for Reconciliation* (1985)

This section entails a brief survey of literature emerging from the *National Initiative for Reconciliation*. Of course, the *National Initiative for Reconciliation* cannot be understood apart from the events leading to it, and this will be addressed in summary form.

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3.4.1 The rise of neo-Pentecostalism

The beginning of the *National Initiative for Reconciliation* is traced back to the 1960s. During this period neo-Pentecostalism (or the charismatic movement) emerged within mainline churches. This started in the United States and soon spread to other parts of the world, including South Africa, where it spread widely among ministers and laity. In South Africa, it was mainly among the white and coloured constituencies of the major denominations where this movement gained momentum. In the process, some members left their churches to join the new Pentecostal denominations, while others decided to form new

Verenigende Kerk in Suider-Afrika and the NGK. This development was still unfolding by the time this study was completed. See Pauw, "Anti-apartheid theology in the Dutch Reformed family of churches", 96.

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independent charismatic-type congregations. The majority of people, however, remained in the mainline denominations. In the 1970s there were significant charismatic groups in the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Baptist, Congregationalist churches, including some in the Dutch Reformed Church. De Gruchy mentions that the charismatic movement was significantly strengthened when prominent figures like Bill Burnett, the Anglican bishop of Grahamstown and, later archbishop of Cape Town, together with several other church leaders joined the movement. He further suggests that the emergence of the charismatic movement came about mainly as a reaction to the social and political activism that was taking place in the mainline churches. "Thus, while [the charismatic movement] had a significant impact upon the life and worship of many congregations, it also led to a spirituality of withdrawal from socio-political involvement, as well as to dissension and the formation of independent charismatic churches."[91]

Charismatics, together with conservative evangelicals in a variety of denominations, concentrated their attention more on evangelism and church growth. They generally stood apart from ecumenical cooperation, especially on political matters. Motivated by the claim of political neutrality, the increased focus away from politics made a significant contribution towards the life and worship of many congregations. However, in reality, this simply meant that white charismatics and evangelicals continued supporting the *status quo*, whereas blacks very often accepted their oppression.[92]

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In 1973 the first attempt was made to relate the "evangelicals" to the "ecumenicals" at the Congress on Mission and Evangelism in Durban. The meeting was meant to create a platform where these groups could integrate their respective concerns. The meeting was jointly sponsored by the SACC and the Africa Enterprise, an evangelical organisation founded in the 1960s by an Anglican evangelical, Michael Cassidy. The meeting brought together an array of church groups, including some from the Pentecostal movement as

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91 J. W. de Gruchy, "Christianity in twentieth-century South Africa", In: M. Prozesky and J. W. de Gruchy (eds.), *Living faiths in South Africa,* London: C. Hurst, 1995, 101.

92 De Gruchy, "Christianity in twentieth-century South Africa", 101.

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well as Roman Catholics. The idea was to create an environment where these groups could discuss the many issues facing the churches. In one sense the meeting was important in getting groups together as well as setting the tone for further deliberations and cooperation. At the same time, the meeting also revealed the extent of the racial and theological polarisation. According to De Gruchy:

> This was demonstrated in the response of many whites to black theologian Manas Buthelezi's address entitled 'Six Theses on Evangelism in the South African Context'. Buthelezi argued that the time had arrived for blacks to take the initiative in the life of the church and in the church struggle against apartheid. Indeed he declared, it was now necessary for blacks to evangelise whites and enable them to be set free from their racism.[93]

At this point, it was clear that whites were prepared to work towards the eradication of racial discrimination. However, the question of black liberation and blacks taking the lead in the process remained a challenge that many whites were unwilling to face.

Following on the 1973 meeting, the Africa Enterprise made a further attempt to bring the various church constituencies together at the meeting called the South African Leadership Assembly (SACLA) in July 1979. Following the Soweto uprising in 1976, the purpose of the meeting was to consider ways of responding to the crisis in the country.[94] Among its achievements, SACLA helped generate a more radical evangelical witness among student participants leading to the establishment of the Student Union for Christian Action.[95]

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93 De Gruchy, "Christianity in twentieth-century South Africa", 101.

94 The Soweto Uprising of 16 June 1976 took place after thousands of black schoolchildren began protests against the compulsory use of the Afrikaans language in their schools. It began with a youth march in Soweto, but spread to townships across the country. As tensions rose, more security police were deployed and youth became a symbol of bravery against armed soldiers. This protest gained significant local and international attention when police opened fire on a gathering of scholars marking one of the most significant events in the struggle against apartheid. The detail of the Soweto Uprising will be discussed in following chapter of this study.

95 The Student Union for Christian Action is a non-racial student body that sought to engage in direct acts of Christian witness against the growing crisis of apartheid and rising resistance. It sought to respond to the ecclesiastical, political, social and economic challenges in the post-1976 political environment.

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However, as was the case with the Congress on Mission and Evangelism in 1973, SACLA also was too theologically diverse and politically divided to reach a consensus. According to De Gruchy, this meeting revealed the extent to which the church had become even more polarised by politics, particularly in relation to the question of appropriate political action. For some, the way to overcome apartheid was through a gradual process of changing people's hearts and minds through spiritual conversion and the renewal of the church. For others, apartheid had to be opposed by direct political action and, if need be, by participating in the armed struggle against the state.[96]

In response to the political instability, the Africa Enterprise, under the leadership of Michael Cassidy, launched the *National Initiative for Reconciliation* (NIR), calling together a large church conference in Pietermaritzburg, in September 1985. Consisting of some 400 church leaders from 47 denominations, the main purpose was to convene a conference to pray and discuss ways in which the church could respond to the political crisis. It attracted church leaders of different denominations and races for the purpose of reconciling with one another and implementing this practice in their respective churches and communities. Desmond Tutu who had recently been elected Anglican archbishop of Cape Town together with University of South Africa professor, David Bosch, among others were some of the main speakers.[97]

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3.4.2 The theological "Third Way"

Anthony Balcomb notes that alongside the aims of the NIR, it also had a qualifying statement claiming that the initiative was ideologically free and politically neutral. "The proposed gathering of togetherness", it said, "does not have political origin". Instead, the intention was to "wait and listen for the voice of God". It noted, however, that it is hard to

[96] J. W. de Gruchy, "Political landmarks and the response of churches in South Africa, 1936-1994", *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*. 118, 3-26, 2004, 19.

[97] See K. Nürnberger and J. Tooke (eds.), *The cost of reconciliation in South Africa: National Initiative for Reconciliation Reader 1,* Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House, 1988.

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achieve this mainly because "Christians are highly politicised" and "trapped by group loyalties and interests" so that "pre-understanding, biases, and agendas become the filter through which everything is received". Moreover, it asserted that "these gatherings of Christian people are not influenced by any particular political agenda" and that "at the heart of this movement is an ideological freedom which does not project any particular economic or political solution for South Africa". It further stressed that "there is no purpose, secretly obscured, either to preserve the status quo or enhance revolutionary objectives" It admitted, however, that "socio-political solutions" must be found but that this could happen only through "Christian repentance, reconciliation, reflection and resolution". According to the NIR what was needed was a "third way" forward between a "violent and repressive peace" and a "violent and destructive revolution or civil war". Out of this "third way" could come "considerable social and political consequences" which would help in moving the nation towards "peaceful and just solutions".[98]

For the organisers of the initiative, the church provided an excellent opportunity to facilitate dialogue, mainly because it had representatives on both sides of the socio-political divide. The idea was that the presence of Christians, connected by virtue of their faith, could provide the counterbalance to the political instability. In order to achieve this, the conference proposed two strategies. The first had to do with a general reconciliatory and conscientising nature. And the second was focused on exerting pressure for change. Among the recommendations of the first strategy was the need to continue to "proclaim and witness to the good news of Jesus Christ", to "continue in prayer and fasting for renewal of the Holy Spirit and reawakening of the church of Jesus Christ and for peace and justice", to "create concrete opportunities for meaningful worship, fellowship and discussion with people of differing racial and cultural groups", to "help remove ignorance of events in South Africa and prepare people for living in a changed and totally non-racial

[98] Unpublished *National Initiative for Reconciliation* document, private collection found in A. Balcomb, *Third way theology: Reconciliation, revolution and the reform in the South African church during the 1980s*, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1993, 83.

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land", and to "share the South African reality of suffering be extending and accepting invitations to experience the life of fellow Christians in the townships".[99] The second strategy was intended to place pressure on government and to meet the demands to, among other things, a) end the 1985 state of emergency; b) to remove the army and emergency police forces from townships; c) release all political prisoners and withdraw charges against those accused of treason for fighting apartheid; d) begin talks immediately with the authentic leadership of the various population groups with a view towards equitable power-sharing in South Africa; e) begin the process of introducing a common system of education; and f) take the necessary steps towards the elimination of all forms of legislated discrimination. The meeting further asserted that these objectives could only be achieved if a position of political and ideological neutrality was taken.[100]

According to Balcomb there were at least four reasons why those behind the NIR felt that they needed to remain neutral: a) all perspectives on the political situation in the country reflected an ideological bias which meant that most (if not all) views were fundamentally distorted; b) to take sides politically meant the church would jeopardise its potential to act as mediator in the conflict; c) the violence committed by the state for the sake of "law and order" as well as the violence committed by those who revolted against the state were basically the representation of the two dominant political views, so, for the sake of neutrality it simply had to distance itself from these polarised positions; d) the NIR was convinced that it was able to exercise its own unique understanding of and make its own contribution to the situation, without seeing itself accountable to political positions.[101]

In order to disseminate the conference proceedings, the organisers planned to publish a series of readers with relevant materials on justice and reconciliation to be used by study and action groups. The most important, *The Cost of Reconciliation in South Africa*, published

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[99] Balcomb, *Third way theology*, 85.

[100] Nürnberger & Tooke, *The cost of reconciliation in South Africa*, 83-85

[101] Balcomb, *Third way theology*, 87.

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in 1988, deals specifically with reconciliation as a theological concept.[102] De Gruchy notes that its "Statement of Affirmation" also published in national newspapers at the time focuses on the reasons for the initiative as well as revealing the commitment to work towards reconciliation. At the same time, it warns that reconciliation without removing the causes of injustice is counter-productive. They further understood that reconciliation without linking it to justice (in society) was highly problematic. Following the "third way" of the gospel, reconciled communities (i.e. the churches) provided the key to overcoming the political crisis. This proved to be an attractive proposition for many conservative church leaders. At the same time, many outside this initiative called for a more radical response.[103]

3.4.3 The NIR, Statement of Affirmation: An overview

Apart from a detailed analysis of socio-political challenges, the NIR reader, *The Cost of Reconciliation in South Africa*, deals specifically with reconciliation as a theological concept. It states that, "Christian reconciliation is based on the fact that God reconciled us to himself in Christ. Christ suffered our iniquity on the cross, restored us to his fellowship with God and with each other, and involves us in God's act of reconciliation by the power of the Spirit. Forgiveness, acceptance, redressing the causes of the conflict and forbearance all imply the willingness to sacrifice and suffer for the sake of justice, peace, fellowship and cooperation." It further suggests that those "who have been reconciled to God, the new life in fellowship with God constantly puts to death their own sinful nature and involves them in God's redeeming love for others. As God's agents of reconciliation and transformation, they share God's suffering acceptance of the unacceptable. That is the human meaning of the cross of Christ."[104]

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102 Nürnberger & Tooke, *The cost of reconciliation in South Africa*, 1.

103 De Gruchy, *The church struggle*, 196; De Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 35.

104 Nürnberger & Tooke, *The Cost of reconciliation in South Africa*, 84-85.

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The NIR expands the meaning of reconciliation to include not only reconciliation between God and humanity but also how the concept is to be understood for human relationships. It states that, "Reconciliation between people implies the active commitment to achieve justice." In this context justice is the hermeneutical key through which human relationships are evaluated. Justice becomes the means through which reconciliation as a theological concept is understood. In other words, justice is the ordering of social relationships in such a way that both the benefits of the relationship and the sacrifice necessary to maintain the relationship are shared equally between those concerned as far as this is possible and conducive to the relationship. Furthermore, reconciliation between people takes place when conflicting parties are willing to confess and redress wrongs they have inflicted on each other, forgive each other and restore full fellowship with each other. To confess, redress and forgive wrongs implies suffering. This suffering is interpreted as participation in the cross of Christ. In this context reconciliation takes place when the parties concerned: a) acknowledge, regret and undertake to put to an end the abuse of power and all injustices in society; b) agree to co-operate in redressing the structural imbalances and maladjustments concerned by instituting social mechanisms that balance out power and privilege in society and; c) are willing to tolerate differences of race, culture and conviction within the common society and ban any discrimination on these grounds.[105]

The NIR further suggests that:

> Reconciliation which serves to conceal or play down injustices, which condones the abuse of power at the expense of others, which appeases the wronged party, which expects of the victims of structural imbalances to accept their fate, which serves to avoid the suffering necessary for the restoration or development of just relationships, or which assigns to one party more of the benefits and to another more of the sacrifices is a fraud and stands condemned in the eyes of

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105 Nürnberger & Tooke, *The cost of reconciliation in South Africa*, 85-86.

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> God and human morality. It will make no contribution to the resolution of the conflict and undermines the credibility and effectiveness of the church's message of reconciliation in the society.[106]

The NIR reader concludes the section on reconciliation by affirming the view that God has through the death of Christ reconciled humanity to himself and to one another. Through this act Christians are invited to form the body of Christ on earth. This unity does not remove difference; instead it is a higher reality that relativises any worldly divisions. For this reason Christians cannot regard any other Christians as their enemies. On the contrary, Jesus commands that when Christians realise that other Christians have anything against them, they should postpone everything to "go and be reconciled" to the others (Matthew. 5: 24). In South Africa this means that Christians who have many grievances against one another should continually be going across the boundaries for the sake of reconciliation. Christians are further called to listen to one another in order to understand the pain of the other on a personal and social level. This understanding, the document further asserts, should lead to a new perspective for the privileged, so that they can see the social structures that benefit them as well as those which deprive others. The inevitable result, it further claims, will be that the privileged start acting to promote social justice. This would include social action for justice as part of true reconciliation. Those belonging to the oppressing groups have to be willing to confess their collective guilt, and the oppressed should be willing to forgive them. The former will then show the genuineness of their repentance by their actions. Reconciliation without actions is false reconciliation which actually deepens the divisions in society.[107]

The NIR asserts that it is not a viable option to be neutral mediators in the conflict. In this context it is necessary to take a position in favour of the poor and the weak. However, this does not mean that:

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[106] Nürnberger & Tooke, *The cost of reconciliation in South Africa,* 87.

[107] Nürnberger & Tooke, *The cost of reconciliation in South Africa*, 87-88.

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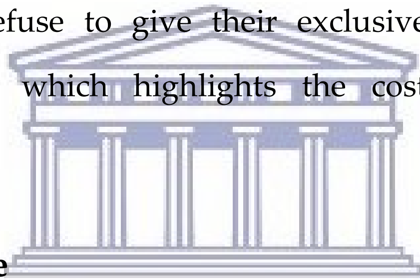
> Christians automatically have the right to become instigators of war against the system. They refuse to give their absolute loyalty to any side because it belongs to Christ and his body. Essentially they are not war-makers but peacemakers, and therefore they are very critical against the powers of hostility building up on both sides. It is very clear that all will have to refuse co-optation by the oppressive forces but [their] solidarity with the poor will also have to be critical as their struggle is also not free from sin.[108]

The authors of the document suggests that Christians have the responsibility to "open the road towards peace" by not surrendering to the "powers of hostility". In this context the powers of hostility refer to individuals or groups who give loyalty to any side in an absolute manner – thus, becoming agents of division rather than reconciliation. It further forewarns that those who refuse to give their exclusive loyalty to either side will experience painful rejection, which highlights the costliness of working towards reconciliation.[109]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3.4.4 The NIR in perspective

The organisers of the NIR placed much emphasis on its ideological neutrality. In response, Balcomb argues that the black constituency found this so-called neutrality or "third way" approach quite difficult, if not impossible, to comprehend. While the white constituency believed that a position of neutrality was essential to maintain the kind of objectivity appropriate for the church. The problem with this, according to Balcomb, is that even at church events, blacks continued to see themselves as victims of oppression. This made it difficult for them to simply suspend their convictions for the sake of neutrality. Just as blacks formed themselves into political groupings to assert their common will outside the church, the declaration of black demands also had to be taken into account when mapping a way forward for the NIR. This was not the case, and it is for this reason the prospect of

108 Nürnberger & Tooke, *The cost of reconciliation in South Africa*, 88.

109 Nürnberger & Tooke, *The cost of reconciliation in South Africa*, 89.

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neutrality remained elusive. In reality, even the NIR could not escape the politicisation of the time, and this made the claim of political neutrality highly problematic. It soon became apparent that the NIR proceedings themselves became a microcosm of the struggles that were taking place in the wider political context. He further stresses that an attempt was made to imbue the initiative with a kind of spirituality that transcended the political environment. It was hoped that this would bring about a kind of political "objectivity" in which the issues could be more "reasonably" and "calmly" discussed. He asserts, however that this particular approach highlights a "liberal" agenda, in which political differences are minimised as much as possible and political processes are harmonised as much as possible.[110] In contrast, this was very different from a "liberation" agenda, which maximised political differences and promoted confrontation. These differences are typical of the entire character and process of liberal and liberation politics, each of which has its own tradition, agendas, style, and aims – essentially ideological as well as political in character. In this context, the NIR's "third way" was a profoundly political process with distinguishable political aims, despite its convenors' claims of neutrality.[111]

Martin Prozesky suggests that the convenors of the NIR may have underestimated the difficulty of working towards reconciliation.[112] This was further exacerbated by the continued injustices taking place in the country. He argues that the convenors grossly underestimated the extent to which society, including the church, was polarised. However, he does admit that the convenors may well have been successful in creating an environment where conflicting parties could engage each other. As he puts it, the NIR

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110 The NIR was representative of the substantially powerful middle class church base that extended throughout the denominational spectrum. This also included key figures in the private sector as well as government who participated. Some of the delegates "included key representatives from big business, Kwazulu government, the judiciary, evangelic organisations, and independent churches such as the Rhema Bible Church. All of these groupings are characterised by their distinctive political outlook which is rooted in the adherence to liberal democratic principles and free enterprise economy." See Balcomb, *Third way theology*, 90.

111 Balcomb, *Third way theology*, 89-90.

112 M. Prozesky, "Can Christians overcome apartheid: An evaluation of the Statement of Affirmation of the National Initiative for Reconciliation", *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 54, 1986, 53.

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created an environment in which, “a white [NGK] minister may well embrace a politically radical black bishop.” However, the more important question remained: how would this embrace materialise in a divided society? Prozesky argues that:

> The real challenge is to make reconciliation work in the big, bad and unrepentant world outside, and that is another story altogether. Helping it happen is a challenge worthy of the best in Christianity, but do those who have begun this initiative recognize how huge the task ahead is? Do they know just how crucially they are putting the credentials of Christianity as a force for significant social change on the line? As a minimum requirement, they must now get the Treurnichts and the Boesaks – fellow Christians in the same Dutch Reformed tradition – to find political brotherhood, and not just spiritual agreement.”[113]

Critically, for Prozesky the burden of the legacy of apartheid could not be simply wished or even prayed away. In his view, something more than the “easier reconciliations” highlighted by the NIR was needed. What was required was the reconciliation between bitterly and absolutely alienated people, reconciliation “between the Tambos and the Terre Blanches.” In this context, the NIR was faced with the real danger of believing “deludedly” that it achieved a genuine breakthrough.[114]

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Balcomb argues that the NIR commitment to the goal of reconciliation seems to obscure some important societal challenges. Here he refers to how reconciliation is understood in relation to the dynamics of power and justice in society. In his view, the convenors did not sufficiently recognise that reconciliation was not possible while one party was so aggrieved, marginalised and oppressed.[115] This is similar to the views expressed in the *Kairos Document* (discussed in the next chapter). In this context, the NIR is accused of

113 Prozesky, “Can Christians overcome apartheid”, 53-54.

114 Prozesky, “Can Christians overcome apartheid”, 53-54.

115 Balcomb, *Third way theology*, 115.

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making reconciliation an absolute principle, something that must be applied in all cases of conflict and dissension. This, however, does not mean the initiative ignored the issue of justice. Rather, NIR process illustrates that when it came to the actual dynamics of the power struggle, "its lot fell not to the side with the most claim to justice but to the side with the most hold on power." In other words, the pressing demand for the "absolute principle of reconciliation" as articulated by the NIR superseded the pressing demand for the "absolute principle" of justice as articulated by blacks involved in the process.[116] Balcomb further suggests that here the demand for reconciliation cannot be properly understood unless one takes seriously the power struggle that occurred at the meetings of the NIR. In this sense, reconciliation must be understood within the context of these vested interests. In his view, the convenors themselves had vested interests in seeing their reconciliation initiative succeed. As a consequence, these interests were an added dynamic to the processes of negotiation around black demands. He further submits that, "the tendency to locate the notion of reconciliation, as a theological category, outside the dynamics of power struggle, obscured these interests and therefore soon exposed the NIR at best to co-option by the state and at worst to legitimation of the state's political agenda."[117] This power struggle gave reconciliation a particular character that contradicted the claims of neutrality. The fact that the demand for reconciliation superseded black demands for justice made it especially susceptible to manipulation. The use of reconciliation as a theological category without taking the power struggles in society seriously, further complicated matters. In this context, De Gruchy argues that the NIR failed to make the connection between the church and the political situation in the country. In this regard, slogans such as, "Let the church be church" was often used as a way of escaping political commitment for the sake of neutrality. He adds that:

> The good news that God has reconciled the world to himself in Jesus Christ is the foundation of Christian faith and action. Reconciliation is an act of God in

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[116] Balcomb, *Third way theology*, 115.

[117] Balcomb, *Third way theology*, 115.

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> Jesus Christ, it is something which is given. At the same time, Christians are called to be reconciled to their neighbours and their enemies through suffering love and forgiveness. Reconciliation to God is inseparable from reconciliation with one's fellows. Such reconciliation requires repentance and change, not just a change in attitude, but fundamental change which affects the very structures of existence. In South Africa it is possible for individuals of different races to discover the deep significance of Christian reconciliation. But as long as apartheid structures continue, the genuine reconciliation of social groups remains elusive, and therefore peace remains elusive. Both whites and blacks are chained, and the liberation of the one is necessary for freedom of all. 'Cheap reconciliation', and therefore negotiation prior to a genuine commitment to change, only prolongs the bondage.[118]

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To sum up, the NIR reflects a deep commitment to reconciliation and justice in South Africa. However, based on the political situation in the country, the convenors may have underestimated how difficult this task would be. Focusing on neutrality the convenors may have overlooked the power struggles within the church. In this context they may have underestimated the extent to which the church itself had been politicised. Balcomb warns however, that the NIR must not be seen as a deliberate and calculated attempt to mislead people. On the contrary, he judges it to be a genuine attempt at responding to the crisis in the country. In this sense the integrity of those who called for the NIR is not in question.[119] However, taking a particular approach to the situation in the country they exposed a particular theology used to legitimise a certain kind of political analysis and action. This was done on the premise of neutrality. However, instead of being neutral it reflected a liberal character that precluded the possibility of acknowledging its ideological

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[118] J. W. de Gruchy, "The church and the struggle for South Africa", In: B. Tlhagale and I. Mosala (eds.), *Hammering swords into ploughshares: Essays in honour of Archbishop Desmond Tutu*, Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1986, 203-204.

[119] Balcomb, *Third way theology: Reconciliation, revolution and the reform in the South African church during the 1980s*, 115.

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bias.[120] The NIR claim of neutrality should therefore be treated with suspicion. Nevertheless, at the heart of the initiative was the longing for Christ's work of reconciliation to be made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another. In other words, that which was done through Christ's work of reconciliation must now be the guiding principle for working towards justice in society.

3.5 Closing reflections

It important to highlight that the *Message to the People of South Africa* in 3.2; the *Belhar Confession* in 3.3; as well as the *National Initiative for Reconciliation* in 3.4 employ what may be referred to as a deductive logic.[121] In other words, all of the above initiatives move from reconciliation with God to the ministry of reconciliation in society. According to this logic, the fruits of reconciliation in South Africa are contingent upon reconciliation with God. This approach assumes that no lasting solution to social conflict can be found without addressing the deep roots of such social conflict. In this case social conflict is linked directly to our alienation from God. Ultimately this can be overcome (only) through God's gracious forgiveness of sins. From a classic Reformed perspective such forgiveness is appropriated through justification, sanctification and the vocation of believers. Furthermore, such reconciliation in Christ enables and requires reconciliation with one's brothers and sisters in Christ regardless of the social markers that may separate them ("We are all one in Christ"). According to this "deductive" logic the ministry of reconciliation in church and society is only possible on the basis of reconciliation in Christ. In this sense the ministry goes beyond the requirements for social cohesion and its main focus remains firmly rooted in reconciliation with God. It is only through reconciliation in

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[120] Prozesky, "Can Christians overcome apartheid: An evaluation of the "Statement of Affirmation of the National Initiative for Reconciliation", 53.

[121] See my discussion on the deductive logic as an approach to the doctrine of reconciliation in Chapter 1. This approach is borrowed from Conradie, "Reconciliation as one guiding vision for South Africa?", 17-21.

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Christ that social conflict can be addressed adequately. Without this, reconciliation remains superficial if not misplaced, thus opening itself to renewed conflict. In other words, reconciliation in society springs from the celebration of the Holy Communion. God's reconciliation in Jesus Christ thus becomes the basis for Christians to reject any social system that assumes the fundamental irreconcilability of people.

The emphasis on the cross is of particular importance when observing this particular approach to reconciliation. Here the Anselmian or penal substitutionary theory comes to mind. As mentioned, the *Message to the People to South Africa*, the *Belhar Confession*, as well as the *National Initiative for Reconciliation* proceed from the premise that the injustice of apartheid cannot be addressed unless the roots of the predicament are also identified. Here the roots of human suffering are typically traced back, at a more ultimate level, to our alienation from God. In this context, it is stressed that we do not only need to overcome the consequences of sin (evil), but we also need to address the roots of evil (sin). On this basis, human sin is the root cause of contemporary manifestations of evil. Moreover, salvation is understood at the ultimate level as reconciliation between God and humanity. From an Anselmian perspective, such reconciliation is only possible on the basis of God's liberating word of forgiveness. However, forgiveness alone will not suffice and is dependent on a complex and reciprocal interaction between God and human beings where human sin is not merely condoned (which would be to condone injustice) but is addressed in such a way where reconciliation becomes possible. In this context, Christians typically find the clue to such reconciliation in the cross, and not so much in the resurrection of Jesus Christ – the latter which is the case in the approach to reconciliation found in the *Kairos Document*.

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4. Justice and reconciliation after liberation

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes and analyses a particular way reconciliation is understood within the context of liberation theology in South Africa. In this approach, the need for political, economic and cultural liberation is emphasised. It is assumed that social justice can only follow upon liberation and that reconciliation is only possible on the basis of following justice. This approach is evident especially in the *Kairos Document*, in comments on reconciliation in the context of Black Theology and in critical engagements with the proceedings of the TRC. It is still found in current forms of prophetic theology. Rhetorically, this approach was especially aimed at what the *Kairos Document* describes as "church theology" and "state theology". One may suggest that the question addressed here is how reconciliation between people relates to the victory established by Christ over the forces of death, destruction, and oppression. This leads to a different notion of the relationship between justice and reconciliation.

The description and analysis of this chapter will be done on the basis of selected literature emerging after Cottesloe in 1960 and leading up to the *Kairos Document* in 1985.

4.2 Historical Background to the *Kairos Document*

This section entails a survey of literature emerging from the publication of the *Kairos Document* in 1985. Of course, the *Kairos Document* cannot be understood apart from the events leading to it, and this will be addressed in summary form.

4.2.1 The Study Project on Christianity in an Apartheid Society

The rejection of apartheid as a "false gospel" was discussed in *The Message*. The Christian Institute together with the SACC were shown to be key contributors in formulating what became the first extensive theological rebuttal of the system. However, after its release, the

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question concerning the social implications of *The Message* simply had to be addressed. As a response, the Christian Institute and the SACC launched the programme, the Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid South Africa (SPRO-CAS) in 1969. The five biblical principles of SPRO-CAS were inherited from the theology of *The Message*. Walshe suggests that "these principles also provided the foundations for an indigenous development of liberation theology – a theology that had been gestating within the Christian Institute and was simultaneously maturing as Black Theology within the Black Consciousness movement". The first principle that of change (2 Corinthians 5: 7; Galatians 6: 16; Revelation 21: 5) focused on personal redemption but also referred to the historical evolution of society. Christians were called to be "active collaborators" in seeking a "new world". For this to happen, requires a concern for life (Matthew 11: 4-6; 15: 32, 25: 36), which is the second principle. Here the focus is on those considered poor and oppressed, including the sick, exploited, deprived and alienated. In this context, to love one's neighbour implies a responsibility for public affairs, including government policies. With this understanding, a third principle is revealed, namely that of Christian participation (Luke 10: 1; John 15: 15; Matthew 23: 8) in the sharing and ordering of society which was the antithesis of race domination. This implies the fourth principle, which focuses on stewardship (Matthew 25: 14; 1 Corinthians 4: 2; 1 Peter 4: 10). Here stewardship refers to both the individual being a steward to his or her own life as well as being a steward of the country and its resources. This also includes the stewardship of social processes that govern the political economy. The fifth principle is guided by the belief that every human person is created in the likeness of a loving God (Luke 12: 6; Ephesians 2: 10; Galatians 3: 28). This principle rejects any notion seeking to humiliate, oppress and exploit those created in God's likeness; this includes any social arrangement that strives to alienate the human person from its fellows.[1]

[1] Walshe, *Church versus state*, 103-104

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The novelty of SPRO-CAS was its open-ended, exploratory mode and its willingness to move from the realm of religion to the secular worlds of sociology, politics, education, and economics.[2] Under the directorship of Peter Randall, a teacher and writer as well as Assistant Director of the South African Institute of Race Relations, SPRO-CAS, a public policy think-tank, represents a bold attempt to envision a society beyond apartheid. Its various initiatives were designed to present practical as well as ethically acceptable alternatives to the government policy of apartheid. Alf Stadler mentions that the programme had two phases, with SPRO-CAS I focusing on providing an extensive analysis of the situation, and SPRO-CAS II focusing on formulating strategies for change in South Africa.[3] Over a period of four years, SPRO-CAS established six major commissions (on economics, education, law, society, politics and the church) consisting of more than 130 leading South Africans of different racial and cultural groups. White, English-speaking participants were predominant with black and Afrikaner leaders also represented.[4] They included people from various disciplines such as academics, politicians, lawyers, clergy, teachers, and theologians. Walshe critically observed that "all ethnic groups and a wide range of occupations were to be represented. However, in practice the white professional class and particularly university faculty were pre-dominant, with no more than token black representation on the commissions: the black/white member ratios were 5:26 in the Church Commission, 1:20 Economics, 1:14 Education, 1:13 Legal, 1:24 Political and 5:22 in the Social Commission."[5] Dubow further suggests that through SPRO-CAS I, an older generation of white liberals had direct contact with a rising new generation. Moreover, with SPRO-CAS II in 1972, the initiative became much more action orientated and committed to the idea of black leadership.[6]

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2 Dubow, *Apartheid*, 167-168.

3 A. Stadler, "Anxious radicals: SPRO-CAS and the apartheid society", In: *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 2(1), 1975, 102-108.

4 I. Naidoo, *Island in chains: Ten years on Robben Island,* Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982, 86-87.

5 Walshe, *Church versus state*, 102.

6 Dubow, *Apartheid*, 168; Also see Walshe, *Church versus state*, 108.

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The SPRO-CAS findings and recommendations were not particularly theological. Instead, its recommendations "were designed to produce a common, non-racial society structured around the dignity of the human person. The hope was that it would stimulate discussion in government circles and within political parties as well as in the churches by offering a humane range of alternatives to Christians and non-Christians alike."[7] These recommendations were outlined in the SPRO-CAS reports: *Education beyond Apartheid* (1971); *Towards Social Change* (1971); *Power, Privilege and Poverty* (1972); *Apartheid and the Church* (1972); *Law, Justice and Society* (1972); *South Africa's Political Alternatives* (1973) as well as a coordinated report entitled, *A Taste of Power: The Final Spro-Cas Report* (1973).[8] Though they lacked a single direction the reports were quite thorough and its recommendations very specific – they were polemical in intent and reflected a significant understanding of the challenges facing the country.[9]

This was also reflected in the Church Commission's report, *Apartheid and the Church*, which had a specific focus on how apartheid affected the churches.[10] The report highlighted discrimination, denominationalism, segregation and paternalism as factors undermining the witness of the church. Churches were called to move beyond ecclesiastical self-concern, pragmatic pietism and clericalism to become more faithful to the demands of the kingdom of God. The report further emphasised the failure of the multiracial churches "to promote inter-racial contact, communication and dialogue on a large scale", calling for symbolic acts of protest against racial discrimination – including welcoming persons of different races as worshippers into the various congregations.[11] Most importantly, in Walshe's estimation, was the report's focus on crash training programmes for black clergy and laity – this, with the aim of taking over leadership responsibilities. In his view, this was "the beginning of a shift towards an acceptance of black predominance in the life of

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[7] Walshe, *Church versus state*, 102.

[8] P. Randall (ed), *A taste of power. The final co-ordinated Spro-cas Report*, Johannesburg, 1973.

[9] Randall (ed.), *A Taste of Power*, 117; 146.

[10] P. Randall (ed.), *Apartheid and the church. Report of the Spro-cas church commission*, Johannesburg, 1972.

[11] Randall (ed.), *Apartheid and the Church*, 71.

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the church." The encouragement of black leadership in the churches, as well as wider society, was further outlined in the final SPRO-CAS report, *A Taste of Power*. "This not only encouraged whites to work for the emergence of black leadership, but recognised that South Africa was at a turning point in its history in that a white control model for change had become an outmoded strategy, an unrealistic hope destroyed by white intransigence."[12]

Notwithstanding its "white liberal" outlook, SPRO-CAS initiated a shift in highlighting the importance of black participation and leadership – this, despite its critics, among them the black consciousness leader, Steve Biko, arguing that the initiative was constrained by its desire to find "an alternative acceptable to the white man".[13] Through its director, Peter Randall and his co-directors, Beyers Naudé, Bill Burnett and Alan Paton, the boundaries began to be tested. For Walshe, those involved in SPRO-CAS started to think more courageously, "rather than seeing black pressures for change as a problematical and even alarming reality that had somehow to be coped with, they were slowly coming to see such pressures as the sociological basis for Biblically-inspired hope."[14] This statement should be considered in light of the emergence of Black Theology within the Black Consciousness movement; a development acknowledged in the *Apartheid and the Church* report.[15]

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In addition to bringing people from various backgrounds into urgent conversation, SPRO-CAS provided an opportunity for the Christian Institute and the SACC to strengthen their

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12 Walshe, *The Church versus State*, 109; Also see Randall (ed.), *Apartheid and the Church*, 71-72.

13 S. Biko, *I Write What I Like: A Selection of His Writings*, London: Bowerdean, 1978, 90-91.

14 Walshe, *Church versus State*, 108.

15 The report states that "the basic purpose and tendency of 'Black Theology' is to be welcomed. For this is basically an attempt to indigenise the Gospel in terms of the cultural forms, the general situation and the specific needs of blacks. It is an attempt to translate the Gospel much more radically into black ways of thinking and in relation to black problems so that Christ will no longer be seen through the eyes of [white people]. One of the causes that has helped prompt the rise of black theology is evangelistic concern about the general drift of blacks from the Church today. It is felt that one of the reasons for this is that the traditional Churches have been more adapted to the spiritual needs of the [whites] than to [blacks]. Underlying Black Theology, and necessary for it, is the emergence of a sense of black identity. It realises that the understanding of God must come through life experience and for the black person this means his black experience." See Randall (ed.), *Apartheid and the church*, 51-52.

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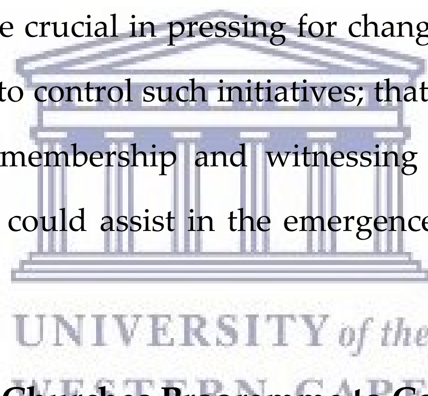
ties with Black Consciousness groupings. But its diverse membership meant that those involved in the initiative could never fully agree on what apartheid was, let alone create consensus about how to end it. However, for De Gruchy SPRO-CAS represents a decisive turning point in the work and witness of the Christian Institute. By 1972, when the programme was completed, the Christian Institute (with support from the SACC) rapidly expanded their work and became more involved in the black struggle.[16] Walshe describes this change in the stance of the Christian Institute as a parting of ways with "the old liberal illusion that change could be effected solely by education and moral appeals directed at the privileged." He further posits that the Christian Institute

> …began to encourage the resurgence of Black Consciousness as a source of renewed dignity and potential for the poor. This involved the judgement that black initiatives would be crucial in pressing for change; that whites could and should no longer expect to control such initiatives; that the [Christian Institute], by increasing its black membership and witnessing to the essential human community above color, could assist in the emergence of a new generation of black leaders.[17]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4.2.2 The World Council of Churches Programme to Combat Racism

On the ecumenical front, the WCC launched its controversial Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) in 1971. This came in the aftermath of the WCC-sponsored Geneva Conference on Church and Society in 1966. As stated elsewhere, the developments at the Geneva Conference had a significant impact on the South African delegates, eventually leading to *The Message* in 1968.[18] Also, at this meeting, the controversial issue of Christian participation in revolutionary struggles was tabled. This resulted in the WCC Executive

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16 De Gruchy, *The church struggle*, 106.

17 Peter Walshe, "Church versus State in South Africa: The Christian Institute and the resurgence of African nationalism", *Journal of Church and State*, 19(3), 1977, 462.

18 See Chapter 3, section 3.2.2.

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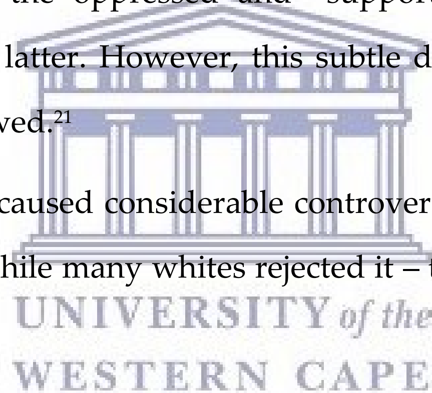
Committee decision recommending the formation of an ecumenical PCR. Their decision formed part of the WCC's broader response to the predicament of human sin – described as the struggle against the deeply entrenched "demonic forces" of "racial prejudice" and "hatred" that operate in the social, economic and political structures of the time. They further called upon the churches to move beyond charity grants to "relevant and sacrificial action" that would lead to new "relationships of dignity and justice" among all.[19] With this in mind, the WCC Executive Committee unveiled a five-year programme providing guidelines for a special fund which was to be used to financially support liberation movements struggling against racism in different parts of the world, notably in Southern Africa. This includes grants to the liberation movements in South Africa, including the ANC.[20] David Thomas notes that the WCC insisted that a distinction be made between expressing "solidarity" with the oppressed and "support" for violence – the grants represent the former, not the latter. However, this subtle distinction was easily brushed aside in the debates that followed.[21]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The news of the special fund caused considerable controversy in South Africa. Generally, blacks welcomed the grants while many whites rejected it – this polarised reaction created

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19 A. J. Van der Bent, (ed.), *World Council of Churches' Statements and Actions on Racism 1948-1979*, Geneva: PCR Information, WCC, 1980, vii.

20 "FRELIMO, in control of approximately one-fifth of Mozambique, received $15, 000 for social welfare as its first development plan set out to expand the number of schools and clinics, to foster agriculture co-operatives and encourage exports of groundnuts, rye, cashew nuts, tobacco and rubber. SWAPO (The South West African Peoples Organisation) received $5,000, ZANU (the Zimbabwe African National Union) and ZAPU (the Zimbabwe African People's Union) $10,000 each, the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) and GRAE (the Revolutionary Government of Angola in Exile) $20,000 each, and UNITA (the National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola $10,000. The ANC received $10,000 to launch a Luthuli Memorial Fund which, it was hoped, would influence world opinion through exploring alternatives to apartheid. Five thousand US dollars were allocated to the Angola Committee and Dr. Eduardo Mondlane Foundation for a joint venture: a Foundation for the Promotion of Information about Racism and Colonialism. These were modest sums and all recipients gave assurances that the funds would be used not for military purposes but for educational or organisational needs which included establishing social infrastructure in liberated areas." See Walshe, *Church versus state*, 111.

21 See D. G. Thomas, *Councils in the ecumenical movements in south Africa: 1904–1975*, Johannesburg: ASCC, 1979, 73.

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serious tension within the churches.[22] For many whites in South Africa, the WCC was now identified as a "terrorist organisation" simply because it aligned itself with the liberation movements and their struggle.[23] This further intensified the debate on the use of violence (as opposed to a non-violent approach) in the struggle for liberation. For the most part, the WCC leadership was seen to be in support of violent revolution. The ecumenical body was also accused of giving up hope in the churches' own struggle for change through working towards justice and reconciliation.[24] These problems were further compounded through government propaganda, pressuring member churches to leave the ecumenical body. In the end, none of them did, but the churches' ambiguous synodical statements reflected the differences of opinion on the matter.

The SACC leadership immediately distanced itself from the WCC decision. Walshe suggests that the SACC, with its predominantly white leadership, failed to comprehend the "carefully marshalled arguments" of the WCC. In his view, the SACC "made the instinctive and tendentious leap from the WCC's support for the publicity and welfare activities of the liberation movements to the assumption that this support involved a commitment to the use of violence for change in Southern Africa."[25] De Gruchy's assessment of the SACC is more generous. He posits that:

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> While the [SACC] expressed their critique of the grants to liberation movements, they also expressed their support for much of the rest of the work of the Programme to Combat Racism. This support needs to be underlined. The churches were unanimous in affirming the programme. The only significant point of difference was on the grants made by the Special Fund to liberation movements using violence to achieve their ends. In rejecting the support, whether implicit or explicit, of violence as a way to solve racism, they were not

22 De Gruchy, "Christianity in twentieth-century South Africa", 100.

23 Thomas, *Councils in the ecumenical movements in South Africa*, 73.

24 De Gruchy, *The church struggle*, 127.

25 Walshe, *Church versus state*, 115.

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> opting for the status quo. They had long been committed to change that, at least in theory.[26]

The Christian Institute also committed to a pacifist stance and distanced itself from the WCC decision. However, its leadership insisted that South Africans had no right to criticise the WCC while structural violence characterised the country's political, economic and social life. They further contended that, given the circumstances, law and order should not be sacralised at the expense of the justice and liberation. On the use of violence, Beyers Naudé argued that Christianity traditionally offers two options: "The first point of view is that the Church and the Christian have under no circumstances the right to approve or use violence. The other point of view is that when all other means have failed, a Christian has the right to use violence to change a situation of unbearable injustice and to bring about a situation of greater justice."[27] In this context, Naudé's stance was closely aligned with the WCC. Walshe postulates that for both Naudé and the WCC the matter was judged to be more complex than simply reducing it to "violence versus non-violence". For instance, the use of violence (structural and otherwise) was a well-established reality, so the question of whether Christians could avoid this is a problematic one. In Naudé's case, the dilemma was to "reduce the sum total of violence in the situation and to liberate human beings for just and peaceful relations with each other". In the same way, the WCC leadership judged their support for the liberation movements as an attempt to address the broader societal deficiencies. The main aim was to minimise violence and injustice. The accusation that the WCC was pro-violence is thus incorrect. Although Naudé and the Christian Institute adopted a pacifist position, they also held the view that action against injustice was needed to reduce the sum total of violence both in interpersonal relations and social structures – in this sense Naudé and the Christian Institute were closely aligned

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26 De Gruchy, *The church struggle*, 127-128.

27 International Commission of Jurists (eds.), *The trial of Beyers Naudé: Christian witness and the rule of law*, London: Search Press, 1975, 116.

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with the position taken by the WCC leadership.[28] Baldwin Sjollema, the first director of the PCR also calls attention to the WCC's long tradition of not only condemning racial discrimination but also when all peaceful means have been exhausted to do more in making sure that the greater good is realised. He insists that the grants to the liberation movements did not imply the unqualified endorsement of their specific tactics. Rather, it was an indication of the WCC support for the long-term goals of a more just society. In the case where some believed that they had no other option but resort to violence, they were no longer automatically excluded from the moral and practical support of the WCC. Moreover, the WCC leadership maintained they would "continue to work for reconciliation, for an end to the violence of the oppressors as well as the violence of the oppressed".[29]

4.2.3 The SACC National Conference at Hammanskraal

The concern over the use of violence resurfaced when the SACC National Conference met at Hammanskraal, a black township north of Pretoria, in 1974. However, at this stage, the situation in the country had deteriorated significantly.[30] De Gruchy remarks that the attempts to resists apartheid by the Christian Institute, the SACC and the Black Consciousness movement (discussed below) as well as by the churches, had been severely countered by the state. This included the arrests, deportation, and banning of many individuals. The South African government also intensified its efforts to suppress SWAPO, the liberation movement in Namibia, as well as increasing its involvement in the civil war

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[28] Walshe, *Church versus State in South Africa*, 116-117. This position, Naudé later explains that their support for the grants had consequences (both personally and for the Christian Institute) which he describes in an article, "The parting of the ways": *"Die tyd vir vroom woorde is verby"* (the time for pious words is past) he wrote in *Pro Veritate*. See *Pro Veritate* 9, 6 October 1970.

[29] B. A Sjollema, *First Answer to Comments Received after the Decision by the WCC Executive to Support Organizations Combatting Racism*, Geneva: WCC, 1970.

[30] According to some there was a mood of desperation in the air. Some even suggest that the country was entering a state of civil war. See for instance Walshe, *Church versus state*, 118; Balia, *Christian resistance to apartheid*, 55-60.

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in Angola. In the process, the South African state became heavily militarised.[31] Delegates to the conference knew how combustible the situation was and this created an expectation (especially among blacks) that the SACC would reconsider its stance on non-violence as the only viable Christian response. Whites, on the other hand, were aware that despite all the resolutions and programmes little had been achieved to resolve the problems arising out of apartheid. In De Gruchy's words:

> There was the feeling that while the position adopted by the churches on the grants to liberation movement was correct, insofar as violence was rejected as a solution, the churches had not really come to grips with the growing militarism of South Africa. Yet, both issues hung together. This provides the background to the challenge to SACC members which required a response as costly for whites as resolutions had normally been for blacks.[32]

The SACC response came in the form of the controversial Resolution on Conscientious Objection against compulsory military service for whites.[33] With this resolution, whites were encouraged to refuse military service given the injustice and violence committed by the South African government.

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The idea of "conscientious objection" was first proposed by Douglas Bax, a white Presbyterian minister. Bax contributed to the SPRO-CAS report on *Apartheid and the Church,* and it was there that the idea of conscientious objection was first raised. Walshe describes the Resolution on Conscientious Objection as "an effort to find a 'third way' – not that of defending the *status quo* as 'law and order', nor that of countering the violence

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31 De Gruchy, *A Theological Odyssey*, 24-25.

32 De Gruchy, *The church struggle,* 135.

33 "Conscientious objection" is an indigenous phenomenon that was encouraged by the success of the peace movement in the United States which opposed the war in Vietnam. A 'conscientious objector' is a person who claimed the right to refuse to perform military service on the grounds of freedom of thought, conscience, or religion. This point became particularly important during the SACC National Conference because by law white adult males were required to perform military service. See E. Regehr, *Perceptions of apartheid: The churches and political change in South Africa,* Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1979, 265.

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of unjust social structures and repression with revolutionary force. The hope was that a way could be found between violence of white domination and the force of black liberation – a way of non-violence with conscientious objection and passive resistance as major components".[34] The SACC member churches were further reminded that the taking up of arms could be justifiable, "if at all, only to fight a just war," but that this excluded "war in defence of a basically unjust and discriminating society." Since the South African government was unjust, any attempt to defend it was deemed questionable. In addition, church leaders were encouraged to call on their members to "identify with the oppressed" and consider "becoming conscientious objectors".[35]

Due to its controversial nature, the Resolution on Conscientious Objection drew considerable public attention. The opponents of the SACC used the opportunity to accuse who considered conscientious objection as the same as those who supported the WCC grants to "terrorists". For De Gruchy, "The fact that the [conscientious objection] statement explicitly indicated that violence was [criticised] as a means to solve problems, and clearly did not therefore justify the black use of violence, was lost from sight. Most people did not really want to know the full position of the churches, which was submerged beneath a plethora of press publicity and propaganda."[36] Walshe adds that leaders of the NGK accused the SACC of committing treason and called on South Africans to defend the country's borders. Even the United and Progressive Parties, which were known to have a liberal orientation, condemned the Resolution on Conscientious Objection for what they believed was undermining the security of the country. This view was echoed by many whites, who through state propaganda, believed that South Africa was under threat from

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34 Walshe, *Church versus state*, 120.

35 See the resolution on conscientious objection in D. G. Thomas, *Councils in the ecumenical movement in South Africa, 1904-1975,* Johannesburg: SACC, 1979, 114.

36 De Gruchy, *The church struggle,* 137.

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a foreign attack. In their opinion, the SACC was acting irresponsibly by not outright condemning foreign and domestic military aggression against the state.[37]

The response from white parishes remained largely apathetic. The attempt to encourage a white movement of conscientious objectors never gained the support needed. In reality, the Resolution on Conscientious Objection caused some white South Africans who were generally opposed to apartheid, to distance themselves from the SACC and the Christian Institute. During this period the modest white membership of the Christian Institute diminished. At the time, Naudé suggested this was "simply because many whites who are willing to be 'liberal' are unwilling to be liberated."[38] In Walshe's words, "liberal whites would not relinquish control. In principle they were prepared to move away from racial discrimination and permit blacks to enter the established economic and political structures under white leadership; but they balked at the risks involved in empowering the poor and oppressed majority."[39] Naudé maintained, however, that the Christian Institute had "no option … but to continue to portray to the church and society its understanding of liberation as proclaimed and exemplified by Christ."[40] In the aftermath of Hammanskraal, the Christian Institute moved into a period of much closer cooperation with black organisations. As a result, it became much more activist-orientated, leading to a significant increase in its black membership. More importantly, the Christian Institute, under Naudé, gained the trust of the black protest movements that were forming inside the churches as well as the Black Consciousness movement.[41]

4.2.4 The emergence of the Black Consciousness movement

The SPRO-CAS call to action resulted in two different initiatives. One was called the White Community Programme (WCP) and other the Black Community Programme (BCP). The

37 Walshe, *Chruch versus state*, 121.

38 Christian Institute, *Director's Report for the Period August 1, 1973 to July 31, 1974,* Johannesburg, 1974, 8.

39 Walshe, *Church versus state* , 122.

40 Christian Institute, *Director's Report for the Period August 1, 1973 to July 31, 1974,* Johannesburg, 1974, 8.

41 Walshe, *Church versus state* , 122.

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WCP later renamed the Programme for Social Change (PSC) never gained the support needed for it to be sustainable.[42] By mid-1975 it had exhausted its budget. Moreover, its white staff members found the initiative to have lost its relevance to effect any meaningful change. In contrast, the BCP had the "easier" task of harnessing black discontent to gain support. However, Walshe cautions against exaggerating the impact of the BCP. In his view, the BCP did not initiate a new protest movement. Rather, it set out to support the much wider Black Consciousness movement, which had its independent origins in the late 1960s.[43] Here the resurgence of African nationalism, usually described as the Black Consciousness movement, is traced to the formation of the University Christian Movement (UCM) in 1966 – this, by black and white students committed to a Christian witness against apartheid. Soon after its formation, the UCM was challenged by internal tension between its black and white members.

Driven by an emerging sense that blacks should take the initiative for their own liberation struggle, it soon became apparent that the (white) liberal model of the non-racial student organisation could not withstand the level of black discontent.[44] It was argued that despite its facade of non-racialism the UCM was primarily a "white-dominated", organisation.[45] This made cooperation across racial lines increasingly more difficult, eventually leading to the formation of a black caucus with Steve Biko and Barney Pityana at its centre.[46] Those in

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[42] The WCP was "intended to raise white consciousness; that is, the responsibility of well-meaning whites was now seen to be in their own community." Here, "the task was to release individuals from their race and class biases, to free them from the morally stultifying grip of their own privilege so that they might respond creatively to black initiatives." However, the WCP never gained the support needed. "As the Christian Institute suspected, even as the [WCP] was being launched, there was insufficient yeast – no critical mass. Certainly the dough did not rise, despite the efforts of a few brave individuals." This trend continued when the WCP was renamed PSC. See Walshe, *Church versus state in South Africa*, 140-145.

[43] Walshe, *Church versus state*, 149.

[44] Although white liberals have often been criticised for interference or "managing" the black struggle (whatever the truth of such claims may be), it is nevertheless fair to say that a select group of white liberals and white liberal organisations made significant contributions in advancing black consciousness at a crucial times during the liberation struggle.

[45] P. Frostin, *Liberation theology in Tanzania and South Africa: A first world interpretation,* Lund: Lund University Press, 1988, 91.

[46] Walshe, *Church versus state*, 149.

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the black caucus were determined not only to understand the long history of black protest in the country but also to find creative ways of addressing existing challenges. They did this by focusing on the radical writings of black American scholars like James Baldwin, Stokely Carmichael, Eldridge Cleaver and James Cone – particularly, their concern with Black Theology as a vehicle for examining the predicament of the poor and the oppressed.[47]

In the meantime, talks were already underway on the importance of forming a black organisation. This led to the establishment of the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) in 1968. According to Takatso Mafokeng, SASO, which developed out of the UCM, became the first organisational expression of Black Consciousness. He posits that "the UCM, a Christian organisation, became the organisational ground on which the idea of Black Consciousness solidified … It is important to note that the SASO and thereby the Black Consciousness philosophical approach was born inside Christian circles."[48] For Basil Moore, the matter is more nuanced. In his words:

> Many of the founding members of SASO, like Steve Biko [also an executive member of the UCM] and Nyameko [Barney] Pityana, were Christians and wanted to maintain their involvement in the UCM. They also recognised that SASO was not and could not become a Christian movement. Thus SASO became the coordinating agency for black student politics and committed itself to the development of the Black Consciousness ideology and the broader Black Consciousness movement.[49] What Christian members of SASO demanded of the

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47 Walshe, *Church versus state*, 149.

48 T. A. Mofokeng, *The crucified among the crossbearers: Towards a black christology*, Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1983, 9.

49 In the SASO policy manifesto of 1971, black consciousness is presented in terms of having a specific focus on cultural liberation in the philosophy of *Ujamaa*: (i) Black Consciousness is an attitude of mind, a way of life; (ii) The basic tenet of Black Consciousness is that the Black man must reject all value systems that seek to make him a foreigner in the country of his birth and reduce his basic human dignity; (iii) The Black man must build up his own value systems, see himself as self-defined and not defined by others. See Regehr, *Perceptions of apartheid*, 201.

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> UCM was the development of a theological counterpart to Black Consciousness which would address the issue of Black liberation. These demands became more strident during 1969 and 1970 and black students became increasingly scornful of UCM's engagement in humanistic 'Encounter Groups' and the like, which reflected an old [liberal] 'reconciliation' mind-set.[50]

SASO further took the initiative of drawing together a wide range of groups to form the BPC in 1971.[51] According to Gail Gerhart, the aim was to form an organisation that would serve as the central coordinating body of the Black Consciousness movement, as well as fill the political vacuum left by the banning of the black liberation movements.[52] For Dubow:

> The Black People's Convention further helped to bring together a burgeoning network of grassroots community organisations seeking to give expression to the idea of self-reliance. Here, Julius Nyerere's *Ujamaa* philosophy [socialist system of village cooperatives based on equality of opportunity and self-help, established in the 1960s] in Tanzania was a source of inspiration. A range of health, educational and literacy projects were undertaken under the auspices of the [BCP] … The intention was to give practical effect to Black Consciousness and to broaden as well as deepen its support base by locating it in (predominantly) rural communities. Significant funding was made available to the BCP from ecumenical Christian organisations like the Christian Institute and foreign churches.[53]

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50 B. Moore, "Black Theology: In the beginning", *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 4(2), 1991, 24.

51 The BPC was aimed to serve as a national umbrella organisation for sympathetic social, cultural, and political organisations. Its inaugural conference was attended by more than 1,400 delegates representing 145 organisations.

52 G. M. Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: The evolution of an ideology*, Berkley: University of California Press, 1978, 292.

53 Dubow, *Apartheid*, 164-165. For an extended discussion on the *Ujamaa* philosophy see Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, 29-47.

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The BPC went on to play a leading role in the student protests of the 1970s. This reached a watershed with the uprising of Soweto youth in 1976, which rapidly spread throughout the country. Inspired and supported by the Black Consciousness movement, the Soweto student uprising represented the first major black act of resistance and protest since Sharpeville in 1960.[54] This came as a direct response to government's educational policies requiring the use of Afrikaans (traditionally seen as the language of the apartheid state) as a medium of instruction in schools. For Hermann Giliomee the reasons for the protest are much broader than this particular issue alone. In his view, "the Soweto uprising that started on 16 June 1976 was rooted in the pass laws, the denial of black political rights, and the lack of any representation in the industrial councils and conciliation boards where wage and other disputes were settled. Black rejection of these structural features of white domination dates back to the earliest days of Union."[55] Whatever the merits, what started as a peaceful protest soon degenerated under the impact of insensitive police action into stone-throwing and police gunfire. After several days of rioting and shooting, 176 people were killed and hundreds injured. John Kane-Berman adds that in the year following the Soweto uprising, the death toll rose dramatically as the army joined the police in attempting to crush organised dissent.[56] Among the many deaths, the death of the Black Consciousness leader, Steve Biko who died in police custody is particularly significant. According to Dubow:

> Biko was brutally interrogated, chained to a grille, and assaulted. He died, aged 30, of brain injuries … on 12 September [1977], after being transported for 1,200 km, comatose and manacled, in the back of a police Land Rover … The government soon comprehended the impact of his death and hastened to crack down on all remnants of Black Consciousness. In October [1977], it banned 18 anti-apartheid organisations including SASO, Soweto Students' Representative

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[54] Engdahl, *Theology in conflict*, 40-41.

[55] H. Giliomee, *The last Afrikaner leaders: A supreme test of power,* Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2012, 108.

[56] J. Kane-Berman, *South Africa:The method in the madness,* London: Pluto Press, 1978, 26-33.

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Council, Black People's Convention, the Christian Institute, and the Black Parents' Association.[57]

Many arrests and banning orders followed as the government tried to contain black demonstrations, strikes and boycotts which continued to disrupt the country for the remainder of the 1970s and into the 1980s. In this context, the Soweto uprising became an international symbol of blacks totally rejecting apartheid. What followed did much damage to the reputation of white South Africa, more so than anything else in its history. Following the chain of events one would have to recognise the role of the Black Consciousness movement as being at the heart of the realisation that blacks would themselves have to bear responsibility for change in the country. The emergence of Black Theology therefore cannot be adequately understood if one neglects the context of Black Consciousness.

4.2.5 The emergence of a Black Theology of liberation

The emergence of the Black Consciousness movement indicates that theology and politics interacted in the articulation of this philosophy. For instance, Steve Biko in his role as leader of this movement was fully committed to the project of Black Theology.[58] The same could be said about Barney Pityana and many others who had close ties with theology and the churches.[59] During this period the "liberation" theme became increasingly influential. In theological circles it became a type of umbrella term for many theologies which reflected on the Christian witness in the struggle for justice in South Africa.[60] Stimulated in part by Black Theology in the United States and aware of the liberation theology articulated in Latin America, those in the UCM sought an indigenous theology that

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[57] Dubow, *Apartheid*, 188.

[58] S. Biko, "Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity", In: B. Moore (ed.), *Black Theology: The South African voice,* London: C. Hurst, 1973, 36-47.

[59] D. R. Howarth, "Black Consciousness in South Africa: Resistance and identity formation under apartheid domination", Unpublished PhD. thesis, Department of Government, University of Essex, October 1994, 100.

[60] Vosloo, "Christianity and apartheid in South Africa", 414.

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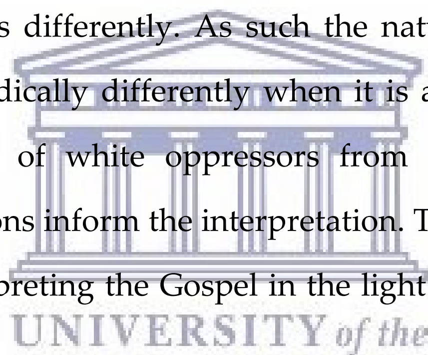
reflected the South African predicament. As a response the UCM launched the Black Theology Project in 1971. It was particularly the Black Theology of James Cone (in the United States) that resonated with those in the UCM.[61] Cone's ideas, especially his focus on Black Theology as a theology of liberation, dominated the Black Theology Project and became a useful basis for developing a Black Theology arising out of the South African context.[62] Ironically, it was the UCM Director of Theological Concerns, Basil Moore (a white Methodist minister, considered to be a Marxist by some conservatives) that Black Theology, as a method of theological reflection was first imported from the United States.[63] In Moore's words:

> He had come to hold that in racist society racism not only structures the experiences of the oppressors and their victims differently, it also makes the 'see' and interpret things differently. As such the nature and meaning of the Gospel is understood radically differently when it is approached from within the experiential context of white oppressors from what it is when black experiences and aspirations inform the interpretation. Thus Black Theology was about black people interpreting the Gospel in the light of black experience and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61 The work of the African American scholar James Cone had particular relevance. See for instance, J. H. Cone, *Black theology & black power*, New York: Seabury Press, 1969; J. H. Cone, *A black theology of liberation*, Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970.

62 B. Goba, "The Black Consciousness movement: Its impact on Black Theology", In: I. J. Mosala & B. Tlhagale (eds.), *The Unquestionable right to be free: Black Theology from South Africa*, New York: Orbis, 1990, 62; V. Vellem, "The symbol of liberation in South African public life: A black theological perspective", Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria, April 2007, 43-46.

63 F. Chikane, "Foreword," In: I. J. Mosala & B. Tlhagale (eds.), *The Unquestionable Right to be Free: Black Theology from South Africa*, xiv; Also see N. Mushete, "The history of theology in Africa: From polemics to critical irenics", In: K. Appiah and S. Torres (eds.), *African Theology en route*, New York, Orbis Books, 1979, 31.

It is ironic that black theology in South Africa was introduced by a white liberal at a time when the black consciousness was at the height of its influence and when its proponents were sceptical about the roles played by white liberals in the black political struggle. Moore was acceptable to those who used black theology as means of self-description because he devoted a lot of energy and effort to encouraging blacks to radicalise themselves on their own terms. In doing so, he was far removed from the many "traditional" paternalistic liberals they were used to. See for instance, M. R. Maimela, "Black consciousness and white liberals in South Africa", Unpublished PhD. Dissertation, University of South Africa, December 1999, 62.

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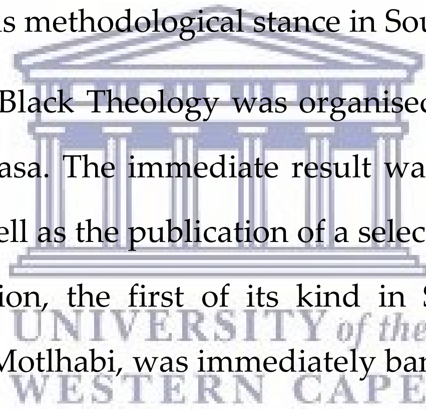
> interpreting black experience in view of the Gospel. Alongside this proposition [he] had come to reject the validity of white theology (a position [he] was later to qualify) on the grounds that Christ was identified with the oppressed both in their suffering and their struggle for liberation. Thus [he] argued that 'black' referred not simply to all the victims of racism inclusively (i.e. had to include 'Coloureds' and 'Indians'), but specifically to those victims of racism who were engaged personally and directly in the liberation struggle. 'Black', if you like, referred exclusively to black freedom fighters. As a result, [he] argued that Black Theology had to grow out of the liberation and its subjects were the liberation activists.[64]

In this sense Moore believes that his own exposure to American Black Theology was very influential in helping shape this methodological stance in South Africa.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The first local colloquium on Black Theology was organised by the Director of the Black Theology Project, Sabelo Ntwasa. The immediate result was a series of further colloquia (throughout the country) as well as the publication of a selection of the essays presented at these meetings. The publication, the first of its kind in South Africa, *Essays in Black Theology*, edited by Mokgethi Motlhabi, was immediately banned.[65] This was followed by a

[64] It is important to note that this stance was not universally accepted in the UCM (as well as SASO). Firstly, there were those in the UCM who came from the PAC and the Africanist tradition. While many agreed with Moore's analysis that racism was the fundamental cause of black oppression, the Africanists argued that his methodology could give no significant place to traditional African culture, especially to traditional African religious culture. According to this view, black theology had to take seriously the theology that was taking shape within the African Independent Churches. Secondly, there were those UCM members who had been nurtured in the socialist traditions of the ANC. In their view, Moore's methodology, including much of what was happening in the black consciousness movement, simply ignored the fundamental issue of capitalism and class. For them, any analysis of the struggle of black people had to include role of capitalism. Racism and capitalism in South Africa were fundamentally tied to each other. In other words, one would have to prioritise both racism and capitalism. The methodology for black theology did not do this. See for instance, Moore, "Black theology: In the beginning", 25-26.

[65] M. Motlhabi (ed.), *Essays in Black Theology in South Africa,* Johannesburg, University Christian Movement, 1972.

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banning order against at least six contributing authors, including Moore and Ntwasa.[66] The essays, supplemented by a few others, were later published by the London publisher Christopher Hurst, under the title *Black Theology: The South Africa Voice*, and was edited by Moore while in exile in Australia.[67]

The immediate challenge facing Black Theology in South Africa was the dominance of what Moore refers to as "liberal ecumenism", where the theme of reconciliation through interpersonal contact was emphasised. This "liberal reconciliation ideology" of opposition to apartheid was attractive to many white English-speakers as well as some of the more conservative blacks.[68] This was the case for the UCM (including the Black Theology Project) as well as what was happening in the churches. Following Cottesloe, the churches' opposition was fundamentally more anti-National Party than anti-racist. In this sense, they (especially the English-speaking churches) never seriously addressed the issue of their own racism. Instead, more focus was placed on the need for multi-racialism. In practice, this did very little to alter the white-dominated power structures of these churches. Key positions were still in white hands. This includes especially English-speaking whites still being appointed as bishops, general secretaries, and other office bearers. They were often appointed in positions concerning financial control, publications and theological education (especially that of blacks). Alongside the dominance of whites arose the clamour for multiracial contact. Moore posits that:

> The religious rationale for this 'contact', which also had its secular counterpart, was 'reconciliation'. Against the rising tide of racialism, the Churches or their leaders came to see the crucial need as being for 'reconciliation' between blacks and whites. This need for 'reconciliation' led to an almost pathological 'got-to-get-me-a-black-man-to-find-out-what-he-is-thinking' attitude among many

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66 De Gruchy, *The Church struggle*, 149-150.

67 Moore, "Black Theology: In the beginning", 19.

68 Moore, "Black Theology: In the beginning", 20.

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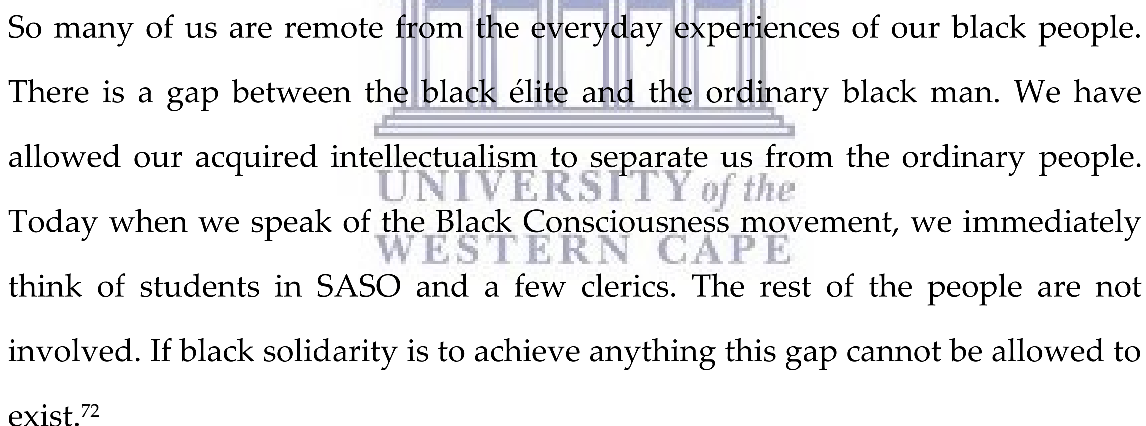
whites.[69]

Over time, however, this particular approach had to contend with the growing mood among blacks against the "phoney" reconciliation implied in the multi-racialism (and liberal ecumenism) of the time. This may be regarded as one of the most significant factors making the emergence of Black Theology in South Africa possible.[70] It further prompted a creative phase in the development of Black Theology in the 1970s – with a number black theologians working towards developing Black Theology in relation to their confessional traditions. Among them were Manas Buthelezi, Desmond Tutu, and Simon Maimela. They were followed by a younger generation of scholars including Buti Tlhagale, Takatso Mofokeng, Bonganjalo Goba, Allan Boesak, Itumeleng Mosala, and Mokgethi Motlhabi among other.[71] However, despite the significant influence of Black Consciousness and Black Theology, the social basis of this new type of intellectual reflection was quite limited. Bonganjalo Goba points to this when he argues:



> So many of us are remote from the everyday experiences of our black people. There is a gap between the black élite and the ordinary black man. We have allowed our acquired intellectualism to separate us from the ordinary people. Today when we speak of the Black Consciousness movement, we immediately think of students in SASO and a few clerics. The rest of the people are not involved. If black solidarity is to achieve anything this gap cannot be allowed to exist.[72]

Per Frostin points that it was only later with the formation of the Institute for Contextual Theology (1982) where the relationship between grassroots communities and the academic

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69 Basil Moore, "What is Black Theology?", In: B. Moore (ed.), *Black Theology: The South African voice* London: C. Hurst, 1973, 3.

70 Moore, "What is Black Theology?" 3.

71 R. S. Tshaka and K. M. Mafokane, "The Continued Relevance of Black Liberation Theology for South Africa Today", *Scriptura*, 105, 2010, 534-535.

72 B. Goba, "Corporate personality: Ancient Israel and Africa", In: B. Moore (ed.), *Black Theology: The South African voice*, 73.

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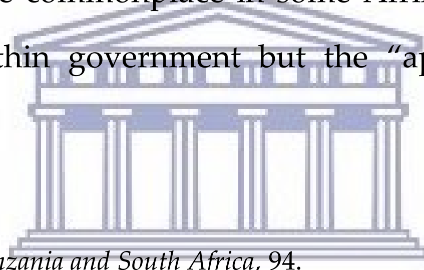
study of Black Theology was given the necessary attention – this also relates to feminist concerns on the role of black women in the discipline.[73] In the meantime, Black Theology was propagated mainly through colloquia and ministers' caucuses. During this period, some of the most significant scholarly contributions, including some doctoral dissertations, on the topic were produced – this continued well into the "Kairos" period during the 1980s.[74]

4.2.6 Prologue to Kairos

The late 1970s saw the apartheid ideology transforming into something searching for what Deborah Posel refers to as a "new language of legitimation".[75] The apartheid state was in decline and its leadership had to find new ways to sustain the ideology. At this time the phrase, "adapt or die" became commonplace in some Afrikaner circles.[76] Not only were there significant tensions within government but the "apartheid is a heresy debate"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[73] Frostin, *Liberation theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, 94.

[74] Among the first of these dissertations published were Allan Boesak's Farewell to Innocence: A Socio-Ethical Study on Black Theology and Black Power (1976); Bonganjalo Goba's *An Agenda for Black Theology: Hermeneutics for Social Change* (1988); Takatso A. Mofokeng's, *The Crucified Among the Crossbearers: Towards a Black Christology (*1983); Itumuleng Mosala's, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (1989); and Cecil Ngcokovane*, Demons of Apartheid* (1989). One notable unpublished doctoral dissertation by a white male theologian is Klippies Kritzinger's, "Black Theology: A challenge to mission" (1988). Among the books published by black theologians include Desmond Tutu's *Hope and Suffering: Sermons and Speeches* (1983) Allan Boesak's, *Black and Reformed: Apartheid Liberation and the Calvinist Tradition* (1984). In 1986 a joint collection of essays entitled, *The Unquestionable Right to Be Free: Black Theology from South Africa* was published – edited by Itumeleng J. Mosala and Buti Tlhagale. A festschrift in honour of Desmond Tutu was published in 1986 – it is entitled, *Hammering Swords into Ploughshares: Essays in Honour of Archbishop Mpilo Desmond Tutu*. Simon Maimela's, *Proclaim Freedom to My People* (1987) is also notable. A collaborative effort between South African and American black theologians came in the form of a collection entitled, *We are One Voice: Black Theology in the USA and South Africa* (1989), edited by Dwight Hopkins and Simon Maimela with contributions from both countries. For the complete list see Mokgethi Motlhabi, *African Theology/Black Theology in South Africa. Looking Back, Moving,* Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2008, 12; Also see Tshaka and Mafokane, "The Continued Relevance of Black Liberation Theology for South Africa Today," 534.

[75] D. Posel, "The Language of Domination, 1978-1983", In: Shula Marks and S. Trapido (eds.), *The politics of race, class and nationalism in twentieth century South Africa*, New York: Longman, 1987, 419.

[76] R. A. Schrire, *Adapt or die: The end of white politics in South Africa*, London: Hurst, 1991, 29-47.

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(discussed in the previous chapter) also strained relations within the NGK.[77] For many, this signalled the beginning of the end of Afrikaner unity in church and state. This also came in the wake of Prime Minister, Pieter Willem (PW) Botha's attempts to reform apartheid through a system of power-sharing (without losing control).[78] This included some movement away from racial discrimination, leading to the amendment of the constitution.[79] Among other things, the new constitution of 1984, gave people from the "coloured" and "Indian" communities limited political representation in the so-called Tricameral Parliament. Black people were not offered representation because they were not considered citizens of South Africa but rather citizens of the Bantustans. The search for this "new language of legitimation" had a polarising effect on the Afrikaner community. Dubow remarks that, "in promoting national survival over Afrikaner ascendency, hitherto core elements of the *volk* were pushed to the margins: the white working class, large parts of the rural *platteland*, as well as Verwoerdian true-believers. This shift in the demographic patterns of power eventuated in a right-wing split in 1982 when … Andries Treurnicht led a break-away from the National Party to form the Conservative Party."[80]

In the meantime, the United Democratic Front (UDF), a broad coalition of 600 anti-apartheid organisations was established in 1983.[81] The formation of the UDF came as a

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[77] J. W. de Gruchy, "Grappling with the Colonial Heritage: The English Speaking Churches under Imperialism and Apartheid", In: R. Elphick and R. Davenport (eds.), *Christianity in South Africa. A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1997, 168.

[78] Giliomee, *The last Afrikaner leaders*, 139-174.

[79] In some ways, these reform initiatives were less repressive than before: interracial marriage and miscegenation – both completely banned since the late 1940s – were legalised, and the constitutional prohibition on multiracial political parties was lifted. During this period the Group Areas Act, which barred "non-whites" from living in certain areas, was also relaxed.

[80] Dubow, *Apartheid*, 203.

[81] The lesser-known black consciousness-aligned National Forum was also formed in 1983. This organisation emerged directly out of the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO), which was formed in 1978 to provide a political home for the Black Consciousness Movement. It should be pointed out, however, that the National Forum's focus on black exclusivism limited its scope of influence. On the other hand, the UDF's focus on "non-racialism" and "multi-racialism" made it more appealing to a wider racially diverse audience. Notwithstanding the ideological issues at play, this may explain why the UDF support base far exceeded that of the National Forum. For an interesting discussion on the National Forum and the UDF. See Dubow, *Apartheid*, 206-207.

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direct response to the Prime Minister Botha's reform proposals which were seen as an attempt to co-op segments of the black community into an ideology of segregation. Instead, the UDF promoted a non-racial state "undiluted by racial or ethnic considerations" as the only constitutional solution for South Africa – in their terms: "Apartheid had to be dismantled not reformed."[82] Significantly, the UDF leadership consisted of prominent clergymen including Desmond Tutu, Allan Boesak as well as Dennis Hurley. According to Pauw, this is good indication that the church struggle now aligned itself firmly with the liberation struggle as the only way to end apartheid – the end result was a shift in church debates away from theological arguments to plans of action against apartheid.[83] Nevertheless, the theological critique of apartheid continued at the recently founded Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT). De Gruchy remarks that it "had been formed in 1982 as a means of fostering the development of progressive or liberating theological responses to the unfolding social and political situation."[84] Its first director, Frank Chikane was a minister in the Apostolic Faith Mission Church. Chikane was a product of the Black Consciousness movement and on the forefront of black student politics following the Soweto uprising.[85] Together with other anti-apartheid theologians, most notably the Catholic theologian Albert Nolan, they helped to formulate a theological response that grew out of the challenges facing the country. Most importantly, this included working towards a better understanding of social-political structures and its impact on the conditions of the poor.[86] According to Walshe, the ICT

> became the cutting edge for liberation theology, or what the [ICT] preferred to call 'contextual theology' – in part, to distinguish South African initiatives from

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82 Balia, *Christian resistance to apartheid*, 102.

83 Pauw, "Anti-apartheid theology in Dutch Reformed family of churches", 128; De Gruchy, "Christianity in twentieth-century South Africa", 107.

84 De Gruchy, "Christianity in twentieth-century South Africa", 108.

85 F. Chikane, *No life of my own: An autobiography*, Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1988.

86 P. Walshe, *Prophetic Christianity and the liberation movement in South Africa,* Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1995, 116.

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> those in Latin America. The South African movement, it was argued, needed to take account not only of race and class exploitation as in Latin America, but of the more complex range of Christian denominations, Islam, and the rich heritage of African religion in South Africa.[87]

In 1985, Prime Minister Botha declared a state of emergency. This was prompted by the mounting political dissent, most notably the urban uprisings of 1984-1986. The cause of the uprising was linked to cost increases in essential services, which had a detrimental effect on the already deteriorated living standards of blacks. This was especially the case in the heavily industrialised Vaal Triangle, south of Johannesburg where the protests started. While this was prompted by the grievances particular to black townships, the overarching factor was government's reform policies in the shape of the 1984 constitution. Here it is important to note that the Vaal uprising started on the same day the new constitution was formally adopted. Robert Price describes the uprising as an insurrection rather than a rebellion. In his view, this insurrection not only sought to destroy whatever legitimacy the state had left, but it was also an attempt to replace that, with new structures of popular authority.[88] In this context, the role of the UDF in leading the popular resistance became increasingly more important. Dubow remarks that:

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> …government allegations that the UDF orchestrated the uprising are difficult to sustain, but there can be no doubt that the UDF played a major role in sustaining the revolt and that the uprising in turn gave the UDF new importance. By the end of 1985 the founding slogan 'UDF unites apartheid divides' was beginning to be replaced with a more specific objective 'people's power'.[89]

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87 P. Walshe, "Christianity and the anti-apartheid struggle: the prophetic voice within divided churches", In: R. Elphick and R. Davenport (eds.), *Christianity in South Africa. A political, social, and cultural history*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1997, 392.

88 R. M. Price, *The apartheid state in crisis: Political transformation in South Africa, 1975-1990*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, 191-192.

89 Dubow, *Apartheid*, 211.

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This also speaks to the fact that the urban revolt of 1984-1986 was the most sustained and widespread resistance that the country has ever seen. In contrast to the uprisings in 1976-1977, the uprisings of 1984-1986 enjoyed a much broader support base. The latter was backed by trade unions, community organisations, students and even the unemployed. This show of unity was apparent in November 1984 when as many as 800,000 workers, together with 400,000 students in the Transvaal, participated in a two-day stay-away in support of UDF demands.[90]

The decision to declare a state of emergency granted the state greater power to contain and if necessary crush political opposition. De Gruchy mentions that this created an environment in which detention without trial, torture, the murder of political activists and the incitement of violence in black townships, became the routine business for state security agencies. He further posits that under these circumstances thousands of people, including many Christians, were detained, tortured and even killed.[91] The state of emergency of 1985 therefore represents a particularly brutal chapter in the apartheid government's familiar *kragdadige* (strongman) response to the growing popular resistance to apartheid.[92] This, together with the massacre of protestors in the Eastern Cape township of Langa, urged the SACC leadership to issue a "Call to Prayer for End to Unjust Rule in South Africa" on June 16, 1985.[93] Exactly nine years after the Soweto student uprising, the SACC called on the Christian community to pray for the demise of the apartheid

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90 Dubow, *Apartheid*, 211.

91 De Gruchy, *The church struggle*, 196.

92 D. P. Van der Water, "The legacy of a prophetic moment: A socio-theological study of the reception and response to the Kairos Document amongst churches, faith-communities and individuals in South Africa and within the international ecumenical community, focussing on the English-speaking churches in South Africa with special reference to the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa", Unpublished PhD. Dissertation, University of Natal, December 1998, 16.

93 An ominous tone was set when, on the 17 March 1985, 20 people were shot dead and 27 injured when police opened fire on a funeral procession in Langa. The tragic incident occurred when police opened fire on a large procession of people on their way to a memorial service for those who lost their lives in the Sharpeville massacre exactly 25 years before.

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government.[94] More than just a simplistic call to prayer, this also symbolised a radical challenge to the churches. In Van de Water's words, churches were challenged, "to move away from the position of merely calling for fundamental reform on the part of a government, to that of aligning themselves with those forces seeking the replacement of the nationalist rulers with a democratically elected government."[95] However, given the history of the churches' inability (or reluctance) to move beyond mere protests and moral appeals, the call to prayer did not receive the necessary support from church leaders. In fact, it also failed to attract a significant response from church communities at large. What it did achieve, however, was to highlight the incongruity between church statements and action.[96] It the interim it was left to ecumenical bodies like the SACC to lead the charge against the state. De Gruchy suggests that in this sense the call to prayer was a decisive moment in the church struggle because for the first time the SACC declared the state to be a "tyrannical", and, moreover, urged people to pray for its removal. [97] This placed the SACC in direct opposition to the state, placing the church struggle on a different trajectory.

With state repression reaching unprecedented levels, Christian activists became increasingly impatient with the churches and church leaders for their apparent inability or unwillingness to confront the state definitively. At a "crisis meeting" convened by ICT staff, a small group of activist theologians, "comprising of Revd F. Chikane (ICT General Secretary), Fr. A. Nolan, the Revd Dr. B. Goba, Sister B. Ncube, Mr M. Tsele and Fr. C Langefeld met secretly at the Ipelegeng Community Centre in Soweto. This group defined their aim as that of stating 'the present crisis theologically and to forge appropriate

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[94] C. P. DeYoung, "Christianity: Contemporary Expressions", In: M. D. Palmer and S. M. Burgess (eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell companion to religion and social justice,* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, 70.

[95] Van der Water, *The legacy of a prophetic moment*, 13-14.

[96] C. Villa-Vicencio, *Trapped in Apartheid: A socio-theological history of the English-speaking churches*, New York: Orbis, 1988, 152.

[97] De Gruchy, "Christianity in twentieth-century South Africa", 108.

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responses that Churches may adopt'."[98] They emphasised the growing conviction that a process was needed which would be qualitatively different from other church-related pronouncements. Those at the meeting critically observed that:

> From the way Church-leaders responded to the crisis it is clear that they lack political analysis. Their eagerness to talk over the crisis with the State President shows that they do not see the political interests of the government … There is a crisis in communication. The leaders do not have contact with grassroots. Most of them are inaccessible. There is no solidarity even between Church-leaders themselves. An example is the split on the June 16 Prayer controversy … What impact on the life of the Church as theologians of the periphery can we make? How can we influence the leadership and not discredit and antagonize them? We need to draft a statement that is critical of the Church and self-critical.[99]

Robert McAfee Brown remarks that it was envisaged that the statement reflects a specific focus on "analysing the present situation", not "lofty theological analysis" or the "reiteration of eternal (and abstract) truth". However, there was also an intention not to merely reduce theology to social analysis. Instead, their approach harnessed social analysis as a means to enrich theology. In other words, the social analysis was deemed essential in the interest of making theology more relevant to the specific situation.[100]

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After much consultation with various stakeholders, including meetings with prominent theologians, the ICT released the *Kairos Document* in September 1985.[101] The intention was to broaden the process of consultation beyond the publication of the first edition. Moreover, the second edition, having had the benefit of further responses, was published

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98 Van der Water, *The legacy of a prophetic moment*, 21.

99 Minutes of ICT Theological Crisis Meeting, Ipelegeng Community Centre, Soweto, 28 July 1985 (ICT Archives, Kairos Files, Johannesburg) quoted in Van der Water, *The legacy of a prophetic moment*, 22.

100 R. M. Brown, *Kairos: Three prophetic challenges to the church*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990, 10-11.

101 Some of the individuals listed to participate in the consultative meetings were: "Fr. B. Thlgale, M. Mothasi, T. Mafokeng, Dr. S. Maimela, the Revd. E. Tema, Fr. S. Mkhatswa, Dr. B. Goba, D. Masoma, S. Masemola, Fr. L. Sebidi, Fr. C. Langefeldt, Bishop D. Tutu, Dr. B. Naude, Dr. W. Kistner, the Revd. F. Chikane, Bishop M. Buthulezi." See Van der Water, *The legacy of a prophetic moment*, 24.

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in January 1986. However, due to the significant interest around its initial release, the revised second edition was only published in September 1986. Those who contributed to the process represented a wide ideological spectrum. This included representatives from the UDF, the Black Consciousness-aligned National Forum as well as the broader mass protest movement. They were united in terms the urgency to redefine their role as Christians, as well as to explore ways in which the Christian community would be challenged to realise the urgent need of participating in the struggle for liberation. For some of them who had been part of the Christian Institute, the UCM and the Black Theology Project, their involvement in the formulation of the document represented a catalyst for a critical evaluation of their theological position. This provided them with the opportunity to contribute to the ongoing struggle for liberation from a more inclusive premise.

4.3 The *Kairos Document*

4.3.1 An overview of the *Kairos Document*

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The document itself consists of seven chapters. This includes a Preface, five Chapters, and a Conclusion.[102] In the Preface, the authors (hereafter the "*Kairos* theologians") defines the document as "a Christian, biblical and theological comment on the political crisis in South Africa today".[103] The message of the *Kairos Document* is directed mainly to the churches and Christians. In this context, the document calls on them to "reflect on the situation and to determine what response by the Church and by all Christians would be most appropriate".[104] However, it is important to note that even though the document was directed to the churches, it was not produced by the churches. In fact, the document did

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[102] The Kairos Theologians, "The Kairos Document, Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa" (Revised Second Edition), In: G. S. D. Leonard (ed.), *The moment of truth: The Kairos Documents,* Pietermaritzburg: Ujamaa Centre for Biblical and Theological Community Development and Research, University of Kwazulu Natal, 2010.

[103] The Kairos Theologians, "The Kairos Document", 45.

[104] The Kairos Theologians, "The Kairos Document", 43.

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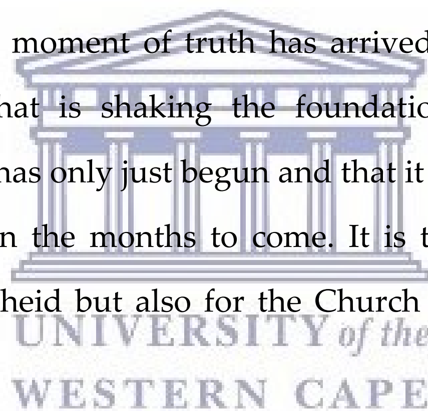
not represent the views of any particular denominational body, individually or collectively. Rather, it was the contributions of individuals affiliated with the different denominations highlighting their views in their personal capacity. However, the *Kairos* theologians recognised the responsibility of the churches to work towards the dismantling apartheid, as well as contributing to the reconstruction of a society based on the principles of justice, democracy, and peace. Thus, the input of the document could be narrowed down firstly, to the challenge directed at the churches and, secondly, the urgency of the need to address that challenge. According to the *Kairos* theologians, the situation dictated that the churches could no longer afford to ignore their responsibility.

The opening paragraph of Chapter 1, entitled, "The Moment of Truth", makes a direct reference to the church. It states that:

> The time has come. The moment of truth has arrived. South Africa has been plunged into a crisis that is shaking the foundations, and there is every indication that the crisis has only just begun and that it will deepen and become even more threatening in the months to come. It is the *Kairos* or moment of truth not only for Apartheid but also for the Church and all other faiths and religions.[105]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Here the *Kairos* theologians locate the crisis not only in the socio-political arena but also within the churches themselves. Moreover, the churches addressed in this section are the churches that have a long tradition of opposition to apartheid. Even though no specific church groupings are mentioned in the "challenge", the thrust of the message is aimed at the English-speaking churches and other ecumenical groupings. Here the concern is derived mainly from the many proclamations opposing apartheid that had been made, at least since Cottesloe in 1960. However, despite the many criticisms of apartheid, the responses of the churches and church leaders lacked the necessary urgency and effectiveness. According to the *Kairos* theologians, this ineffectiveness was due in large

105 The Kairos Theologians, "The Kairos Document", 47.

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part to existing theological suppositions that informed and governed the churches' responses. More importantly, these theological suppositions lacked any semblance of 'social analyses' as well as any real sense of 'an adequate understanding of politics and political strategy'. The *Kairos* theologians state:

> Changing the structures of society is fundamentally a matter of politics. It requires a political strategy based on a clear social and political analysis. The Church has to address itself to these strategies and to the analysis upon which they are based. It is into this political situation that the Church has to bring the gospel. Not as an alternative solution to our problems as if the gospel provided us with a non-political solution to political problems. There is no specifically Christian solution. There will be a Christian way of approaching the political solutions, a Christian spirit and motivation and attitude. But there is no way of bypassing politics and political strategies.[106]

The reason for the inadequacies evident in the response of the churches is influenced mainly by the following factors. The first, the *Kairos* theologians critically refers as "State Theology". The "Critique of State Theology" is Chapter 2 of the document.

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According to the *Kairos* theologians, the apartheid state developed a theology of its own. The document describes this theology as "State Theology". This brand of theology legitimised the politics of repression and violence against black people. It is merely "the theological justification of the status quo with its racism, capitalism and totalitarianism". While "State Theology" claim to be based on Romans 13: 1-7, the *Kairos* theologians argue that the experience of the majority of South Africans suggest that the state that is not acting as a "servant of God" for the benefit of all people. In quoting Revelation 13, the *Kairos* theologians suggest that within the South African context the contrary was, in fact, the case. They state that: "If we wish to search the Bible for guidance in a situation where the State that is supposed to be 'the servant of God' betrays that calling and begins to

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106 The Kairos Theologians, "The Kairos Document", 61.

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serve Satan instead, then we can study Chapter 13 of the Book of Revelation. Here the Roman State becomes the servant of the dragon (the devil) and takes on the appearance of a horrible beast."[107]

"State Theology" further claims to undergird the principle of "law and order" in South Africa. However, in reality, according to the *Kairos* theologians, "this *law* is the unjust and discriminatory laws of apartheid and this order is the organized and institutionalized disorder of oppression. Anyone who wishes to change this law and this order is made to feel that they are lawless and disorderly. In other words they are made to feel guilty of sin."[108] The *Kairos* theologians further argue that the direct association of all those who oppose the apartheid state as being "communists", and therefore by implication "atheists" is problematic simply because most South Africans who have been active against apartheid are members of the church and the African religious traditions. The claim in the preamble of the South African constitution, "in humble submission to Almighty God" was therefore denounced as blasphemous. The *Kairos* theologians state that: "This god is an idol. It is as mischievous, sinister and evil as any of the idols that the prophets of Israel had to contend with … It is a god of superior weapons who conquered those who were armed within nothing but spears. It is the god of casspirs and hippos, the god of teargas, rubber bullets, sjamboks, prison cells and death sentences…the god of the South African State is not merely an idol or false god, it is the devil disguised as Almighty God – the antichrist."[109] This section is followed by what the document critically refers to as "Church Theology". The "Critique of Church Theology" is offered Section 2 of the document.

According to the *Kairos* theologians, "Church Theology" is the "type of faith and spirituality that has dominated church life for centuries". The kind of faith and spirituality that undergirds "Church theology" is described as "other-worldly". The *Kairos* theologians state:

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[107] The Kairos Theologians, "The Kairos Document", 51.

[108] The Kairos Theologians, "The Kairos Document", 51.

[109] The Kairos Theologians, "The Kairos Document", 54.

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> As we all know, spirituality has tended to be an other-worldly affair that has very little if anything at all to do with affairs of this world. Social and political matters were seen as worldly affairs that have nothing to do with the spiritual concerns of the Church ... finally the spirituality we inherit tends to rely on God to intervene in God's own good time to put right what is wrong in the world. That leaves very little for human beings to do except to pray for God's intervention.[110]

The *Kairos* theologians further suggest that it is this "other-worldly" faith and spirituality that is at the heart of the inadequate theological formulations perpetuated by the churches. As a result, the churches tend to resort to "stock ideas", such as "reconciliation", "justice" and "non-violence" to respond to the prevailing crisis in South Africa.

The *Kairos* theologians criticise the churches' use of the "reconciliation" concept. They note that many people, including Christians, have affirmed that there can be no reconciliation while socio-political injustice continues unabated. The *Kairos* theologians state that "there can be no doubt that our Christian faith commits us to work for *true* reconciliation and *genuine* peace. But as so many people, including Christians, have pointed out, there can be no true reconciliation and no genuine peace *without justice*. Any form of peace or reconciliation that allows the sin of injustice and oppression to continue is a *false* peace and *counterfeit* reconciliation. This kind of 'reconciliation' has nothing whatsoever to do with the Christian faith."[111] They further suggest that "'Church Theology' is not always clear on this matter and many Christians have been led to believe that what we need in South Africa is not justice but reconciliation and peace. The argument goes something like this: 'We must be fair. We must listen to both sides of the story. If the two sides can only meet to talk and negotiate they will sort out their differences and misunderstandings, and the

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[110] The Kairos Theologians, "The Kairos Document", 61.

[111] The Kairos Theologians, "The Kairos Document", 70.

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conflict will be resolved.' On the face of it, this may sound very Christian. But is it?"[112] The Kairos theologians argue that the churches were guilty of calling for reconciliation at all costs, making it into an "absolute principle that must be applied in all cases of conflict and dissension". Therefore the insistence upon reconciliation and peace before the present injustices were removed is regarded to being "unchristian". As far as the Kairos theologians are concerned, it would be a total betrayal of the Christian faith to "try and reconcile good and evil, God and the Devil". They further posit that "We are supposed to oppose, confront and reject the devil and not try to sup with the devil."[113] In other words, according to them, "No reconciliation is possible in South Africa *without justice*, without the total dismantling of apartheid."

The *Kairos* theologians also raise serious questions about the meaning when churches call for justice. The document states that "the question we need to ask here, the very serious theological question is: What kind of justice? An examination of Church statements and pronouncements gives the distinct impression that the justice that is envisaged is the justice of reform, that is to say, a justice that is determined by the oppressor, by the white minority and that is offered to the people as a kind of concession."[114] What is clear from this analysis is that the political reforms initiated by the Botha regime were judged to irrelevant because these reforms did not constitute real steps towards a just social order. In fact, the Kairos theologians judged reform initiatives as a mere tactic to maintain political domination and survival. The Kairos theologians argue:

> True justice, God's justice, demands a radical change of structures. This can only come from below, from the oppressed themselves. God will bring about change through the oppressed as he did through the oppressed Hebrew slaves in Egypt. God does not bring his justice through reforms introduced by the

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112 The Kairos Theologians, "The Kairos Document", 55.

113 The Kairos Theologians, "The Kairos Document", 56.

114 The Kairos Theologians, "The Kairos Document", 57.

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Pharaohs of this world.[115]

The *Kairos* theologians conclude that the justice called for by the churches is not the "radical justice that comes from below and is determined by the people of South Africa".

"Non-violence" is the third "stock idea" used by the church which comes under strong criticism in the document. The escalation of violence was indeed a contentious issue as reflected by many involved in the drafting of the document. In this respect, they were very conscious that the participation in the struggle for liberation meant that the issue of violence had to be considered. In this context, the call for non-violent actions was almost always directed at blacks in the townships and not first to the severe violence of the state. The *Kairos* theologians highlight that throughout the Bible the word "violence" is used to describe everything that is done by the wicked oppressor, and never used to outline the activities of Israelite armies in attempting to liberate themselves or to resist aggression.

Having offered a critique of both "State Theology" and "Church Theology", the *Kairos* theologians direct their challenge to the churches to critically examine or re-examine their theological foundations, firstly, about their theological self-understanding as churches, and secondly, the theological suppositions which were used by the state and its supporters to justify, maintain apartheid. This sets the stage for a proposal on a new theological way forward. The section entitled "Toward a Prophetic Theology" suggests that given the serious problems with "State Theology" and "Church Theology" the need exists to formulate new contextual theological paradigms. The *Kairos* theologians suggest that these theological paradigms would have to take seriously, among other things, the role of social and political analysis. They posit that "a prophetic response and a prophetic theology would include a reading of the signs of the times. This is what the great biblical prophets did in their times and this is what Jesus tells us to do. When the Pharisees and Sadducees ask for a sign from heaven, he tells them to 'read the signs of the times' (Matthew 16: 3) or

115 The Kairos Theologians, "The Kairos Document", 58.

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to ‘interpret the Kairos’ (Luke 12: 56).”[116] According to the *Kairos* theologians, integral to “reading the signs of the times” was the task of discerning what the root causes of the conflict are. For instance, the *Kairos* theologians argue that the portrayal of the current conflict merely as a “racial war” is misleading, as this suggests two equal partners standing in opposition to one another. The race component is a central feature of the conflict, but this does not fully explain the situation whereby the two opposing groups are defined through one being the “oppressor” and the other the “oppressed”. For the *Kairos* theologians, this means that the starting point for a “Prophetic Theology” is the experience of people subjected to oppression and tyranny. In this context, it is precisely this experience of oppression and tyranny that constitute the prevailing *Kairos*. Therefore, for the *Kairos* theologians, it is important to identify the parties involved as “oppressors and the oppressed” because the situation of tyranny is no accident history but integral to the social structure of South Africa. The *Kairos* theologians posit that “what we are dealing with here, in the Bible or in South Africa today, is a social structure. The oppressors are the people who knowingly or unknowingly represent a sinful *cause* and unjust *interests*. The oppressed are people who knowingly or unknowingly represent the opposite *cause* and *interests*, the cause of justice and freedom. Structurally in our society these two causes are in conflict.”

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The *Kairos* theologians further charge that, if “Prophetic Theology” identified oppression from a biblical perspective, it also discerned in such oppression an expectation that is directed towards God. They state that “Throughout the Bible, God appears as the liberator of the oppressed. ‘For the plundered poor, for the needy who groan, now I will act’, says Yahweh (Psalm 12: 5) God is not neutral. He does not attempt to reconcile Moses and Pharaoh, to reconcile the Jewish people with any of their later oppressors[117].” So, whenever “Prophetic Theology” identified the oppressor, guided by the Christian tradition, it cannot avoid confronting them. The implication for churches is evident in this regard. According

[116] The Kairos Theologians, “The Kairos Document”, 63.

[117] The Kairos Theologians, “The Kairos Document”, 70.

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to the *Kairos* theologians, the churches had no option but to take the side of the poor and oppressed. It is to this kind of theology and praxis and the ambiguity thereof that the *Kairos* theologians challenged the churches. However, they also point out that at the heart of the prophetic faith is rooted in "hope". They state that "Jesus has taught us to speak of this hope as the coming of God's kingdom. We believe that God is at work in our world turning hopeless and evil situations to good so that God's kingdom may come and God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven."[118] However, according to *Kairos* theologians, the hope of the people needs affirmation. The *Kairos* theologians' call for "Prophetic Theology" therefore insists that what is required in the prevailing crisis in the country is not a theology which merely rehashes or repeat generalised Christian principles. Instead, what is called for is a theology which responds to the particular context in which people live, suffer and die at the hands of an oppressive state. The "Prophetic Theology" through which the churches are challenged therefore does not allow Christians and the churches the luxury of taking a neutral stance. The *Kairos* theologians argue that "the attempt to remain neutral in this kind of conflict is futile. Neutrality enables the status quo of oppression (and therefore violence) to continue. It is a way of giving tacit support to the oppressor."

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The final chapter of the document is entitled, "Challenge to Action". Here the *Kairos* theologians shift attention to the need for the endemic violence in the country to be ended. Here the message is unambiguous. The *Kairos* theologians argue that it is not enough for Christians and churches to merely condemn apartheid or even the violence that is inherent in the system. It is also not acceptable for churches to try to remain neutral or seek to act as a mediator between opposing groups. The *Kairos* theologians call on both Christians and churches to be united in faith and action with those who are oppressed. One of the tangible ways in which solidarity could be demonstrated was for the churches and Christians to engage in acts of "civil disobedience". The Kairos theologians posit that:

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118 The Kairos Theologians, "The Kairos Document", 71.

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> In the first place the Church *cannot collaborate with tyranny* ... Secondly, the Church should not only pray for a change in government, it should also mobilise its members in every parish to begin to think and work and plan for a change of government ... And finally the moral legitimacy of the Apartheid regime means that the Church will have to be involved at times in *civil disobedience*. A Church that takes its responsibilities seriously in these circumstances will sometimes have to confront and to disobey the State in order to obey God.[119]

In this context, the actions of civil disobedience would represent the outward witness of the churches in their defiance of apartheid. The *Kairos* theologians also called for the transformation of "inward" activities such as services of worship, Eucharist services, baptisms, funerals etcetera. They call on such "specific activities" of the church to be "reshaped to be more fully consistent with a prophetic faith related to the Kairos that God is offering us today". The thrust of the challenge to the church in this regard is to make a conscious connection between the rituals of the Christian faith and the daily experiences of people subjected to the oppression associated with the state. For instance, the evil forces alluded in the Christian ceremony of baptism should become more explicit. Moreover, the unity Christians profess in the Eucharist should be demonstrated in acts of solidarity outside the church. The *Kairos* theologians further challenge the churches about the racial divisions within the churches themselves. They posit that: "What the present crisis shows up, although many of us have known it all along, is that the Church is divided. More and more people are now saying that there are in fact two Churches in South Africa – a White Church and a Black Church. Even within the same denomination there are in fact two Churches."[120] According to the *Kairos* theologians, the prevailing crisis in the country has therefore also exposed the ongoing racial divisions within the churches themselves. The churches, therefore, no less than society, are also faced with the challenge of addressing

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119 The Kairos Theologians, "The Kairos Document", 75.

120 The Kairos Theologians, "The Kairos Document", 71.

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the racial division within their own ranks. The message of the document to the churches in this respect is not merely that the churches lack integrity as the Body of Christ, but that such division was the consequence of diverse socio-political persuasions and actions among church members, split along racial lines.

4.3.2 The *Kairos Document* in perspective

The publication of the *Kairos Document* proved to be controversial. Its reception, however, was not uniform – some praised the document for its attempt to energise the vocabulary of political resistance, whereas others judged it to be politically dangerous and theologically suspect.[121] The apartheid government responded immediately by detaining many who signed the document. They further dismissed supporters of the document, accusing them of being part of the anti-Christian revolutionary "total onslaught", waged against South Africa – apparently, this was part of government strategy to regain Christian legitimation and support within the English-speaking churches.[122] For their part, the NGK instructed rejection, arguing the document was the work of communists and heretics. Except for two churches, the document was never officially adopted by any of the churches to which it was primarily addressed.[123]

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Rejecting the "liberal rhetoric of reconciliation", the *Kairos Document* called for direct participation in the struggle for liberation.[124] This includes participating in acts of civil disobedience against the apartheid state. This was in contrast to the views of many white

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121 For reactions to the *Kairos Document*, see T. Borer, *Challenging the state: Churches as political actors in South Africa, 1980-1994,* Notre Dame, NJ: Notre Dame University Press, 1998, 121; J Suggit, "Kairos: The wrong way on the right road", *Journal of Theology in Southern Africa*, 58, 1987, 70-74; J. B. Torrance, "South Africa today: The Kairos Debate: Listening to its challenge", *Journal of Theology of Southern Africa* 55, 1986, 42-45; P. Beyerhaus, *The Kairos Document: Challenge or danger to the church?* Cape Town: Gospel Defence League, 1987.

122 De Gruchy, "Christianity in twentieth-century South Africa", 108.

123 The only two churches that officially adopted the *Kairos Document* were the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa who adopted it in 1985, and the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa, who adopted it in 1986. See Van der Water, *The legacy of a prophetic moment*, 28.

124 De Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 36.

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South Africans and church leaders who believed they could be agents of reconciliation without actively engaging in the liberation struggle. Not only this, according to De Gruchy, "even Churches and church leaders who had rejected apartheid and who were engaged in the struggle to end it, such as Archbishop Tutu, were unhappy about the way in which 'church theology' and reconciliation were, in their terms, caricatured and criticized." Also, "There was sharper criticism of the *Kairos Document* emanating from a circle of black theologians who remained faithful to the more radical concerns of the Black Consciousness movement. For them, the discourse of reconciliation was controlled by the 'ruling class' rather than by those who were alienated from whites, from the land, from the means of production, and thus from power. If reconciliation was to mean anything significant for them it will have to reverse this alienation."[125] Also, the reluctance of some black theologians to give their full support is attributed to document's emphasis on social oppression in general terms, instead of a more specific focus on the racist foundations of apartheid.[126] Itumeleng Mosala, one of the foremost proponents of Black Theology, later remarked that:

> The real hope of Black Theology in South Africa/Azania may well lie in the fact that it has never been co-opted by the Establishment. No Church has ever officially affirmed Black Theology as a legitimate and correct way of doing theology in South Africa ... This did not happen, and the situation was exacerbated by the *Kairos Document's* total neglect of Black and African theologies. In fact, many of us were incensed by the fact that this potentially empowering document was careful not to mention the word 'black' once – despite its Sowetan origins.[127]

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[125] De Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 36.

[126] B. Goba, "The role of religion in promoting democratic values in the post-apartheid era: A personal reflection", *Journal of Constructive Theology*, 1(1), 1995, 18.

[127] I. J. Mosala, "Spirituality and struggle: African and black theologies", In: C.Villa-Vicencio & C. Niehaus (eds.), *Many cultures, one nation: Festschrift for Beyers Naudé*, Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1995, 81.

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Notwithstanding the concerns raised, it was the *Kairos* theologians' critique of "reconciliation" as a form of "Church Theology" that attracted considerable attention. Most notably, Desmond Tutu who did not sign the document, citing that it was not fair to the church or the New Testament's rendering of reconciliation.[128] The main concern was the presupposition of liberation within the context of justice, repentance and forgiveness before reconciliation can be achieved. The *Kairos* theologians argue that, "No reconciliation is possible in South Africa without justice. What this means in practice is that no reconciliation, no forgiveness and no negotiations are possible without repentance. The Biblical teaching on reconciliation and forgiveness makes it quite clear that nobody can be forgiven and reconciled with God unless he or she repents of their sins. Nor are we expected to forgive the unrepentant sinner." In their view, good and evil cannot be reconciled because that would amount to a betrayal of the Christian faith. Anders Göranzon suggests this particular approach to reconciliation is "clearly" informed by Black Theology.[129] Here, Per Frostin's contribution on the place of reconciliation in Black Theology is particularly helpful.[130] According to Frostin, the ministry of reconciliation is emphasised by different interest groups (see the previous chapter) in South Africa. This is not only with regard to those that opposed apartheid but also those proposing its theological legitimacy (*Ras, Volk en Nasie*).[131] For the proponents of Black Theology, Frostin posits, the validity and value of the ministry of reconciliation are not in question. What is questioned, however, is the strategy on how to go about working towards this ideal.

Underlying much of the critique of Black Theology seems to be the notion that

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128 Doxtader, *With Faith in the works of words*, 40; Botman, "The church partitioned or the church reconciled?" 113.

129 Göranzon refers also to Per Frostin's important contribution on the influence of black theology in the *Kairos Document*. See A. B. O. Göranzon, "The prophetic voice of the SACC after 1990 – Searching for a renewed Kairos", Unpublished PhD. Dissertation, University of the Free State, May 2010, 53.

130 Frostin, *Liberation theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, 169-176.

131 As Doxtader puts it, "Held out as a vindicating 'potential' of separate development, reconciliation was defended by the state-aligned Dutch Reformed Church as a condition yet to come, a future of 'unity in diversity' that followed from the logic and law of race classification and division. See Doxtader, *With faith in the works of words*, 41.

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> reconciliation can be brought about *hinc et nunc* provided that the conflicting parties have an open attitude. Black theologians, by contrast, argue that reconciliation between the oppressed and the oppressor is impossible as long as the oppressor insists on their privileged position.[132]

In this, Frostin identifies two distinct approaches to reconciliation – one is "synchronic", and the other "diachronic". The synchronic approach to reconciliation suggests that mutuality can be achieved immediately by a change in mentality and attitude. In contrast, the diachronic approach to reconciliation suggests that reconciliation can only be arrived at as a result of the process through which the opposing parties are liberated from their different types of alienation. Thus, in the diachronic approach, the distinction between "authentic" and "cheap" reconciliation will often be made.

> Underlying this distinction is the black analysis of apartheid as a state of oppression and injustice. In the context oppression, cheap reconciliation denotes a situation where the oppressor and the oppressed recognize and accept each other without questioning the roles each plays in the relationship determined by the structures of oppression. The structural analysis by Black Theology, by contrast, implies that *metanoia* is a necessary condition for authentic reconciliation.[133]

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Black theologians insist that the confession of sin is a necessary condition for reconciliation. Here, Frostin refers to the *Kairos Document* when it states, "No reconciliation, no forgiveness and no negotiations are possible without repentance."[134] This, however, does not mean that *metanoia* is not necessary for blacks, merely that the call for repentance has different implications for both blacks and whites. Thus, the reconciliation in Black Theology (and by implication the *Kairos Document*) cannot be

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132 Frostin, *Liberation theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, 170.

133 Frostin, *Liberation theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, 170.

134 Frostin, *Liberation theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, 170-171.

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adequately understood if isolated from the truth claims of its social analysis. Moreover, the social analysis revealed that apartheid was a form of tyrannical oppression, not merely a race war. For the *Kairos* theologians, the state's espoused promise of legal equality was contradicted by its historical commitment to violence and oppression. This contradiction was proof that the apartheid "regime has no moral legitimacy".[135] This was also taken as an explanation why God was not neutral in the struggle for liberation. Tied to the relative merits of revolutionary violence the *Kairos Document* troubled and redefined the idea of reconciliation.[136] This was in contrast to general calls for reconciliation, which was judged to be "superficial and counter-productive". Moreover, what distinguished the *Kairos Document* from other church-related statements (see the previous chapter) is the way in which the central argument was constructed and performed. The approach in the *Kairos Document* is counterintuitive, using reconciliation as a mode of opposition which is in contrast to how the concept is traditionally understood. From this vantage point, the promise of reconciliation is radicalised. In Doxtader's words, "as such reconciliation [is] indeed not cheap, especially as its promise for the present depended on its abiding commitment to justice."[137] Accordingly, this commitment to justice contends that "one side is right and the other wrong". Reconciliation, thus, could not mean negotiation or compromise because tolerance beckoned "false peace" and the perpetuation of "evil", resulting in "a total betrayal of all that the Christian faith has ever meant." The *Kairos* theologians contend, as the dominant theological discourse defined reconciliation in terms of personal guilt, it neglected to address injustice effectively, thus bolstering the claim in *Ras Volk en Nasie*, that the present situation of separation expressed the will of God. Accusing the NGK of heresy, the *Kairos* theologians argued that apartheid's distorted words of reconciliation had to be returned to the Word.[138] Opposed to "cheap"

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135 The Kairos Theologians, "The Kairos Document", 68.

136 Doxtader, *With faith in the works of words*, 82.

137 Doxtader, *With faith in the works of words*, 74.

138 Doxtader, *With faith in the works of words*, 41.

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reconciliation, "authentic" reconciliation takes inspiration from the burden of the cross. For the *Kairos* theologians, it begins with a testimony that remembers an experience of suffering and confessed the offences that each individual had inflicted upon others – this, they charge, "does not separate the individual from the social or one's private life from one's public life."[139] Authentic reconciliation creates relationships between human beings and between humans and God. In other words, as individuals concede their transgressions in the name of forgiveness, they provide an environment for collective action. The *Kairos* theologians state:

> We must begin to plan for the future now but above all we must heed God's call to action to secure God's future for ourselves in South Africa. There is hope. There is hope for all of us. But the road is going to be very hard and very painful. The conflict and the struggle will intensify in the months and the years ahead. That is now inevitable – because of the intransigence of the oppressor. But God is with us. We can only learn to become the instruments of his peace even unto death. We must participate in the cross of Christ if we are to have hope of participating in his resurrection.[140]

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The *Kairos Document* reflects a deep commitment to justice (and by implication liberation) in South Africa. However, in so doing, it is accused of giving primacy to justice at the expense of reconciliation. For some, the struggle for justice must not be regarded as an end itself but rather as a means to achieve reconciliation. However, based on the political situation in the country, the *Kairos* theologians may have underestimated how difficult this task would be. De Gruchy remarks that "the problem with the *Kairos Document* was that while it distinguished between cheap and costly reconciliation, it did not differentiate between various forms of justice even though it spoke clearly enough about justice in

[139] The Kairos Theologians, "The Kairos Document", 21.

[140] The Kairos Theologians, "The Kairos Document", 21.

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terms of God's reign."[141] That there is no coherent understanding of justice complicates the matter even further. Another concern is what Botman refers to as the document's focus on reconciliation, lacking a vision of how exactly the new nation will be established.[142] In other words, the hope and promise articulated in the *Kairos Document* must now be translated into concrete theological programmes for nation-building. This is closely aligned with Charles Villa-Vicencio's proposal for a theology of reconstruction (discussed below) calling for a theology that is more than just oppositional, which the *Kairos Document* appears to be.[143] On the doctrine of reconciliation, Botman charges that the *Kairos Document* lacks the Christological depth that is found in *The Message* or the *Belhar Confession* for example. In his view, a stronger Christological emphasis would have clarified that God is not revealed anywhere else but in Jesus Christ. He believes this would have aided the document in providing something distinct, particularly regarding reconciliation's potential in the Christian tradition. The document's narrow interest-based notion of theological irreconcilability is thus judged to be less than adequate.[144]

4.4 Closing reflections

It is important to highlight that the *Kairos Document* and its associated tradition employs what may be referred to as an "inductive" logic.[145] According to this approach, the need for a wider frame of reference follows the argument that any breach in a relationship has wider implications than only for the two parties concerned. If such a breach has almost cosmic ramifications, the final resolution of such conflict has to take into account the widest possible scope of the problem. In this context, reconciliation between two

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141 De Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 199-200.

142 Botman, "The church partitioned or the church reconciled?", 112.

143 C. Villa-Vicencio, *A theology of reconstruction: Nation building and human rights,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

144 Botman, "The church partitioned or the church reconciled?", 112-113.

145 See my discussion on the deductive logic as an approach to the doctrine of reconciliation in Chapter 1. This approach is borrowed from Conradie, "Reconciliation as one Guiding Vision for South Africa?" 17-21.

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individuals is only possible if the whole of that society is reconciled with itself. Ultimately, reconciliation between two individuals is possible only through reconciliation with God. For apartheid South Africa the situation demanded an immediate remedy where the consequences of the problem were alleviated. Here it may be helpful but not enough to experience solidarity and companionship amidst suffering. In this sense a victory of some sort is required. Unlike the approach highlighted in the previous chapter, here, the symbol of the cross is not enough. In highlighting the *Christus Victor* or classic view of atonement, here the victory has to be more than "moral victory" or a new vision. Apartheid and its associated evils, have to be negated. In this context, victory may be ascribed to one's own efforts and commitment. Here the category of redemption is often used to capture the thrust of such salvific experiences. With reference to the classic type in the context of the South African struggle, one may speak of liberation from oppression and a victory over forces of death, destruction and evil (the main thrust of Aulén's argument). In this context, the most important Christian symbol which may be used is the resurrection of Christ, because it symbolises the power of God to address any situation and to conquer even death. In other words, it is a triumphal manifestation of God's decisive victory over the forces of evil. In this case that victory is over evil associated with apartheid.

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In turn, this invites reflection on the cosmic scope of God's work of reconciliation. This would include not only human beings and human societies but the whole created order. In other words, everything is included in God's work of reconciliation in Christ. Reconciliation should, therefore, be understood in the context of both God's work of creation and salvation. What is at stake is the tension between Creator and the creature that has emerged because of captivity to the principalities and powers of this world (Colossians 1: 18-23). "God's cosmic reconciling activity precedes and provides the framework within which God's reconciliation of humanity occurs."[146] However, the main concern with the "inductive" approach is the danger of self-secularisation, of reducing the

[146] De Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 53.

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Christian confession to nothing more than an example of religious affiliation that may be tolerated as long as its particular claims are not foregrounded. The obvious danger, as may be the case with the *Kairos Document*, is one of being socially relevant without having anything distinct to offer in response to the challenge that one may be confronted with.

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5. Reconstruction requires national reconciliation

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to describe and analyse the way in which the symbol of reconciliation has been understood amongst proponents of a theology of reconstruction and development – by those emphasising the need for national reconciliation and nation-building, by those recognising that the reconciliation is a necessary requirement for processes of social transformation and moral regeneration in South Africa.

This description and analysis will be done especially on the basis of literature during the period of the transition to democracy and in ongoing theological discourses on nation-building, development, social transformation, and moral regeneration reflected in the decision to establish the TRC. This chapter will illustrate that the shift in emphasis from liberation to reconstruction during the transitional period (1990-1994) led to a different notion of how the discourse on reconciliation was to be understood and interpreted.

5.2 Towards the Truth and Reconciliation of South African

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This section entails a brief survey of selected developments that led to the South African TRC. Of course, this significant development on the discourse of reconciliation cannot be understood apart from the events leading to it, and this will be addressed in summary form.

5.2.1 The transitional period

In a comprehensive study of the South African crisis during the 1980s, Robert Price maintains that a precondition for the collapse of legislative apartheid, leading to fundamental change, was an extended period of economic decline combined with the

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political unrest of the 1980s.[1] So, despite the state efforts to uphold what it described as "law and order" it became apparent that it could no longer maintain the mounting international combined with international pressures. In more detail, Walshe underscores the combination of pressure brought about by the Mass Democratic Movement in conjunction with the threat of further sanctions, a debt-service crisis together with a stagnating economy that made it difficult for the apartheid state to continue with its campaign.[2] It was the burden of these factors coupled with ill-health that eventually led to the forced resignation of Prime Minister Botha in the final months of 1989.[3]

Botha was eventually replaced by Frederik W. de Klerk, an active member of the Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika, and son of a former National Party leader.[4] According to Dubow, De Klerk was a skilled political operator with a long record of supporting traditional apartheid measures but few deep ideological convictions other than his religious conservatism.[5] On his appointment, many expected a continuation of apartheid policies, but what followed surprised many observers. De Kerk moved decisively to establish his authority and called a general election in September 1989. In this election, the National Party lost considerable support to both the Conservative Party and the liberal Democratic Party. Notwithstanding its majority, this was the ruling party's poorest electoral performance since it came to power in 1948. Through all of this De Klerk's efforts to stabilise the political situation transformed him from a supporter of apartheid into progressive reformer. In the midst of much volatility, De Klerk set a new tone. In Dubow's words, "One of his first acts as president was to prohibit the use of the *sjambok* whip, that potent symbol of rural disciplinary power and police brutality, for purposes of crowd

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1 Price, *The apartheid state in crisis: Political transformation of South Africa, 1975-1990*, 12.

2 Walshe, *Church versus State*, 75.

3 Giliomee, *The last Afrikaner leaders*, 277-279

4 C. W. Burger, "Reformed liturgy in the South African context", In: L. Vischer (ed.), *Christian worship in Reformed Churches past and present,* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003, 160; Giliomee, *The last Afrikaner leaders*, 282-283.

5 Dubow, *Apartheid*, 262.

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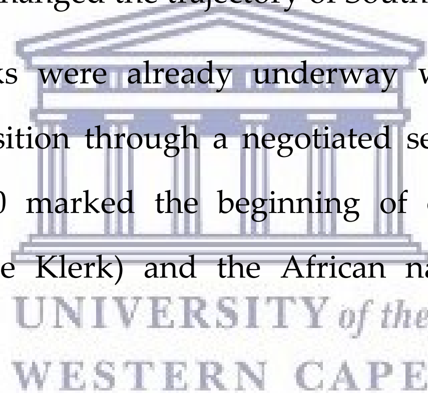
control. Another potent change was De Klerk's decision, under some pressure, to permit a big march of over 20,000 people, led by Archbishop Tutu and other church leaders, to proceed through central Cape Town."[6] In De Klerk's terms, the door to a new South Africa was open and in this environment, it was not necessary to batter it down. He appealed to those involved in the liberation movement to encourage their leaders to come to the negotiating table.[7] De Klerk further concretised this new approach in his now famous speech at the opening of Parliament in February 1990. Dramatically, De Klerk announced the unbanning of anti-apartheid political organisations, including the ANC, the PAC and the South African Communist Party (SACP). Moreover, he announced the release of political prisoners, most importantly Nelson Mandela, who effectively became the symbol of the struggle against apartheid.[8] In this context, De Klerk's actions set in motion a series of events that fundamentally changed the trajectory of South Africa.[9]

In the meantime, secret talks were already underway with leaders to consider the possibility of a peaceful transition through a negotiated settlement. The Groote Schuur talks from 2 to 4 May 1990 marked the beginning of official negotiations between Afrikaner leaders (led by De Klerk) and the African nationalist movement (led by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6 Dubow, *Apartheid*, 263.

7 R. Renwick, *Unconventional diplomacy in Southern Africa*, London: Macmillan, 1997, 138.

8 In a thoughtful assessment of De Klerk's role in the transitional period, Giliomee writes that, "Five hundred years ago Niccolo Machiavelli set out in *The Prince* some of the realities of power. There are, he wrote, two ways of fighting: by law and by force. 'The first way is natural to men and the second to beasts. But as the first way often proves inadequate, one must have recourse to the second. So a prince must understand how to make nice use of the beast and the man.' Machiavelli went on: 'As a prince is forced to know how to act like a beast, he should learn from the fox and the lion; because the lion is defenceless against traps and a fox is defenceless against wolves. Therefore, one must be a fox in order to recognise traps and a lion to fight off wolves. Those who simply act like lions are stupid.' If PW Botha was a lion, FW De Klerk was a fox and everything depended on whether he would see the traps the ANC would lay for him. He came to power disgusted with the way in which the government and its security forces had acted like lions. As a [lawyer], he believed that laws and the constitution could settle disputes and that judges would weigh up arguments judiciously and fairly before delivering and honest verdict. His entire attempt to bring about a constitutional settlement in South Africa hung on this belief – that a deal could be struck that balanced the interests of minorities with the aspirations of the majority." See Giliomee, *The last Afrikaner leaders*, 311-312.

9 See S. Johnson for a detailed account of the developments during South Africa's transition. S. Johnson, *Strange days indeed: South Africa from insurrection to post-election*, London: Bantam Books, 1994.

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Mandela).[10] This was followed by the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) at the end of 1991. At this stage, it was clear that the political situation dictated that neither side could achieve a decisive victory. In this context, working towards a negotiated settlement appeared to be the sensible way forward. However, after the initial euphoria, the opening of negotiations was followed by a period of a general sense of disillusionment, as the talks seemed to drag on inconclusively. This happened amidst the scene of rising black-on-black violence in townships across the country.[11] The situation on the East Rand, near Johannesburg, together with what was going on in Natal province was particularly disturbing. Here clashes between supporters of the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) often resulted in the killing of political opponents. Also, the political assassination of Chris Hani, the SACP leader in 1993 also threatened to destabilise the situation. In Dubow's words, Hani a popular leader of the resistance movement "was gunned down outside his house outside Johannesburg. Two right-wingers, one English-speaking, another Polish, were arrested. The assassination raised political tensions to dangerous levels amidst fears that black anger would explode into violence. In an act of consummate statesmanship, Mandela intervened publicly to call for calm. Hani's burial, which was covered in full by South African television, amounted to an unofficial state funeral. The shock of the killing prompted the leading negotiating participants to press

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[10] "De Klerk's entire team consisted of Afrikaner men – nine politicians and six government officials. The latter were Niel Barnard and Mike Louw of the National Intelligence Service, S. J. J. (Basie) Smit of the police, W. H. Willemse of prisons, Fanie van der Merwe of the Department of Constitutional Development and Jannie Roux from the office of the state President. Neither Minister of Defence Magnus Malan not any other military officer was included. In terms of symbolism, omitting a military figure was a blunder. De Klerk had clearly indicated that he staked everything on a constitutional solution. Always attentive to symbolism, the ANC put together a team of ten black men, one black women (Ruth Mompati), one Afrikaner man (Beyers Naudé), one Jewish man (Joe Slovo), one coloured woman (Cheryl Carolus) and one Indian man (Ahmed Kathrada). Nine of the ANC team gave the Lusaka address, and three (Mandela, Kathrada and Walter Sisulu) had recently been released from prison. It was an early sign that the ANC is exile, together with Mandela, would dominate the movement after the transfer of power, although the UDF and trade unions borne the brunt of the struggle on the ground." See Giliomee, *The last Afrikaner leaders*, 322-323.

[11] For a detailed analysis on the violence at the time see D. Chidester, *Shots in the streets: Violence and religion in South Africa,* Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1992.

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harder to resolve the country's future."[12] Discussions on the causes of the violence during this period continued unabated.[13] However, based on the evidence later presented at the TRC, it came to light that a "third force" (with links to the state) was directly involved in the incitement of township violence.[14] During this period, church leaders, together with Christian activists continued to play an important role, not only to prevent the violence in the first place but also through intervening and mediating talks between the opposing factions. Church leaders, like the Methodist Bishops, Mmutlanyane Stanley Mogoba, and Peter Storey, and the General Secretary of the SACC, Frank Chikane, for example, played a major role through the various national and regional peace structures established to deal with township violence.[15]

5.2.2 Rustenburg: Redefining the role of the churches

In the context of unpredictable transitional politics and protracted negotiations the question concerning the role of the churches had to be addressed. The unbanning of the liberation movements meant that the churches no longer assumed the primary role of political opposition in the country. Some churches responded by scaling down their political activities. Those who remained active found it increasingly difficult to re-orientate themselves to the new situation – Christian leaders simply struggled to develop appropriate tactics and strategies. For some the abolition of apartheid presented the opportunity to get back to "normalcy" – to get back to the basics of "being church". In this respect the 1990s were already being thought of as the decade of evangelisation with social justice treated as a separate issue. De Gruchy warns, however, that while this attitude may have been understandable given the many years of struggle against apartheid, this period

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12 Dubow, *Apartheid*, 271.

13 For an interesting discussion on violence during the transitional period see H. Adam and K. Moodley, *The negotiated revolution: Society and the politics in post-apartheid South Africa*, Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1993, 121.

14 Doxtader, *With Faith in the Works of Words*, 173; De Gruchy, *The church struggle*, 216.

15 De Gruchy, *A theological odyssey*, 32.

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also reflects the failure of the churches to respond to new challenges. In his view, the task of "being the church" now had to include working towards justice and reconciliation.[16] At the time the General Secretary of the SACC, Frank Chikane, echoed similar sentiments on the question of "being the church". In an address entitled, "The Church's Role during a period of Democracy", organised by Diakonia, an ecumenical organisation based Durban, he spelt out his understanding of what was now required given the abolition of apartheid.[17] In his view, the Gospel imperative was to be involved on the side of justice and not necessarily on the side of any particular political party. He further underscored the need for the churches to now act as mediators between conflicting parties. Moreover, to work towards reconciliation, but always with the demands of justice in mind. Chikane further stressed that restitution would have to be an integral part of the reconciliation process. Walshe charges that it is within this context that the SACC attempted to chart a dual ministry; with intervention and mediation in the short run, allied to reconstruction in the long-term:

> This, it was argued by Villa-Vicencio, Boesak and others, required a revised contextual theology to sustain the endeavour. It also meant tackling the immediate crisis of political transition by setting out to check the spread of violence through monitoring, accurate exposé and persistent mediation. Furthermore, it meant nurturing the fraught process of negotiations with a view to maintaining a dialogue between a broad range of political organisations as possible, the hope of being to form a multiparty transitional executive, elect a constituent assembly and then activate a non-racial constitution bolstered by a comprehensive Bill of Rights. Simultaneously, the prophetic church supported, and attempted to refine a set of social and economic policies designed to

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16 De Gruchy, *The church struggle*, 219

17 Diakonia was the vision of the Catholic Archbishop Denis Hurley. It was formed in 1970 and the aim was to create an ecumenical organisation to work for justice in the Durban area. At the time the work of the organisation was motivated mainly by the injustices caused by apartheid.

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produce a more egalitarian yet pluralistic society in which the sense of the common good would be nurtured. These pressing issues included, *inter alia*, land redistribution, the restructuring of economic institutions and the reordering of economic priorities so as to meet the basic needs of all citizens; protecting the environment; redesigning the country's collapsing educational and medical systems; supporting the women's movement to eradicate sexism; and critiquing and international economic system that engenders gross inequalities within South Africa, just as it polarises industrialised and developing societies across the world.[18]

With this understanding, the SACC, under the leadership of Chikane, went on to play a crucial role in organising the famous Rustenburg meeting called the National Conference of Church Leaders in November 1990.[19]

The Rustenburg meeting brought together church leaders from a broad spectrum that went beyond those affiliated with the SACC. This included church leaders from the NGK, African Initiated churches, Pentecostal churches as well independent charismatic churches. It is estimated that the meeting was attended by 230 representatives of 97 denominations and 40 church associations, as well as ecumenical agencies like Diakonia and the ICT.[20] In this sense the church in the country was comprehensively represented. This included church leaders and denominations with longstanding suspicions of liberation theology as well as those who supported the apartheid state's attempts to reform apartheid during the 1980s. This also included the NGK, the Baptist Union, the Apostolic Faith Mission Church, the white-dominated Lutheran churches, evangelicals

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[18] P. Walshe, "Christianity and democratisation in South Africa: The prophetic voice within phlegmatic churches", In: P. Gifford (ed.), *The Christian churches and the democratisation of Africa,* Leiden: Brill, 1995, 76.

[19] F. Chikane, "The Church's role during a period of transition," 1-11, an address given at a breakfast briefing, 12 August 1992, organised by Diakonia's Sociopolitical Development Programme. On the four task forces, see SACC, "Report of the General Secretary to the National Executive Committee Meeting, 26-27 May 1992, 5, and Annex II." See Walshe "Christianity and Democratisation in South Africa", 78.

[20] Walshe, "Christianity and Democratisation in South Africa", 78.

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like the Rhema churches and several African Independent Churches who were not members of the SACC.[21] While Rustenburg was characterised by the presence of a wider spectrum of churches, it was the SACC and its member churches that took a leading role. Consequently, the agenda was set by the proponents of contextual theology, especially those in the SACC who were on forefront in resisting apartheid during the 1980s. Through their combined experiences they developed a strong sense of their historic responsibility to begin the process of reconstructing a more just South Africa. The end result of their efforts was the *Rustenburg Declaration* which was adopted by the participants.[22]

Despite some delegates not agreeing to everything said at the conference, the *Rustenburg Declaration* indicates that all were in agreement on "the rejection of apartheid as a sin".[23] Participants further underscored the "critical time of transition" which held out the "possibility of a new dispensation and the promise of reconciliation between all South Africans". In this context, Christians were called to be a sign of hope from God, and to share a vision of a new country. Delegates further emphasised "repentance and practical restitution" as a prerequisite for God's forgiveness and for justice as a preparatory step towards reconciliation. They further described South Africa's challenges within "the context of Western colonialism" as well a "weakness common to the worldwide church in dealing with social evil". Those who supported or refused to resist apartheid confessed their "misuse of the Bible", "ignoring apartheid as evil", as well as the "spiritualising of the Gospel by preaching the sufficiency of individual salvation without social transformation". In other cases some were "bold in condemning apartheid but timid in resisting it". Those who were victims of apartheid acknowledged their "own contribution to the failure of the church". While apartheid damaged self-esteem and "eroded the fibres of *ubuntu*" (humanness), many responded with "timidity and fear, failing to challenge [their] oppression". The meeting also responded to church leadership often "ignoring the

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21 Walshe, "Christianity and Democratisation in South Africa", 78-79.

22 National Conference of Church Leaders in South Africa, "Rustenburg Declaration" (1990).

23 "Rustenburg Declaration"

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sexism of many of the church, social, political, economic and family structures". In the same way, church leaders were called to confess their failure to involve young people in the full life of the church.[24]

The meeting affirmed the need for a just economic order based on "justice, compassion and co-responsibility, so that those in need benefit more than those who have more than what they need". In this context, South Africa's white population would have to accept "affirmative acts of restitution in health care, psychological healing, education, housing, employment, economic infrastructure and especially land ownership". The church and state were charged to work towards restoring land "to the dispossessed people". In committing themselves to the establishment of a "just, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist South Africa", the Rustenburg meeting called for a popularly elected constituent assembly. In turn, this should produce a new constitution that would enshrine the "value of human life created in the image of God" and entrench a Bill of Rights "subject to the judiciary alone". All of this should happen within the context of a multiparty democracy within a unitary state. Concerns were also raised at the rising levels of violence. In their estimation, the rising levels of violence were rooted in the denial of political rights, the emergence of a "third force" with links to the state, rivalry for limited resources and "power struggles between some political parties". Church agencies were encouraged to collect evidence and expose the perpetrators of violence, provide support to victims and to convene a task force to coordinate strategy. Furthermore, churches were called to move from confession and declaration to restitution and action. In practical terms this meant redistributing church land, opening white-only schools to blacks as well as planning a national day of prayer for "forgiveness and reconciliation".[25]

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24 "Rustenburg Declaration"

25 "Rustenburg Declaration"

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The Rustenburg meeting acknowledged the different understandings of the message of reconciliation.[26] The gathering further acknowledged the need to admit guilt and to ask forgiveness and acceptance within the church of Christ. In fact, the respected NGK theologian, Willie Jonker, underscored that an experience of reconciliation was necessary to enable the church to come to a united witness in promoting reconciliation in the anticipation of a new South Africa. Jonker argued that without acknowledging guilt as asking for forgiveness and acceptance, mutual trust could not be restored. In addition, the meeting recognised that the churches shared a responsibility to stand with the marginalised. Here the notion of reconciliation was invoked to address the violation of human rights in the country. In addition the gathering agreed that a confession of guilt and restitution on the basis of reconciliation with all people and all churches was essential.

5.2.3 Rustenburg in perspective

The main objective of the Rustenburg was to foster reconciliation as well as redefining the role of the churches after the abolition of apartheid. This meant helping the churches come to terms with the changing political terrain and enabling them to contribute to the development of the new South Africa. Among other things the conference is known for the spirit of confession that became a characteristic feature of the gathering. The most significant of these came from Willie Jonker. Jonker, who had been on the more progressive wing of the NGK, expressed deep regret that his church and the Afrikaner people defended apartheid. In his view, he could do little more than acknowledge their guilt and to ask for forgiveness and acceptance:

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[26] Firstly, there were those who were deeply moved by the sinful violent situation in the country, thereby proclaiming reconciliation with God and their neighbours. Secondly, there were those who argued that the Christian faith had a very clear political function and message, which called people to liberating political action. These Christians read and interpreted the gospel from the perspective of the marginalised, who are seen as God's redemptive activity. They argued that the South African situation was characterised by totalitarian oppression, which was idolatrous, and completely under the judgment of God. In this context, traditional theology would be naïve in its attempt to present the middle way between opposing forces, thereby asserting the notion of reconciliation was not suitable in the present situation because it could be misused by the oppressors.

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> I confess before you and before the Lord, not only my own sin and guilt, and my own personal responsibility for the political, social and economic and structural wrongs that have been done to many of you, and the results of which you and our whole country are still suffering from, but vicariously I dare also to do that in the name of the DRC of which I am a member, and for the Afrikaans people as a whole.[27]

Jonker's confession received a mixed reception. Some were of the view that Jonker had no right to confess on their behalf, while others felt that the NGK was still not doing enough to seek unity within its own ranks (i.e. NG Sendingskerk).[28] Nevertheless, many responded favourably, including Desmond Tutu, who as a sign of accepting the apology responded with a warm embrace. Boesak observes, "In the hall that day when Tutu strode to the podium, spoke into the stunned silence, and said, 'We forgive you,' he made this an unforgettable, historic moment." [29] Frits Gaum one of the senior NGK figures remembers the immensity of the moment, stating that: "The applause was deafening … Tears of gratitude and forgiveness were flowing."[30] Notwithstanding the significance of the moment, Tutu's action also received its fair share criticism, especially from blacks who felt he had no authority to accept the NGK apology for anyone other than himself; whereas others were inspired to make their own confessions.[31]

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According to Boesak, Tutu's reconciliatory gesture also spells the beginning of something that often goes unnoticed. In this context his response may have been met with resistance by some but this reconciliatory act also cleared the way for something else to emerge. Here the words, "we forgive you", as spoken by Tutu, deserve particular attention. In Boesak's

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[27] L. Alberts and F. Chikane (eds.), *The road to Rustenburg: The Church looking forward to a new South Africa,* Cape Town: Struik Christian Books, 1991, 92.

[28] Vosloo, "Christianity and apartheid in South Africa", 418.

[29] Boesak and DeYoung, *Radical reconciliation*, 133.

[30] L. Gaum and F. Gaum, *Praat verby grense,* Cape Town: Umuzi, 2010, 82-83.

[31] I. Phiri, *Proclaiming political pluralism: Churches and political transition in Africa,* London: Praeger, 2001, 124.

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view, the language of forgiveness transformed ("redeemed") Tutu in the eyes of many whites. Tutu, a key figure in the church struggle against apartheid, was fierce opponent of the NGK's policies on race, and for many of its members, this reconciliatory act came as a surprise. In fact, Frits Gaum, a senior NGK official described the experience as "a moment of liberation". They were now convinced that he had "proved in practice" that he meant what he had been saying all along. In essence, Tutu became the redemptive presence in South Africa: "the embodied forgiveness of whites, and the simultaneously the embodied example of magnanimity for blacks. His was a piety that might be beyond the reach of most, but he personified the hope that a miracle was not impossible."[32] So while not everyone shared Tutu's sentiments and the consequence for reconciliation at that very moment, there is very little doubt that his action brought him renewed and certainly even new veneration across racial lines.[33]

Critically, the Rustenburg conference was supposed to mark the beginning of a new era of the churches. However, in reality it seems more plausible to suggest that it signalled the beginning of the end of the influence of the churches. For many, Rustenburg did very little to help facilitate the process of rebuilding. Some even go as far as describing the Rustenburg conference as a disappointment – in many respects lacking new insights.[34] This is attributed to the view that the *Rustenburg Declaration* is a compromise document, with much of the prophetic demands that were called for subdued by the burden of general consensus.[35] The influence (or lack thereof) of the Rustenburg conference should also take into account the many developments outside of the ecumenical movement. In this context the voice of the churches now had to compete with the voices of the unbanned political movements that were now starting to take shape.[36] So, while the SACC and its affiliates did much in trying to invigorate the churches in the post-apartheid environment,

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32 Boesak and DeYoung, *Radical reconciliation*, 133.

33 Boesak and DeYoung, *Radical reconciliation*, 133-134.

34 Phiri, *Proclaiming political pluralism: Churches and political transition in Africa*, 125.

35 De Gruchy, *The church struggle*, 214.

36 Phiri, *Proclaiming political pluralism*, 125.

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denominational responses were largely disappointing. Walshe notes that the vibrant, populist responses generated in the 1980s were now largely absent – appeals from church leaders all too often encountered timid local clergy and uninterested parishes.[37] This was also the case with the second ecumenical conference referred to as Cottesloe II, held in Cape Town, approximately one year after the Rustenburg meeting. The hope was that Cottesloe II would prompt a renewal of the ecumenical movement through a pastoral programme of nation-building – much as the Rustenburg meeting had anticipated. But here also the end result was disappointing, a sobering reminder that the "fire in the belly was gone".[38] Overwhelmed by the complexity of the transition many churches withdrew and occupied themselves mainly with internal church affairs.[39]

In December 1992 at the centennial celebration of the Free Ethiopian Church of Southern Africa, Nelson Mandela made a plea in which he underscored the contribution of the "broad ecumenical movement in South Africa and internationally". Mandela emphasised the role of the churches in the anti-apartheid struggle, stating that: "One has just to look at leaders such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Dr. Frank Chikane, Dr. Beyers Naudé and many more to measure the role of the church in the struggle." Furthermore, with the abolition of apartheid the churches could "not afford to retreat to the cosiness of the sanctuary." Rather, that it now had to assume the role "as midwife to the birth of our democracy," In Mandela's view this role suggested a number of responsibilities. Among other things this included the involvement of the church in "…national reconciliation that is underpinned by confession and restitution." Moreover, the church, was called "to take an active part in the building of a new nation in South Africa."[40] Inevitably the responses from the churches remained hesitant. In this context, the churches were once again

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37 Walshe, "Christianity and democratisation in South Africa", 81-82.

38 Villa-Vicencio, "South Africa's churches: After resistance …?", 35.

39 P. Walshe, *Prophetic Christianity and the liberation movement in South Africa,* Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1995, 144.

40 "Mandela's Challenge to the Church", Speech at the Centenary Celebration of the Free Ethiopian Church of Southern Africa, December 14, 1992, *Challenge*, 20-21.

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challenged to formulate a revised contextual theology. James Cochrane and Gerald West make this point in stating that given the changes in the political landscape the churches needed a prophetic vision that went beyond protest to one which was prepared to be "constructive". In their view much of what came from the churches before the transitional period was rooted in the need to object and protest against the injustices of apartheid. The situation dictated that more was needed. That protest alone would not suffice. In their view there was a need to move from "liberation" to "reconstruction".[41] This came in the wake of the views expressed by Charles Villa-Vicencio, who not long after the abolition of apartheid proposed a "theology of reconstruction" as a means to address the new situation that has arisen.

5.2.4 The proposal for a theology of reconstruction

The proposal for a theology of reconstruction emerged during the 1980s as an approach to African theology. The Kenyan theologian, Jesse Mugambi, was the first among African scholars to propose a departure from liberation to reconstruction.[42] Mugambi began advocating for "reconstruction" as a new theological metaphor especially when it became apparent that apartheid was coming to an end. He argued that, in post-colonial Africa, theological articulation (be it South African Black Theology, African Women's Theology, Liberation Theology or Cultural Theology) needed a new theological motif to deal with the emerging challenges.[43] Mugambi argued that this new phase on the continent represents an opportunity in which theological articulation must shift from "liberation" to "reconstruction". Comparing Africa to 15th-16th century Europe (and the respective awakenings of the Renaissance and the Reformation), Mugambi declared the 1990s to be the beginning of Africa's Renaissance and Reformation and therefore the commencement

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41 J. R. Cochrane and G. West, "War, remembrance and reconstruction", *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 84, 1993, 25-40.

42 Vellem, "The symbol of liberation in South African Public Life", 130.

43 J. Gathogo, "Black Theology of South Africa: Is this the hour of paradigm shift?", *Black Theology: An International Journal*. 5, 2007, 328.

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of a process of reconstruction.[44] This proposal was taken further through the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) under its president, Desmond Tutu and General Secretary Jose Chipenda who also advocated for a shift in paradigm. In February 1990, the AACC invited various theologians to take part in discussions on the changing global patterns that followed the end of the Cold War, and the relevance of these changes for the African continent. Various papers on the reconstruction of Africa were later presented in March the same year. Some of these contributions were published in a book entitled *The Church of Africa: Towards a Theology of Reconstruction*, with Mugambi as one of the co-editors.[45] Since then the concept of reconstruction has been an important component of the discourse on African Christianity, and African church history in particular.[46]

In South Africa, the proposal for a theology of reconstruction was put forward by Charles Villa-Vicencio.[47] In his view, much emphasis was placed on the Exodus motif in the articulation of Black Theology of liberation in South Africa – in this context blacks are likened (metaphorically) to the people of Israel on their way from the land of bondage in Egypt (oppressive regime) to the promised land (anticipated liberation). Here Black Theology of liberation is modelled on the Exodus event (Exodus 3), where Moses led the Hebrews to freedom from oppression. With the abolition of apartheid and the subsequent transitional period, Villa-Vicencio identifies a shift, which he likens to the Old Testament post-Exilic period.[48] Accordingly, this new phase in the history of South Africa provides the basis for the "reconstruction" motif in contextual theology. In this context, the post-Exilic metaphor derived from Nehemiah, not that of Moses, represents the lens through

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44 J. N. K. Mugambi, *From liberation to reconstruction: African Christian theology after the cold war,* Nairobi: East Africa Educational, 1995.

45 J. B. Chipenda, A. Karamaga, J. N. K. Mugambi, C. K. Omari (eds.), *The church of Africa: Towards a theology of reconstruction,* Nairobi: AACC, 1991.

46 I Phiri & Julius Gathogo, "A reconstructive motif in South African Black Theology in the twenty-first century", *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae,* 36, ,2010, 2 – Supplement, 185-206.

47 C. Villa-Vicencio, *A theology of reconstruction: Nation-building and human rights,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

48 Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of reconstruction*, 6-8.

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which one interprets the mission of the churches to redefine what is needed in the country. For Villa-Vicencio, “liberation”, which has largely been associated with the Exodus theme, is no longer adequate to deal with some of the new challenges. In his words: “Hitherto the task of liberation theology has essentially been to say “No” to all forms of oppression. The prophetic “No” must, of course, continue to be part of a liberating theology. As the enduring struggle for democracy in some parts of the world begins to manifest itself in differing degrees of success, however, so the prophetic task of the church must include a thoughtful and creative “Yes” to options for political and social renewal.”[49] In this sense the abolition of apartheid, together with the demands of the transitional period demanded more than merely resistance, it demanded the reconstruction of South Africa in the 21st century.[50]

The proposal for a “theology of reconstruction” emerged in a climate where reconstruction and development were central themes in discussions on South Africa. It also came at time in which the churches were struggling to articulate an effective strategy on a way forward. Thus, for many, reconstruction as a contextual theology, was not only necessary but also appears the sensible thing to pursue. This is also the case for those directly involved in political negotiations where discourses on reconstruction became increasing important. At this stage the ANC had already begun to discuss the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), a programme central to its bid to become the first democratically elected government. Tinyiko Maluleke observes that the RDP became the ANC’s “rallying call”. Moreover, that it was during the transitional period where the term reconstruction was popularised through the ANC’s labour alliances – “This reality has helped to entrench reconstruction as an important concept in so-called ‘progressive circles’ including the churches.”[51]

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[49] Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of reconstruction*, 1.

[50] Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of reconstruction*, 14.

[51] T. S. Maluleke, “The proposal for a theology of reconstruction: A critical appraisal”, *Missionalia* 22(2), 1994, 245-246.

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In the context of transitional politics much emphasis was placed on the need for reconstruction in the context of nation-building. Except for the scepticism coming from some quarters, it appears most were in favour of this proposed shift.[52] However, on the theological front, those using Black Theology as a self-description were not as enthusiastic. Among other things, they sharply criticised the project of reconstruction on the basis that it takes very little account of the heritage of liberation theologies in South Africa.[53] Nevertheless, like those using Black Theology as a self-description, the proponents of a theology of reconstruction also appear to be using substantial biblical motifs to support their views. Here concepts such as "reconciliation", "repentance" and "forgiveness" are essential building blocks in the formulation of this theology.[54] These components were further explicated through the proceedings of the TRC. Here it is important to note that Villa-Vicencio, the main proponent in the call for a shift, became the Director of Research for the TRC. It is, therefore, not surprising that many of these principles were ever present in the approach and conceptualisation of the TRC. Here the notion of reconciliation, although inspired by the theological principles, appears to be unrelated to Christian beliefs or practices; it is a process in society. According to Villa-Vicencio, reconciliation, within the context of reconstruction, is a process driven by an energy that stands at the intersection between theology and experience, in which the biblical invitation to reconcile and the experiences of those who have suffered are taken seriously.[55] He argues that reconciliation requires sincere and lasting repentance and this invites theological and ethical reflection.[56]

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52 For an interesting discussion on the general reception of the RDP, see Maluleke, "The proposal for a theology of reconstruction: A critical appraisal", 245-246.

53 For an in-depth discussion on the theological reception of a reconstruction, see Vellem, "The symbol of liberation in South African public life", 128-236.

54 Maluleke, "The Proposal for a Theology of Reconstruction: A Critical Appraisal", 250.

55 C. Villa-Vicencio, *The art of reconciliation,* Östervåla: Life & Peace Institute, 2002, 13-14.

56 Elsewhere he states that, "Reconciliation with God involves accepting the claim of God on one's life. But this can be little more than homiletical appeal if it is not translated into cultural and structural controls and incentives designed to order our lives. At best, under the continuing challenges of the gospel, these

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Villa-Vicencio further identified the following distinctive features of the process of reconciliation. Firstly, that “reconciliation does not necessarily involve forgiveness”. For Villa-Vicencio, the perpetrators may be ready to confess and repent their wrongdoing, but this does not necessarily mean the victim will respond by offering forgiveness. Secondly, that “reconciliation interrupts an established pattern of events”. To engage in reconciliation is to step beyond enmity, in the midst of violence, without any guarantees. To allow for the possibility of reconciliation is to make time for speech. Thirdly, “reconciliation is a process”. It is a process that begins with intrigue, curiosity and perhaps morbid fascination as to what it is that makes the alienated person who he or she is. Fourthly, “reconciliation involves understanding”. Understanding does not necessarily lead to reconciliation, but when the story of the perpetrator is thoughtfully told, heard and deeply understood by the victim or survivor, it opens the space for the possibility of a new kind of interaction between those alienated from each other. Fifthly, “reconciliation requires acknowledgement”. Acknowledging the truth does not necessarily lead to reconciliation, it does not mean forgetting the ghastly deed, and it also does not mean becoming friends with the perpetrator. However, it does mean a break from unconcealed enmity. This implies the beginning of a different kind of relationship that is open to new possibilities. And lastly, “reconciliation takes time”. For most people only a first enquiring venture beyond hatred is possible. In this context, the reconciling process takes time and may only come later. It is with this in mind that reconciliation as a national project could be considered.

structures can become part of the process of renewing, transforming and redirecting personal and social goals. See Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of reconstruction*, 162.

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5.3. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa

5.3.1 Reconciliation as a national initiative

South Africa's transition marks the time the when discourse on reconciliation shifted from an almost exclusive theological endeavour to something that was now seriously considered a national issue. Through various developments on the political front, the discourse on reconciliation evolved from its traditional theological associations into something that now formed part of a guiding vision for the country. Until the Rustenburg meeting, theologians and church leaders used reconciliation in the church struggle, inspired by biblical and theological language and aiming to reconcile the races, and later on to reconcile the opposing parties in the context of the then apartheid state and its growing violent polarisation. These religious positions informed the public debate on the future of the country. But the discourse on reconciliation grew more important when key political figures started using and contesting the concept. In this context, the discourse on reconciliation moved from being a theological issue into something that now formed part of the general plan of national reconstruction. Notwithstanding its deep theological roots, it now became an issue firmly observed through the lens of public morality. This does not mean that theologians did not continue to grapple with this controversial symbol but simply that it now became a national rather than strictly theological matter. The end result, as Eddy Van der Borght observes, is that the discourse on reconciliation was now incorporated into various spheres, including the vocabulary of psychology, sociology, philosophy and political science as well as being embraced by politicians, especially during the transitional period.[57]

The beginning of reconciliation and a national initiative is traced to the decisions reached during the multiparty negotiating process. An important aspect of the negotiations was

[57] E. A. J. G. Van der Borght, "Reconciliation in the public domain: The South African case", *International Journal of Public Theology* , 9, (4), 2015, 413.

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the issue of an interim constitution that would replace the old constitution that formed the basis of apartheid legislation. Among other things, one of the more controversial aspects of this interim constitution was the issue over whether the advent of democracy would include the possibility of amnesty. The lack of an amnesty provision in interim constitution posed a particular problem, especially to those forming part of the military as well as human rights communities. The issue of amnesty was temporarily "solved" by allocating a place for it in the post-amble of the interim constitution and by framing it within the context of reconciliation on the road to national unity. In Doxtader's words:

> The pursuit of national unity, the well-being of all South African citizens and peace require *reconciliation* between the people of South Africa and the *reconstruction* of society. The adoption of this constitution lays the secure foundation for the people of South Africa to transcend the division and the strife of the past, which generated gross violations of human rights, the transgression of humanitarian principles in violent conflicts and a legacy of hatred, fear, guilt, and revenge. These can now be addressed on the basis that there is need for understanding not for violence, need for reparation but not retaliation, a need for ubuntu not for victimisation.[58]

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On this basis, an amnesty provision was announced: "In order to advance such reconciliation and reconstruction, amnesty shall be granted in all respect of acts, omissions, and offenses associated with political objectives and committed in the course of conflicts of the past. To this end, Parliament under this constitution shall adopt a law determining a firm cut-off date …, and providing for the mechanisms, criteria, and procedures, including tribunals, if any, through which such amnesty shall be dealt with at any time after the law has been passed."[59]

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58 Doxtader, *With Faith In The Works Of Words*, 213.

59 For the full text and the interpretation of the post-able to the interim constitution, see Doxtader, *With faith in works of words*, 211-217.

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Van der Borght observes that the inclusion of the amnesty provision in the post-amble did not satisfy the various stakeholders. The representatives of the apartheid government understood this as "forgive and forget" and accordingly they wanted to "close the books on the past". On the other hand, the victims of gross violations of human rights opposed the amnesty provision because they were not prepared to consider immunity to prosecution. Moreover, some were convinced that in order to prevent the explicit risk of forgetting the past, a process was necessary that would help facilitate the transition from a violent past to a more sustainable future.[60] The main issue was that the post-amble did not provide the tools for such a procedure. Due to uniqueness of the situation it would be fair to suggest that at this stage such tools had not yet been developed. In the context of the negotiated settlement, Kader Asmal, in his inaugural lecture as Professor of Human Rights Law at the University of the Western Cape in 1992, had already explained why and how the past needed to be opened. Asmal explained that "we must take the past seriously as it holds the key to the future. The issues of structural violence, of unjust and inequitable economic social arrangements, of balanced development in the future cannot be properly dealt with unless there is a conscious understanding of the past."[61] In this context, he was convinced that in order to come to terms with the problematic history of South Africa, something more than a Nuremberg-style trial was needed. In fact, he argued that such an approach would lack the capacity to deal with the humiliation, brutality, deprivation, and degradation of the past. In his view South Africa needed a truth commission because the harm done by apartheid simply exceeded the law's grasp. It is for this reason that South Africa needed to embrace the mode of reconciliation that carefully considered the past, located accountability, and supported the revival of moral conscience. Reconciliation entailed more than the mere creation of new structures and arrangements. For Asmal, reconciliation's potential needed to serve three ends. Firstly, it required a demonstration of

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[60] Van der Borght, "Reconciliation in the Public Domain", 417.

[61] Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report Volume One. Cape Town: Juta Press, 1998, 49; Doxtader, *With faith in the works of words*, 230.

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apartheid's illegitimacy. The process needed to illuminate the past in order to better grasp the current predicament. Secondly, reconciliation's potential to enact change was largely dependent on its capacity to broker disputes and disputation. This would forge consensus and deter denials about the evils of apartheid. Finally, reconciliation offered the chance for cathartic truth-telling, a process in which South Africans could hear the experiences of fellow citizens, stories that set the stage for the "justice" of acknowledgement, "restitution", and "atonement".[62]

After the adoption of the interim constitution, the organisation Justice in Transition, headed by Alex Boraine, organised an international conference in February 1994 to reflect on dealing with the past in the context of a negotiated transition. Through these deliberations and others, it became apparent that amnesty without history and truth-telling would not yield the intended aim of reconciliation. Doxtader explains that "the spirit of transition called for the constitution of individual and collective identity while emphasising that apartheid's violent identitarian logic was precisely why citizens needed to remember the past in the name of creating the identifications of reconciliation".[63] The end of the political negotiations reached its symbolic climax with the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as the country's first democratically elected President on 11 May 1994.[64] This was followed by the passing of the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act in mid-1995. This legislation gave birth to the TRC. Chapter 2, section 3:1 (a-d) of the Act, spells out the mandate of the commission. Here the commission is tasked with: (a) establishing a picture of the gross violations of human rights in the period between 1 March 1960 and 10 May 1994 through investigations and hearings; (b) facilitating the granting of amnesty to those who made a full disclosure of all the relevant facts to acts associated with political objectives; (c) establishing and making known the fate or whereabouts of victims, restoring dignity by giving victims the opportunity to relate their

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62 For an analysis of Asmal's inaugural lecture, see Doxtader, *With faith in the works of words*, 229-232.

63 Doxtader, *With faith in works of words*, 239.

64 South Africa first non-racial, democratic elections took place on 27 April 1994.

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own accounts, and recommending reparations, and (d) compiling a comprehensive report with findings and recommendations.[65] De Gruchy observes that through the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, reconciliation was crucial in trying to uncover the truth, also, in terms of how the country should deal with the past as well as defining the future. Moreover, reconciliation was now seen as part of defining the national goals of democratic transformation and reconstruction.[66]

5.3.2 The mandate of the TRC

The 17 member commission, headed by Desmond Tutu as the chairperson, was inaugurated in December 1995. The commissioners (including Tutu) were nominated by a representative panel appointed by President Mandela. The commissioners included people from different backgrounds, with Christian leadership well represented. Besides Tutu, they included the deputy chairperson Alex Boraine, a theologian by training, and also former leader of the Methodist Church. Other church leaders included, Khoza Mgojo, theologian and former president of the SACC; Charles Villa-Vicencio, theologian; Bongani Finca, church leader and prominent ecumenist; Tom Manthata, former employee of the Justice and Reconciliation division in the SACC; Rev Xundu, church leader and Piet Meiring, theologian and prominent figure in the NGK.[67]

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The idea of the commission is not unique to South Africa. There are other examples, particularly in Latin America where similar ventures have been undertaken in post-conflict situations.[68] However, these commissions differed in their approaches. Elsewhere they tended to opt for approaches focused on providing "blanket amnesty" or for

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65 Van der Borght, "Reconciliation in the public domain", 419.

66 De Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 25, 41.

67 R. S. Tshaka, "The black church as the womb of black liberation theology?: Why the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) is not a genuine black church?", *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 71, 2015, Online: http://www.hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/article/view/2800 [Accessed 21 December 2017].

68 For a comparative study of different truth commissions, see P. Hayner, *Unspeakable truths: Transitional justice and the challenge of truth commissions*, New York: Routledge, 2001,

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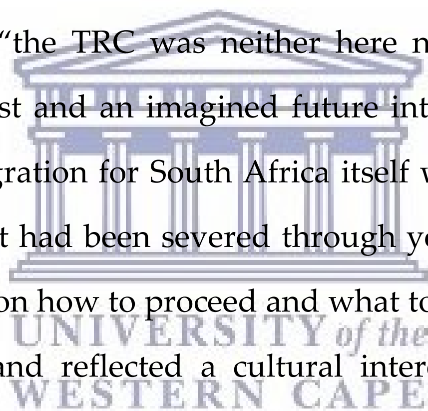
"Nuremberg style trials" to deal with past atrocities.[69] In contrast, the South African commission attempted to find a balance between the two approaches. In Tinyiko Maluleke's words:

> On the one hand, the plan aims to grant amnesty 'at a price' – the price being the requirement for those applying for amnesty to make 'full disclosure of all the relevant facts' regarding their activities. On the other hand, through its processes of public and private 'hearings,' the TRC hopes to give the victims of 'gross human rights violations' a chance to tell their story, not only to the TRC but also to the nation as a whole, with some prospect of possible reparations.[70]

Moreover, at heart of the TRC process is the notions of "reconciliation and reconstruction," rather than retribution or justice in a judicial sense. Catherine Cole underscores this "balancing act", stating that "the TRC was neither here nor there, located somewhere between the islands of the past and an imagined future integration – integration for the races, of course, but also integration for South Africa itself within both the continent and the larger world from which it had been severed through years of cultural and economic boycotts."[71] With no template on how to proceed and what to expect, the TRC sprang from "the morality as a people" and reflected a cultural interest in realising the common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69 Jennifer Harvey posits that: "In the challenge coming out of apartheid and birthing a new civic society, (a) it was not feasible to imagine one could prosecute and punish all the perpetrators for their gross participation in human rights violations; (b) layers of secrecy and lies made getting to the truth of the past virtually impossible without significant cooperation from perpetrators; (c) learning such truth was perceived as one of the most important needs of victims if they were to become full participants in a new civic community; and (d) the possibility of massive social violence (civil war even) threatened at every turn in the transition to a 'new South Africa' such that some type of honest, collective, and public contending with the past had to take place if nationhood was to have any hope of success." See J. Harvey, *Dear white Christians: For those still longing for racial reconciliation*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014, 91.

70 T. S. Maluleke, "Truth, National Unity and Reconciliation in South Africa: Aspects of the emerging theological agenda", *Missionalia* 25(1), 1997, 60. Also see A. Boraine, J. Levy and R. Scheffer (eds.), *Dealing with the past: Truth and reconciliation in South Africa,* Cape Town: Idasa, 1993; K. Asmal, L. Asmal and R. Roberts, *Reconciliation through truth: A reckoning of apartheid's criminal governance,* Cape Town: David Philip, 1996, 11.

71 C. M. Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission: Stages of transition,* Indianapolis, IN: Indiania University Press, 2010, Preface and Acknowledgments.

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humanity (ubuntu) of the people of South Africa.[72] Coupled with what is described as an international "fetishisation," the South African commission became one of the most ambitious projects of its sort ever undertaken.[73]

With much fanfare, skepticism and pointed opposition the TRC started its work in 1996. The commission was divided into three sub-committees. This included a) the Committee on Human Rights Violations; b) the Committee on Amnesty; and c) the Committee on Reparations and Rehabilitation. The initial plan was that these committees would hold simultaneous hearings around the country during the two years of operation. Due to the public nature of its work, it was the Committee of Human Rights Violations that attracted the most attention when it started its work. This commission was entrusted to hear the stories of victims to determine whether gross violations of human rights had occurred.[74] It took the testimonies of more than 21,000 victims and witnesses – 2,000 were selected to appear in public hearings. The hearings received extensive media coverage. In the process, the weekly Truth Commission Special Report became South Africa's most watched news show.[75] This was in line with the TRC's mandate to promote national reconciliation through providing ordinary South Africans (who were neither perpetrators nor victims of gross violations of human rights) with the opportunity to reflect on their past and future through the publicity around the TRC.[76]

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The most innovative – and yet also the most controversial aspect of the TRC's work – was its power to grant amnesty for gross violations of human rights. The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act made provision for the granting of amnesty of

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72 K. Moodley, "African Renaissance and Language Policies in Comparative Perspective," *Politikon* 27, 2000, 3.

73 Doxtader, *With faith in works of words*, 5.

74 According to the *Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act*, no. 34 of 1995, a gross human rights violation is defined as the "violation of human rights through the killing, abduction, torture, or severe ill treatment of any person … which emanated from conflicts of the past … and the commission of which was advised, planned, directed, commanded, or ordered by any person acting with a political motive".

75 Hayner, *Unspeakable truths*, 28.

76 Hendrikson, *A journey with a Status Confessionis*, 147.

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persons who made full disclosure of all the relevant facts. The amnesty provision stated that:

> In order to advance reconciliation and reconstruction, amnesty shall be granted in all respect of acts, omissions and offences associated with political objectives and committed in the course of the conflicts of the past. To this end, Parliament under this constitution shall adopt a law determining a firm cut-off date…, and providing for the mechanisms criteria and procedures, including tribunals, if any, through which such amnesty shall be dealt with at any time after the law has been passed.[77]

In his critical assessment of the amnesty provision, Richard Wilson argues that the post-amble's "amnesty provisions were the only indispensable and necessary part of the process of national unity and reconciliation". In his words, "reconciliation was the Trojan horse used to smuggle an unpleasant aspect of the past (that is, impunity) into the present political order, to transform political compromises into transcendental moral principles."[78] It is for this reason that the TRC legalisation was often described as weak, in some ways favouring the perpetrators at the expense of victims.[79] After the granting of amnesty to key political and army figures, the fear of prosecution and condemnation among many perpetrators resided. Instead of coming forward and disclosing, many decided not to apply for amnesty. As a consequence, many of the crimes committed during apartheid were never revealed. In total there were 7,115 applications for amnesty, 4,500 were rejected, and another 145 were granted partial amnesty.[80]

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The Committee on Reparations and Rehabilitation was tasked with determining how each victim should be compensated and make recommendations to the president in an

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77 Doxtader, *With faith in works of words*, 215.

78 R. A. Wilson, *The politics of truth and reconciliation in South Africa,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 99, 97.

79 T. S. Maluleke, "Truth, National Unity and Reconciliation in South Africa. Aspects of an Emerging Agenda", *Missionalia* 25(1), 1997, 59-86, 63

80 Van der Borght, "Reconciliation in the public domain", 420.

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endeavour to restore the human and civil dignity of such victims. Whereas the Committee on Amnesty had the power to grant amnesty, the Committee of Reparations and Rehabilitation, which dealt with reparations for victims, could only make recommendations to either the president or a parliamentary standing committee. In this context, the TRC had the mandate to provide amnesty to perpetrators but was only mandated to make recommendations for the provision of reparations for victims. In Maluleke's view, beyond the complex arguments about whether the TRC ought to have been given more judicial "teeth" so that it could adopt a prosecution-centred approach, a blanket amnesty approach, etc., there was the feeling that as things stood, the scales were tilted slightly in favour of the perpetrators of apartheid atrocities. Indeed, the very clause of the interim constitution that gave rise to the TRC referred mainly to amnesty and not reparations.[81]

5.3.3 Religious symbolism and the TRC

The central aim of the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act was to promote national unity and reconciliation. While the detail of this mandate remained vague, the legislation charged the TRC to facilitate consultations that would contribute to the to the public's ability to understand and redress apartheid atrocities as well as working towards national reconciliation. This was set against notions of "vengeance" or "justice" in a judicial sense. Notwithstanding the religious underpinnings of this approach, the establishment of the TRC, as John Allen observes, had very little to with religious ideals. Rather "it was rather the providential outcome of realpolitik, which reflected a convergence of pressures from three directions: idealistic human rights activists within the ANC, frightened generals of the old order, and nongovernmental lobby coordinated by the man who was to become Tutu's deputy in the commission."[82] Nevertheless, under the

[81] Maluleke, "Truth, national unity and reconciliation in South Africa", 67.

[82] J. Allen, *Rabble-rouser for peace: The authorised biography of Desmond Tutu*, Johannesburg: Rider Books, 2006, 344.

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leadership of Desmond Tutu the religious character of the commission became a distinctive feature. The prominence of religious, especially Christian, leaders was not random. Here one would have to come to terms with the role of Christian activists (including the commissioners) in the struggle against apartheid. However, Maluleke explains that the commissioners were not appointed as church representatives, rather as individuals who proved their worth in the struggle against the injustices of apartheid. In his words, "We must never forget that the TRC is a juridical entity with a political rather than a spiritual or theological agenda … It is therefore erroneous to assume that the presence of church people in the commission means that the church is represented in it or that its objectives are spiritual and theological."[83] Notwithstanding Maluleke's observation, the language and conceptualisation of the TRC was largely inspired by Christian principles. De Gruchy remarks that TRC's mode of "operation sometimes resembled a pastoral counselling chamber presided over by a father confessor rather than a court of law chaired by a judge."[84] The chairperson, Desmond Tutu was always dressed in purple clerical robe and clearly acting as a religious figure. Moreover, public hearings sometimes resembled a church service more so than a judicial proceeding. Alex Boraine, who served as vice-chairperson of the TRC, remarks that from the beginning it was clear that there would be both praise and criticism for how Tutu handled public hearings. Tutu's wearing of clerical dress, offering prayers and often using Christian metaphors became a cause for concern for some who preferred a more forensic approach to public proceedings.[85] Nevertheless, in responding to criticism, Tutu insisted that President

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83 Maluleke, "Truth, national unity and reconciliation in South Africa", 69.

84 S. De Gruchy, "From Church Struggle to Church Struggles", In: De Gruchy, *The church struggle*, 226; Cole's perceptive book on the TRC provides the reader with a detailed account of the different sensory elements in the process, See Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission*, Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010.

85 A. Boraine, *A country unmasked: Inside South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 266.

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Mandela was acutely aware that he (Tutu) was an archbishop when he appointed him chairperson of the commission.[86]

The firm emphasis on the religious (especially Christian) aspects of the TRC should have been expected. In Piet Meiring's words,

> The South African community is by and large a religious community. The vast majority of South Africans belong to one of the Christian denominations or to the Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Bahai, Jewish or African traditionalist communities…the influence of the churches and other faith communities is still a force to be reckoned with. From the onset, the faith communities were involved in discussing the possibility of a truth commission and eventually in the drafting of the TRC Act. Workshops and conferences to further the aims of the TRC and to identify the churches' and other communities' role in the process were the order of the day. And when the TRC hearings started, the local churches were the staunch co-workers of the Commission, helping to disseminate news, to encourage victims and perpetrators to approach the TRC and to act as facilitators and spiritual guides throughout the life of the Commission.[87]

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The development of a TRC "liturgy" that set the pattern for public hearings is set against this background. This included an "order of worship" that that consisted of: the singing or hymns, prayers (interdenominational and inter-faith), scripture readings in many languages, the lighting of candles and the presenting of olive branches. In this context, Archbishop Tutu, understanding the spiritual needs of victims and the audience, made

[86] Boraine, *A country unmasked*, 101.

[87] P. Meiring, "Pastors or lawyers? The role of religion in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission Process", *HTS Theological Studies*, 58(1), 2002, 332.

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ample use of prayers not only to open and close meetings but to guide the process through sometimes difficult periods.[88]

5.3.4 The framing of reconciliation at the TRC

In all probability, the notion of the TRC was borrowed from the Roman Catholic model of penance, confession, and absolution. In this context, the very notions of "truth" and "reconciliation", underscored in the name of the commission, are central elements in the Christian tradition. Fundamental to the work of the commission was to establish the truth about the past. Meiring notes that the Minister of Justice, Dullah Omar, in introducing the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act to Parliament, highlighted the inextricable link between truth and search for genuine reconciliation.[89] In this context, Anthea Jeffery raises serious criticisms on the difficulty of not only establishing the "truth" but also in the TRC's handling of the "truth".[90] Meiring's interpretation of the "truth" and how it was dealt with at the TRC is quite perceptive. In his view:

> The quest for truth also had a deeper side to it. Searching for the truth, in the tradition of all religions, is a spiritual exercise. Finding the truth goes well beyond establishing historical and legal facts. It has to do with understanding, accepting accountability, justice, restoring and maintaining the fragile relationships between human beings, as well as with the quest to find the Ultimate Truth, God Himself. Leading the nation on this road indeed posed a huge challenge to the faith communities in the country. The search for truth needed to be handled with the greatest sensitivity. Would that not be the case, the nation could bleed to death. But if we succeeded, it would lead to a national catharsis, peace and reconciliation, to the point where the truth in all reality sets

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88 Meiring, "Pastors or lawyers?", 332-333.

89 P. Meiring, *Chronicle of the Truth Commission*, Vanderbijlpark: Carpe Diem, 1998, 12-14.

90 A. Jeffery, *The truth about the Truth Commission*, Johannesburg: South African Institute for Race Relations, 1999, 13.

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one free.[91]

The work of the commission was further complicated by linking truth-seeking with reconciliation. Megan Shore explains that, on their own, these concepts are quite difficult to comprehend. Not only was the relationship between "truth" and "reconciliation" expressed in the name of the commission, but it was also publicised in the commission's slogan, "Truth, the Road to Reconciliation".[92] Meiring remarks that the rather naïve expectation from the onset of TRC's work is "that once we have welcomed truth in at the front door of our house, reconciliation would slip in by the back door."[93] However, there were instances of reconciliation between perpetrators and victims, but for the most part, this cases was not indicative of the broader quest for national reconciliation. Part of the problem was defining what exactly was meant by reconciliation. This was much easier to define on an individual basis but what exactly this meant on a societal level remained elusive.

The lawyers, jurists and politicians were much more grounded and less starry-eyed their interpretation of what reconciliation meant within the context of the TRC. People did not kill each other and for them that was enough. However, people like Desmond Tutu and some of the other religious leaders favoured a loftier ideal. In Meiring words:

> When they spoke about reconciliation they clothed it in religious terminology. Referring to Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, it was often said that only because God had reconciled us to Him by sacrificing his Son Jesus Christ on the cross, true and lasting reconciliation between humans became possible (2 Cor 5:17-12). Trying to define reconciliation, references were often made to the shalom, the peace that God alone could provide. Psalm 85: 10-14 was often quoted. In similar fashion, spokespersons for the other faith communities used

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91 Meiring, "Pastors or Lawyers?", 336.

92 Shore, *Religion and conflict resolution*, 107.

93 Meiring, "Pastors or Lawyers?", 337.

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deeply religious terminology, referring to the deepest sources of their beliefs, when they joined in the debate.[94]

The different parties did reach consensus on the fragility and costliness in working towards reconciliation. Also that it would be nearly impossible refer to reconciliation without taking seriously the issue of justice, accountability and restitution. In this context, Tutu emphasises the need to reach into the "spiritual wells of our different religious traditions" to address the challenge of healing and nation building. In his view, the Christian tradition has "a special responsibility" because of the way Christian theology was used in the justification of apartheid.[95]

5.3.5 Narrative and the TRC

The place of narrative is crucial in trying to understand the inner logic of TRC. Here the public hearings of the Committee of Human Rights Violations are of particular importance. For Russel Botman and Robin Petersen: "While the importance of narrative has been a central issue in much contemporary theology and ethics, this theory is rarely demonstrated with as much power as it is at the TRC hearings."[96] Victims of apartheid were encouraged to tell their stories. In being encouraged to share their stories of pain and suffering, victims routinely used overtly Christian terminology to describe their situation as well as how they dealt with their loss. In the context of dealing violence committed against an individual, or dealing with a loss, Lyn Graybill posits that "it is important that victims be allowed to share their stories; survivors often feel misunderstood and ignored, their sacrifice unacknowledged, their pain unrecognised, and their identity destroyed."[97] In addition, narrative also relates to the construction of a common memory of the past for

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[94] Meiring, "Pastors or Lawyers?", 337-338.

[95] D. M. Tutu, "Foreword", In: H. R. Botman and R. M. Pietersen (eds.), *To remember and to heal: Theological and psychological reflections on truth and reconciliation,* Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1996, 8.

[96] Botman and Petersen, "Introduction", *To remember and to heal*, 12.

[97] L. S. Graybill, "South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Ethical and theological perspectives", *Ethics & International Affairs,* 12, 1998, 48.

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victims, perpetrators as well as bystanders. For Graybill, where common memory is lacking, where people do not share in the same past, there can be no real community, and where community is to be formed common memory must be created. In this context the TRC provided the victims, perpetrators as well bystanders with the opportunity to participate in each other's humanity in story form.[98] Kader Asmal, Louise Asmal and Suresh Roberts posit that through the stories coming from the TRC, South Africans were confronted with the unwelcome truths in order to "harmonize incommensurable world views" so that conflicts and differences stand "at least within a single universe of comprehensibility."[99] In this context, working towards reconciliation requires that there is general agreement between both sides as to the wrongs committed. In the framework of the TRC, the danger of perpetrators not coming forward threatened that of the large parts of the narrative remained untold.

5.3.6 Forgiveness and Repentance at the TRC

The logic of the TRC confessional process was based on the notion that the perpetrators repent their sins and victims offer forgiveness, leading to reconciliation between individuals and ultimately the nation at large. Tutu encouraged this process and had implored perpetrators to apologise publically and accept the forgiveness he hoped would be forthcoming. It is important to note that an apology or remorse was not a prerequisite for the granting of amnesty. This leads Graybill to question the TRC's emphasis on forgiveness. With so much emphasis on forgiveness, not forgiving was not given the space it deserved. The reality as she further explains is that none of the victims could be compelled to forgive any more than perpetrators could be forced to repent. As a reconciling figure Tutu did much in terms of encouraging forgiveness and repentance to take place but in reality this was not a legislative requirement. At the same time it could

98 Graybill, "South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission", 49.

99 K. Asmal, L. Asmal, and R. S. Roberts, *Reconciliation through truth: A reckoning of apartheid's criminal governance*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1996, 46.

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not be realistically expected that victims would be ready to forgive even when they were asked to do so. Tutu emphasised this point more than once.[100] The TRC hearings illustrated that perpetrators often did not always express remorse for the wrongs committed. At the same time the victims also did not always express forgiveness.[101] Peter Storey does not view the lack of contrition when it comes to showing remorse of many amnesty applicants as a particular problem. In his opinion, forced repentance would devalue those moments of apparently genuine repentance that often took place. Thus, whether amnesty applicants were remorseful or not, at the very least disclosure meant an acknowledgement of the truth of what actually happened.[102]

5.3.7 The notion of guilt at the TRC

The TRC operated from the premise of original sin. This is rooted in the idea that everyone is bears some responsibility for what happened – there are obviously varying degrees of guilt that need to be considered. In the South African context, everyone was implicated in the crime of apartheid. Thus, when appearing before the TRC, both sides (in defence or defiance of the system) were required to disclose violations of human rights committed. In other words, no moral distinction was made between the violence used to maintain, and the violence employed to oppose apartheid. This particular aspect has been severely criticised by some sectors of society, particularly those who committed human rights violations in the name of the liberation movement. Those in the ANC believed that their struggle was a moral one against an unjust system and for this reason they discouraged their members from seeking amnesty. As a response Tutu threatened to resign from the

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100 Harvey, *Dear white Christians*, 92.

101 For a detailed discussion on the aspects of remorse and forgiveness at the TRC see, P. Gobodo-Madikizela, *A human being died that night: A story of forgiveness*, Cape Town: David Philip, 2003; S. L. Kobe, "The Relationship between Remorse and Offering Forgiveness: Selected Case Studies from the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission", Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of the Western Cape, November 2014.

102 P. Storey, "A different kind of justice: Truth and reconciliation in South Africa", *The Christian Century,* 114, 1997, 793.

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TRC, if the ANC members tried to exempt themselves from the provisions of the legislation requiring all individuals involved to apply for amnesty in order to avoid prosecution. The ANC later announced that it would no longer discourage its members from applying for amnesty. However, the ANC's insistence on fighting a just war persisted, but at this point the TRC leadership had already resolved that the issue did not concern the morality of politically motivated offences, only whether an applicant could be held criminally or civilly liable for their actions. This was affirmed by Boraine, who stated that, "No matter how just the cause may be, if there are violations of human rights, the liberation movements must accept responsibility for them."[103]

On the notion of guilt at the TRC, Christian tradition applied, in which each person is responsible for the way society conducts itself. In this context the faithful take upon themselves the guilt of crimes that they did not necessarily commit. Although many whites did not directly engage in acts of crimes against black people, they are nonetheless implicated as supporters or beneficiaries of the National Party government. In this sense the TRC had particular significance for those who maintained that they were not aware of the misdeeds committed in their name. Mahmood Mamdani explains that there may have been few perpetrators but that there are many who benefitted from apartheid.[104] However, Graybill observes that due to the very nature of the commission, ordinary whites were simply "let off the hook". Because the hearings focused on atrocities, crimes of torture and murder, usually at the hands of the police, it was easy for ordinary whites to simply say, "Well, I never did anything like that, I have nothing to apologise for." [105] On this issue Maluleke notes that:

> On the whole, it appeared that while black people are following the proceedings of the TRC with a touch of curiosity, many white people appear to

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103 South African Press Association, "TRC Members Not Morally Neutral: Tutu", 7 March 7, 1997.

104 M. Mamdani quoted in A. Krog, "The Parable of the Bicycle", *Mail & Guardian,* 7 February 1997. https://mg.co.za/article/1997-02-07-the-parable-of-the-bicycle, [assessed 15 August 2017].

105 Graybill, "South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission", 54.

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> treat TRC proceedings with disdainful apathy. While white amnesty applicants have been steadily appearing before the TRC's Amnesty Committee, white people in general are still conspicuous by their absence and disinterest. Surely, the TRC is not of concern only to the perpetrators of gross human rights violations and their victims. It should be a truly national issue, able to touch the conscience of the entire nation.[106]

In an effort to draw the population as a whole, the TRC later in December 1997 established a register of reconciliation that members of the public could sign. This was done as way of expressing regret at failing to prevent human rights violations and to pledge commitment to a future South Africa in which human rights abuses will not be tolerated.

5.3.8 The churches and their involvement at the TRC

Even with the contribution of Christian theological symbols to guide the proceedings at the TRC, the response of the churches was minimal. Formal responses came early on from the Research Institute on Christianity in South Africa at the University of Cape Town, the Faculty of Theology at the University of the Western Cape and the church leaders from the SACC.[107] The responses from individual denominations were quite weak. Where and when such specific replies to the TRC happened, they were at the request of individual congregations, individual ministers or by highly specialised groupings, with very little coordination or cooperation. Etienne de Villiers makes the point that TRC faced a particular difficult challenge in getting NGK involved. In his view the TRC could only function successfully if the NGK and other Afrikaner churches supported the process. In his words: "If the political parties of the Afrikaner, the Afrikaans newspapers, and, in particular, the Afrikaans churches withdraw their support and encourage Afrikaners to

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106 Maluleke, "Truth, national unity and reconciliation in South Africa", 65.

107 Graybill, "South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission", 56.

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refuse any co-operation with the TRC, the TRC will surely not succeed in its objectives."[108] Despite this appeal most white churches, particularly the Afrikaner churches, did not directly participate in the process. Among other churches, the Salvation Army and the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) were the first national church bodies to make official submissions to the TRC. Graybill notes that Salvation Army admitted that during apartheid it had chosen to be silent on the injustices that were committed. On the other hand the AFM confessed that it had failed in its duty to question the system and pledged to become a more faithful watchdog to make sure that history does not repeat itself.

In November 1997 more churches responded to the invitation for a special hearing of the faith communities extended by the TRC. With the opening of this special hearing in East London, Tutu warned that no church in South Africa could claim a perfect record regarding opposing apartheid and all churches would, therefore, need to confess their own shortcomings. Over the course of three days, the TRC heard the confessions of various Christian denominations as well as confessions from the Muslim, Hindu and Jewish communities, who in varying degrees apologised for not doing enough with regard to opposing apartheid policies. The most self-critical submission came from the SACC. Notwithstanding the SACC's public opposition to apartheid over many years, for which the state often targeted it, it nevertheless expressed some regrets. Brigalia Bam, the General Secretary, of the SACC, confessed that the SACC did not do enough to seek out the victims of apartheid, but relied, in the main, on for people to come to it for assistance and aid.[109]

What may be described as one of the most significant developments at the special hearings for the faith communities came from the NGK. However, as Graybill observes, the NGK submission was a disappointment because the NGK moderator said very little about the

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108 E. de Villiers, "The Challenge to the Afrikaans Churches", In: H. R. Botman and R. M. Pietersen (eds.), *To remember and to heal: Theological and psychological reflections on truth and reconciliation,* Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1996, 151.

109 Graybill, "South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission", 57.

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past and how the NGK theology lent credibility to apartheid; rather the focus was on the present need for reconciliation. "Ironically (though not surprisingly), the denomination that was most explicit in the theological justification for apartheid and support of the National Party's policies was the church body that could find the least for which to apologize."[110] In reflecting on the role of the churches in the TRC process, Maluleke posits that there nothing to suggest that the churches were opposed to or highly critical of the commission. Neither was there a lack of practical suggestions on what the church should do. However, what is also evident is the lack of an enthusiastic, well thought through coordinated response equal to the national significance of the TRC itself.[111] For this reason, the churches' role in TRC process was less than adequate.

5.3.9 The TRC in perspective

The TRC's framing of the reconciliation discourse placed much emphasis on the acknowledgement of history as means of establishing a shared truth. However, as Audrey Chapman observes:

> What seems appropriate in theory may not be feasible in practice or may be at least very problematic to achieve. Truth commissions, including the TRC, typically function in situations where the legacy of conflict has resulted in deep social divisions and sharply conflicting and contested versions of the past. In such situations, it is difficult for any single body to succeed establishing a widely accepted version of the truth of historical events and the chain of responsibility for them or promoting reconciliation among antagonists or contending groups, let alone both. Moreover, the immediate requirements of these two goals may be in conflict. While truth finding and the formulation of a shared history are prerequisites for long-term nation building, the process may

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110 Graybill, "South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission", 57.

111 Maluleke, "Truth, National Unity and Reconciliation", 66-67.

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not be conducive for promoting reconciliation, at least in the short term.[112]

Further complicating the work of the commission, as Megan Shore observes, is the tension that exists between the different interpretations of reconciliation itself. In Shore's view, the "greatest" contributing factor to this tension is the reality that the TRC had no consensus on the definition of reconciliation. Furthermore, "during the actual functioning of the process, there was no attempt to provide a commission-recognised definition of the term."[113] The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act itself states that the overall objective of the commission is to promote national unity and reconciliation, but the act fails to define what reconciliation entails. It does not specify a series of activities intended to contribute directly to the process of reconciliation. The legislation does not identify the parties that are to be reconciled. Here one needs to consider whether the commission was intended to focus on reconciliation between individuals, races, contending political organisations and other actors. Nor did it offer mechanisms to evaluate the contribution of the TRC to reconciliation.[114] Part of the problem stemmed from the role of the Christian symbols in shaping a particular sense or operational understanding of reconciliation. Kader Asmal observes that the "overly Christian or religious emphasis on the idea of reconciliation" as highlighted in the TRC proceedings caused much controversy.[115] Whatever the merits of such objections, it was ultimately a Christian understanding of reconciliation that was pursued. This was due in large part to the leadership of Archbishop Tutu and other clergy, all of whom were committed Christians who insisted on an explicitly religious approach to reconciliation.[116] According

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112 A. R. Chapman, "The TRC's approach to promoting reconciliation in the human rights violations hearings", In A. R. Chapman and H. van der Merwe (eds.), *Truth and reconciliation in South Africa. Did the TRC deliver?* Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008, 45.

113 Shore, *Religion and conflict resolution,* 108.

114 Chapman, "The TRC's approach to promoting reconciliation in the human rights violations hearings", 46.

115 K. Asmal, L. Asmal, and R. Roberts, "Afterword", *Reconciliation through truth. A reckoning of apartheid's criminal governance*, i.

116 Chapman, "The TRC's approach to promoting reconciliation in the human rights violations hearings", 47.

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to the TRC Final Report, this factor created much confusion between what may be considered a religious as opposed to a political understanding of reconciliation. The TRC Final Report refers to "the potentially dangerous confusion between a religious, indeed Christian, understanding of reconciliation, more typically applied to interpersonal relationships, and the more limited, political notion of reconciliation applicable to a democratic society."[117] As a consequence, the commissioners and those directly involved in the facilitation of the TRC often pursued very different approaches to reconciliation. Chapman observes that:

> Depending on who was taking the initiative, the public interface and sections of the final report of the commission alternatively conveyed religious and secular perspectives. Some of the commissioners clearly vested reconciliation with religious content. Those with religious backgrounds, particularly … Archbishop [Tutu], linked or equated reconciliation with interpersonal forgiveness. At other times the TRC put forward a more political and judicial concept of reconciliation. Neither statements at public hearings nor in the media or the text of the TRC report makes an effort to integrate or harmonise the very different conceptions of reconciliation. The dominant role of Archbishop Tutu meant that the commission frequently communicated a message that linked reconciliation with healing and forgiveness.[118]

An awareness of these different interpretations of reconciliation was already observed as early as 1994. At the conference entitled, 'The South African Conference on Truth and Reconciliation', organised by Alex Boraine. Richard Goldstone in his address to the conference noted that, "on the one hand there is the vital legal underpinning of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission without which such a commission could not succeed and would not exist. On the other hand there are philosophical, religious and moral aspects

117 TRC Final Report, Vol. 1, Ch. 5, 108.

118 Chapman, "The TRC's approach to promoting reconciliation in the human rights violations hearings", 47.

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without which the commission would be an empty legal vessel, which would do a great deal of harm and achieve nothing."[119] In Goldstone's view both "streams" to reconciliation was necessary for the success of the commission. He was optimistic that the mandate of the commission with regard to reconciliation would become clearer as the commission progressed and that they would merge in the end. This did not happen. Instead the lack of conceptual clarity meant that the commissioners were left to provide a particular (oftentimes religious) interpretation of reconciliation.[120] This is not to say that all non-religious, especially legal scholars, were opposed to the idea. Like Goldstone, Dullah Omar, a lawyer and Minister of Justice at the time, also supported the idea of bringing a religious understanding of reconciliation into the equation. At the same time people like Jakes Gerwel, the Director-General of the Office of the State President, warned not to misrepresent the TRC as a search for the holy grail of spiritual reconciliation, but instead to appreciate it first and foremost as a secular pact, a political agreement, that confirmed the latent national unity that has been present since the Union of South Africa in 1910.[121]

The discourse on reconciliation and how the concept is understood in the context of the TRC is really a discussion on whether the commission was a religious or a political instrument. Dirkie Smit highlights that the TRC was intended to be a political and legal, and not necessarily religious or spiritual undertaking.[122] Smit remarks that the commission's mandate clearly reflects the view of juridical undertaking rather than a spiritual or Christian one. The commission should thus be seen in the light of the negotiated settlement and not necessarily from the perspective of the religious pursuit of reconciliation. In doing so, Smit may be correct in cautioning against misrepresenting the

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119 R. Goldstone, "To remember and acknowledge: The way ahead", In: A. Boraine and J. Levy, *The healing of a nation*? Cape Town: Justice in Transition, 1995, 120.

120 Shore, *Religion and conflict resolution*, 121.

121 J. Gerwel, "National reconciliation: Holy grail or secular pact?", In: C. Villa-Vicencio and W. Verwoerd (eds.), *Looking back, reaching forward: Reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa*, Cape Town: Cape Town University Press, 2000, 277-286.

122 D. J. Smit, "The Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Tentative religious and theological perspectives", *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 90, 1995, 14.

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TRC as something other than a juridical and public instrument. As Piet Meiring observes, given the people who were charged to lead the TRC process it was only a natural consequence that reconciliation would be interpreted from a religious perspective.[123] Thus, by having religious leaders lead the process and by making reconciliation a focal point, it was only natural that the TRC would take on a religious character.[124] De Gruchy posits that "the TRC vision arose out of religious and specifically Christian conviction and was shaped by the Christian doctrine of reconciliation. The debate about reconciliation within the TRC and the wider South African public would undoubtedly have been different if the Commission had been chaired by a judge rather than an archbishop, by a politician rather than a pastor and father confessor."[125] For the most part, the concepts of forgiveness, confession, and reconciliation were far more at home in the religious sphere as opposed to political discourse. In this context, those responsible for appointing the TRC leadership had to be aware that process would take on a religious character. This may be problematic for various reasons, but at the same time, it created a space for South Africans to express themselves in ways that they may have been more familiar with.

Systematic reflection on the theological, moral and religious questions on the TRC seems to be lacking. On this point, Maluleke's warns that the TRC presents an opportunity to assess what exactly is meant when concepts such as "reconciliation," "truth" and "forgiveness" are invoked. In most cases, South Africans were urged to support the TRC process in various ways. Some theologians, he suggests, go "overboard" in singing the praises of both the TRC and government. In his words: "It is one thing to acknowledge the need for national healing – even reconciliation or national unity – but not to probe whether the processes, strategies, discourses, gesticulations, and pseudo-theologies [reconstruction] currently in circulation are conducive to genuine national healing and

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123 P. Meiring, "Reconciliation: Dream or reality", *Missionalia*, 2 (2), 1999, 242.

124 Tutu, *No future without forgiveness*, 71-7; A. Boraine, *A country unmasked*, 360-361; De Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 41-3.

125 De Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 41.

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genuine reconciliation is another." Thus, if national healing, unity, and reconciliation are indeed crucial for the people of South Africa, then sharp, thorough, deep and honest theological reflection is needed. For Maluleke, as the TRC process unfolded it became clear that the victims of apartheid are once again in a disadvantaged position. In light of this reality, the calls to embrace reconstruction and transformation may not be in the best interest of those most in need.[126] Dirkie Smit's assessment is quite illuminating. He argues that:

> In reading many of the religious, theological and spiritual reactions already available…It seems that most of them reflect these ideas. Remembrance is essential; the truth must be told; guilt must be confessed; the perspective of the victim is important; reconciliation must be sought; the church is also guilty; the truth is complex. Yet, I also find it somewhat troubling to read some of these reactions, particularly in the way they give their almost unqualified blessing to every single detail … Even if the Christian church and theology support the broad process and the idea of the Commission itself, it looks rather too much like a (new) religious sanctioning of the state's entirely political and judicial proposals in a way that is not going to assist the state.[127]

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In this context, the church needs to realise that its pastoral task will continue long after the political and juridical process has been completed.

5.4 Closing reflections

This chapter underscores the steady movement of reconciliation as a theological concept used by Christian churches and theologians, into a key notion in the political discourse in the transition towards a democratic state structure – from a theological to a multi-disciplinary symbol. This approach only became evident after the negotiated settlement

[126] T. S. Maluleke, "Dealing lightly with the wounds of my people: The TRC process in theological perspective", *Missionalia*, 25(3), 1997, 341-342.

[127] Smit, "The Truth and Reconciliation Commission", 15.

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reached during the period from 1990 and 1994 in South Africa. This prompted the recognition of the need for a reconstruction of society and social development. However, this required the need for coming to terms with the apartheid past (including amnesty), for national reconciliation and nation building. This was expressed (and legitimised) theologically in diverse ways, including the emergence of a theology of reconstruction, but especially through engagements with the proceedings of the TRC. Drawing on Abelard's moral influence theory, rhetorically, this approach is aimed at calling for social responsibility and against a privatisation of religion after the advent of democracy. Here one needs to acknowledge the multi-layered nature of the reconciliation symbol and what it means for a democratic South Africa. A diversity of role-players have attributed to the reconciliation symbol, bringing with them a variety of meanings, including proposals to strip reconciliation from its theological fetters. This variety of meanings makes it difficult to bring together, to harmonise and reconcile. Nevertheless, what ties these varying perspectives together is the recognition that reconciliation is a necessary requirement for processes of social transformation and moral regeneration of South Africa. However, the concern with the moral influence theory is that it reduces the work of Christ on the cross to a private affair, a subjective matter, thereby undermining the objective reality of divine reconciliation. In doing this, it seems incapable of appreciating the theological richness of previous approaches, thus failing to grasp the existence of evil and the significance of Christ's work on reconciliation in conquering such evil.

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6. Conclusion

6.1 Recapitulation

The strategy proposed for this study is that there are at least three distinct approaches in response to the question: *How has the symbol of reconciliation been understood in Christian theological literature emanating from the South African context between 1968 and 2010?* As a background to these approaches, in Chapter 2, "The symbol of reconciliation in Christian theology", I provided a brief survey of reconciliation (or atonement) as a central tenet of the Christian faith. This is of particular importance because essentially the Christian Gospel is about overcoming alienation and estrangement between God and humanity. In this context, the Christian tradition portrays Jesus Christ as the mediator of the broken covenant between God and humanity. Christian reflection on the work of Christ is traditionally discussed within the context of a theology of reconciliation. I mentioned that unlike the "person of Christ" in which the ecumenical councils formally stated their position, the question regarding Christ's work on atonement does not have a singular ecumenical reference point. This makes it particularly difficult to highlight any singular position as the traditional (Nicene) Orthodox reference point. The consequence is that Christ's work on reconciliation (or atonement) has been understood in very different ways. To delineate the discussion, I used Gustaf Aulén's *Christus Victor* typology to offer a history of the interpretation of atonement, at least until 1930 when this book was published. In doing so, I underscore what Aulén refers to as the three main "types" of Christ's work on atonement. These three main "types" provide the background to three approaches to the discourse on reconciliation in South Africa.

The term "reconciliation" was at the heart of the church struggle against apartheid. It is for this reason that it came under close scrutiny in Christian theological reflection at least since 1968. Such theological controversies had to do with the search for appropriate theological models and root metaphors. Reconciliation offered one such concept, but

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"ecclesial unity", "liberation", "justice", "nation-building", "human dignity", "reconstruction" offered alternatives. How, for example, is reconciliation related to liberation theologically and methodologically? Should justice and liberation follow upon reconciliation or vice versa? How is reconciliation between different social groups related to the reconciliation in Jesus Christ? What connotations are attached to the symbol of "reconciliation"? I argued that while there may well be a consensus in theological publications on the question what reconciliation entails, the controversies over the symbol of reconciliation suggest that at least three additional layers of meaning may be identified in the Christian discourse on reconciliation. In this context, it was argued that reconciliation lack a fixed or singular meaning lending credence to the idea that it is best conceived as an essentially contested concept. From this vantage point, I provided an overview of the three approaches to the discourse on reconciliation and the context from which it emerged.

a) Justice through reconciliation in Jesus Christ

In Chapter 3, the approach identified as "Justice through reconciliation in Jesus Christ" (drawing especially on the Anselmian or penal substitutionary theory) was discussed. In this approach it is assumed that the reconciliation of humanity with God in Jesus Christ implies a ministry of reconciliation in a country divided by race, class, and culture, thus necessitating a concern for social justice. This particular approach employs what I referred to as a "deductive logic", moving from reconciliation with God to the church's ministry of reconciliation in society. Here the fruits of reconciliation in South Africa are contingent upon reconciliation with God – it is assumed that the message of reconciliation has been entrusted to the church as the Body of Christ. For example, in this respect, the *Belhar Confession* suggests that the church is to embody reconciliation among its members. It further asserts that reconciliation must be understood as a gracious gift from God through the blood of Christ. Also, it calls the church into understanding its own reconciliation and its place in God through the Body of Christ. It further asserts that the church is called to

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take up the ministry of reconciliation to the point where it is believed to be the responsibility of the church. Thus, the church needs to act as a reconciled community reflecting love and peace among people and establishing visible signs of God's kingdom within the context of the divisions in society. However, the focus on the ministry of reconciliation in the church transcends the noble idea of merely helping people to "get along". Here the assumption is that no lasting solution to social conflict can be found without addressing the deep roots of such conflict. This social conflict is traced directly to humanity's alienation from God and can only be overcome through God's gracious forgiveness of sins through Christ. In other words, the focus of the church must remain on reconciliation with God. Otherwise, too much emphasis on reconciliation in society without reconciliation with God will continue to be inauthentic, shallow, misplaced, allowing the space for renewed conflict. In this sense, this approach goes beyond the requirements for social cohesion and remains firmly rooted in reconciliation with God through God. In other words, God's reconciliation in Jesus Christ becomes the basis for Christians to reject any social system that assumes the fundamental irreconcilability of people. It was argued, however, that through using the "deductive logic" one runs the risk of using abstract theological language that only focuses on the church more than social needs.

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b) Justice and reconciliation after liberation

In Chapter 4, the approach identified as "Justice and reconciliation after liberation" (drawing especially on the *Christus Victor* theory) was discussed. Here I described how reconciliation was understood in the context of liberation theology, especially in the *Kairos Document* and in comments on reconciliation in the context of Black Theology. This approach is associated with churches or theologians who see the need to address situations of conflict in society. Here the need for political, economic and cultural liberation was emphasised. Those involved assumed that social justice can only follow upon the liberation from apartheid and that reconciliation is only possible on the basis of

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(following) justice. They employ what I referred to as an "inductive logic" where the situations of conflict are rooted in human alienation from God and where social conflict forms the starting point for the ministry of reconciliation. This view suggests that reconciliation has to be understood in the context of both God's work of creation and salvation, given that what is at stake is the tension between Creator and creature, which has emerged because of captivity to the principalities and powers of this world (Colossians 1: 18-23). The "inductive logic" further suggests that not only human beings or human society, but the whole of creation is included in God's work of reconciliation in Christ – the need for a wider frame of reference follows the argument that any breach in a relationship has wider implications that only the two parties concerned. If such a breach has almost cosmic ramifications, the final resolution of such conflict has to take into account the widest possible scope of the problem. In this context, reconciliation between two individuals is only possible if the whole of that society is reconciled with itself. In other words, everything is included in God's work of reconciliation in Christ. God's cosmic reconciling activity precedes and provides the framework within which God's reconciliation of humanity occurs. It is suggested that this approach is significant because through it the Christian message of reconciliation in Christ is rediscovered through engaging with social problems such as social and economic inequality and the need for restitution, especially in the context where there is a history of social injustices. However, I argue that those using the "inductive logic" as an approach to the discourse on reconciliation are confronted with the danger of self-secularisation, of reducing the Christian confession to nothing more than an example of religious affiliation that may be tolerated as long as its particular claims are not foregrounded. The obvious danger, as may be the case with the *Kairos Document*, is one of being socially relevant without having anything distinct to offer.

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c) Reconstruction requires national reconciliation

In Chapter 5, the approach identified as "Reconstruction requires national reconciliation" (drawing especially on Abelard's moral influence theory) was discussed. Here I described the steady movement of reconciliation as a theological concept used by Christian churches and theologians, into a key notion in the political discourse in the transition towards a democratic state structure. In other words, the movement of reconciliation as theological to a multi-disciplinary symbol was discussed. This approach only became evident after the negotiated settlement reached during the period from 1990 to 1994 in South Africa. This prompted the recognition of the need for the reconstruction of society and social development. However, this required coming to terms with the apartheid past (including amnesty), for national reconciliation and nation building. This was expressed (and legitimised) theologically in diverse ways, including the emergence of a theology of reconstruction, but especially through engagements with the proceedings of the TRC of South Africa. Rhetorically, this approach is aimed at calling for social responsibility and against a privatisation of religion after the advent of democracy. However, in this approach the biblical message of reconciliation is taken out of context and reduced to matters directly related to the social transformation and the moral regeneration of South Africa.

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6.2 Reconciliation in Christian soteriology

One may suggest that the three approaches to the discourse on reconciliation are concerned with the search for appropriate theological models and root metaphors within the framework of Christian soteriology. In this context, the use of metaphor is an important element in the interpretation of Christ's atoning work – this includes His life, ministry, death and resurrection. In the biblical roots and the subsequent history of Christianity, God's work often invites a diversity of metaphors that describe experiences of what may simply be called "salvation" or a sense of "comprehensive well-being". Here

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it is important to appreciate the richness of metaphors and especially their roots within a particular *Sitz-im-Leben*. These metaphors often relate to specific predicaments in which humans longed for "salvation" or "comprehensive well-being". The Christian discourse on salvation emerges in cases where suffering and anxieties over potential suffering are not only serious, but where there seems to be no other way of addressing such suffering. Here the way in which human beings have collectively been trapped in violent societal structures is typically interpreted in terms of the category of (original) sin, that is, in terms of the alienation that emerged between God and humanity.[1] The sources of suffering often cannot be disentangled from one another. It should be made clear, however, that many of the challenges we currently face are linked to the inefficiencies deeply embedded in social structures of South Africa. In the biblical roots and the subsequent history of Christianity we find numerous examples where "salvation", from experiences of suffering are documented. Such salvific experiences may be expressed in a rich array of metaphors leading to a variety of soteriological concepts that follow from reflection on such metaphors. By utilising a soteriological map developed by Ernst Conradie, the point is to highlight the core insights of all three types of atonement that Aulén analysed in order to highlight its significance for the contemporary discourse on reconciliation.[2]

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a) Salvation as God's victory over the forces of evil, death and destruction

There are numerous situations where one may be faced with a predicament in which there seems to be no light escape. In this context many bear evidence that they were rescued from this predicament, that the forces of evil have been conquered. The Bible has many examples where the "victory" is ascribed to God's involvement. For example, a military threat is averted through political diplomacy or a victory on the battlefield; a drought or famine is averted through an alternative food supply; after a period of political

[1] E. M. Conradie, "Towards an ecological reformulation of the Christian doctrine of sin", *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 122, 2005, 4-22.

[2] E. M. Conradie, "The salvation of the earth from anthropogenic destruction: In search of appropriate soteriological concepts in an age of ecological destruction", *Religion and Theology: A Journal of Contemporary Religious Discourse*, 13(1), 2006, 114.

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oppression, a day liberation dawns where the power of the unjust ruler is ended. In all these situations the predicament is intolerable and has to be overcome. These consequences may follow directly or indirectly from particular actions. It may be the result of one's own action, or someone else's or both – the result of societal structures. It could also be the product of pain and suffering embedded in nature and exacerbated through human action. Here the situation demands an immediate remedy. In this case, it may be helpful but not sufficient to experience solidarity and companionship amidst suffering. Here a victory of some sort is required. In this context, the symbol of the cross is considered significant but not enough here. The victory has to be more than a moral victory or a new vision. Here the consequences of evil that are the cause of the suffering have to be negated. Conradie mentions that:

> When being rescued is experienced in such a situation, it may be ascribed to one's own efforts, to commitment and dedication, to human wisdom, ingenuity or technology, to fortune, to spiritual forces or whatever. It may also be ascribed, at a more ultimate level, to God's presence and involvement in history. The categories of 'redemption' or 'salvation' are often used to capture the thrust of such salvific experiences. One may also speak of being rescued from danger, liberation from oppression and a victory that has been achieved over the forces of death, destruction and evil.[3]

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Strictly speaking, this is the main thrust of Aulén's retrieval of the *Christus Victor* tradition. Here the resurrection of Christ is a significant symbol because it symbolises the power of God to address any situation, including conquering death. Conradie states that "the emphasis on a victory over evil brings Oscar Cullman's well-known image from World War II to mind. With the resurrection of Christ, the decisive battle ('D-Day') in the war

[3] Conradie, "Healing in soteriological perspective", 9.

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against sin and evil has been achieved. Although the war is still continuing, the final victory (V-Day') is assured."[4]

There are several contemporary theological movements in which the significance of such an array of soteriological concepts is emphasised. Here the *Kairos Document* and the subsequent Kairos movements are of particular importance. In more general terms "liberation" theologies (and Black Theology in particular) have called for liberation from political, racial and economic oppression. Feminist theologies have called for liberation from patriarchy. African theologies also are attracted to the idea of victory over the evil forces that threaten overall well-being.[5] Whether liberation is the most appropriate metaphor to be employed in this regard cannot be taken for granted. There may be a need, as Villa-Vicencio and others proposed, to move from "liberation" to a new vision. Again, whether that vision is necessarily "reconstruction" is also not to be taken for granted.[6] Nevertheless, whenever an immediate threat has been averted, there are still dangers that threaten the well-being of communities. The challenges of post-apartheid South Africa underscore this point. There is thus a need to address the very roots of such evil and establish measures that would limit the recurrence of such problems. Conradie critically observes that it is not clear whether such experiences of redemption can be ascribed to the work of the Holy Spirit. He asks: "How does God's work here relate to our work or is reference to God's involvement merely a more metaphoric way of referring to human emancipatory praxis?" In this sense, it may be important whether such notions of redemption could indeed be understood as Christian? In other words, how are they related to the core Christian symbols of incarnation, cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ?[7] Indeed, the *Kairos Document*, and other initiatives using an "inductive logic" are confronted with the danger of self-secularisation, of reducing the Christian confession to

4 Conradie, "The Salvation of the earth from anthropogenic destruction", 120-121.

5 Kärkkäinen, *Christ and reconciliation*, 380.

6 C. Villa-Vicencio, *A theology of reconstruction: Nation building and human rights,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

7 Conradie, "The salvation of the earth from anthropogenic destruction", 123.

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nothing more than an example of religious affiliation that may be tolerated as long as its particular claims are not foregrounded. This results in initiatives that may be socially relevant without having anything distinct to offer.

b) Salvation as reconciliation between God and humanity and on that basis within the Body of Christ and between humans

In some cases it is important to address not only the consequences but also establish the root causes of the problem. Here one may consider the numerous examples in the Bible, in the subsequent history of Christianity and from everyday life where a predicament has to be addressed at its very roots. One may consider criminal and civil court proceedings where the truth has to be established before justice can be served. There are also situations in which conflict between people has emerged. There may be various reasons why the conflict is there in the first place and in many cases the parties concerned share in the guilt, albeit not equally. The obvious solution would be to terminate the relationship but this is not always possible. Here it would be helpful if those involved acknowledge (through regret, signs of remorse and confessing their guilt) their role in damaging the relationship and offer compensation without making further accusations. This may encourage the other party to reciprocate. Conradie mentions that the only lasting solution in this case would be a word of unconditional forgiveness, which is a crucial way of addressing evil at its very roots. In his words, "unlike condoning someone, forgiveness is an action in which one indicates to someone else that the continuation of this relation is more important to the one who forgives that the real damage done by the one who is forgiven … Forgiveness is the only way in which a vicious spiral of violence may be broken."[8] Hanna Arendt comments that forgiveness "is the only reaction that does not merely react but acts anew

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[8] Conradie, "The salvation of the earth from anthropogenic destruction", 124.

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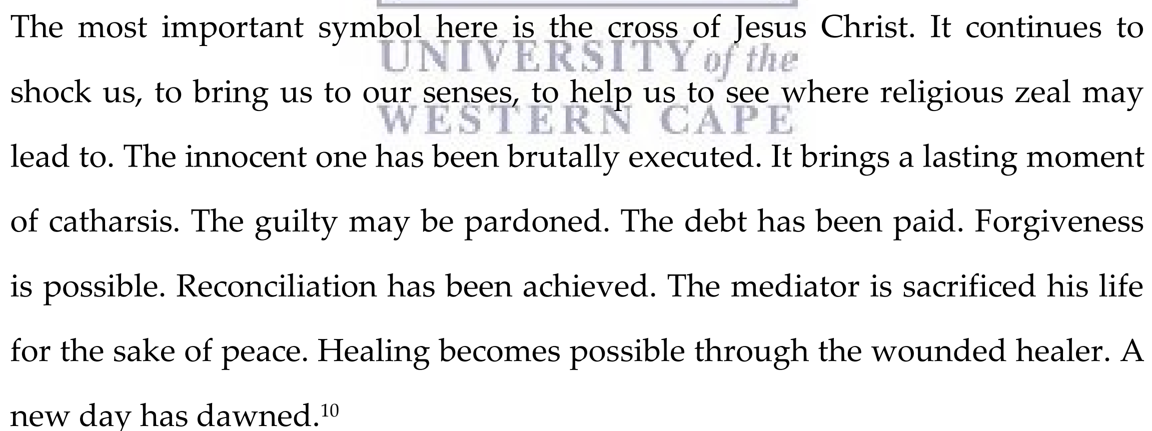
and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the action which preceded it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven."[9]

There are somewhat similar situations of conflict where whole groups of people may be involved, for example imminent threats of war between countries, rebellion and ethnic violence. In some cases the situation may have deteriorated significantly and where an act of forgiveness may not suffice given the mistrust that exists. What is required in this context is a mediator who can help start a process of reconciliation. This mediator should have the trust of the parties involved and be able to identify the root causes of the problem. In addition, the mediator should help uncover the injustices and help find an amicable solution out of the conflict. At a more ultimate level, the problem may be understood in terms of our alienation from God – enmity between God and humanity, characterised by a broken relationship. If the problem is not addressed, if the relationship is not restored, there will be no lasting solution to other predicaments that are experienced. In other words, our alienation from God is the root cause of irreconciliation. In response to this predicament, Conradie remarks:



> The most important symbol here is the cross of Jesus Christ. It continues to shock us, to bring us to our senses, to help us to see where religious zeal may lead to. The innocent one has been brutally executed. It brings a lasting moment of catharsis. The guilty may be pardoned. The debt has been paid. Forgiveness is possible. Reconciliation has been achieved. The mediator is sacrificed his life for the sake of peace. Healing becomes possible through the wounded healer. A new day has dawned.[10]

Because forgiveness does not by itself lead to reconciliation, it has to be embedded in a complex and reciprocal interaction between human beings and God. Here sin is not merely condoned (which would be to condone injustice), but the long-term impact of

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9 H. Arendt, *The human condition: A study of the central dilemmas facing man*, Garden City: Doubleday, 1959, 216; Also quoted in Conradie, "The salvation of the earth from anthropogenic destruction", 124.

10 Conradie, "Healing in soteriological perspective", 12.

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human sin is addressed in such a way that reconciliation, healing and peace become possible. Conradie mentions that: "Christians typically find the clue to such reconciliation in the cross and not so much the resurrection of Jesus Christ."[11] This emphasis on the cross is of particular importance when observing the approach of especially the *Belhar Confession*. This is in contrast to the *Kairos Document* where the emphasis is more on the resurrection, symbolising the victory over the evil forces. In the context of the cross, the Anselmian or penal substitutionary theory comes to mind. Conradie remarks that various metaphors may have been used to explain how such forgiveness and reconciliation is indeed possible on the basis of what Christ has done. This includes the use of the cultic image, suggesting Jesus Christ has brought a "sacrifice" on behalf of humanity to God – a sacrifice that is commensurate with the severity of humanity's rebellion against God. Some may use legal images to suggest that Jesus Christ has taken himself (as a substitute) the appropriate punishment that the judge directed in his sentence on humanity. In other words, Jesus died in our place.[12] It should be noted that there are serious theological problems associated with the use of these images. Some of them are raised in Aulén's critique of the legal order of the Anselmian theory.[13] Conradie goes further, highlighting that the cluster of metaphors of salvation are often confused and conflated with one another, to the extent where their metaphorical roots are no longer clear. This is particularly the case of attempts to explain the significance of the cross "for us and our salvation" through categories such as "forgiveness", "reconciliation", "sacrifice", "satisfaction" and penal substitution. The mixing of metaphors is particularly evident concerning the notion of "forgiveness" – which may be understood as amnesty or legal pardon, an interpersonal word of forgiveness or the cancellation of monetary debt ("guilt"). The difficult task of unravelling the significance of such metaphors is addressed in the context of theories of atonement. In Protestant theologies, atonement is typically

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11 Conradie, "The salvation of the earth from anthropogenic destruction", 125.

12 Conradie, "The salvation of the earth from anthropogenic destruction", 126.

13 Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 143-159.

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understood in a juridical context, while forgiveness for sinners is subsequently understood forensically. This tends to portray God as a God of law before being a God of love and fails to do justice to the more personal and relational aspects of forgiving and wrongdoing.[14]

The significance of the juridical emphasis on the forgiveness of sinners is its emphasis on the diagnosing the root causes of our estrangement from God and responds to sin at its roots through the good news of the justification of sinners through God's grace. This is the lasting significance of the positions of Anselm and Luther and many evangelical theologies of atonement. However, more is needed. Conradie warns that the emphasis on the roots of sin should not be reduced to personalist categories. A more comprehensive notion of God's justice is required in order to emphasise God's concern to re-establish just rule in a world corrupted by human sin.[15] Colin Gunton seems to agree. He offers a creative reinterpretation of a juridical view of atonement on the basis of "the justice of God".[16] Within the context of the Anselmian theory, Gunton remarks that it was the duty of the ruler to maintain order in society without which society would collapse.[17] In this sense God does not so much demand satisfaction for sin because God was personally offended, but because of the disruptive consequences of sin in society.[18] God acts as a judge not as much to punish sinners but from the vantage point of unwillingness to allow creatures to destroy themselves.[19] What is needed is to create a new dispensation, the way of the cross, which would satisfy the ruler as being appropriate to re-establish order in society. God does not desire punishment, but the justice of God calls for the eschatological transformation of the whole created order. This is what Gunton refers to as God's loyalty to creation.[20] Here there is a fundamental asymmetry between divine and human action,

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14 Conradie, "The salvation of the earth from anthropogenic destruction", 127-128.

15 Conradie, "The salvation of the earth from anthropogenic destruction", 128.

16 Gunton, *The atuality of atonement*, 87.

17 Gunton, *The actuality of atonement*, 89.

18 Gunton, *The actuality of atonement*, 95.

19 Gunton, *The actuality of atonement*, 92.

20 Gunton, *The actuality of atonement*, 103.

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an unbridgeable gulf between the work of Christ through which God reconciled the world to Godself (2 Corinthians. 5: 19) and the Spirit's ministry of reconciliation through us. Thus, the notion of the justice of God goes beyond the narrow personalist concept of righteousness through legalistic pardoning of sin and succeeds in integrating all three models of atonement quite neatly.

c) Salvation as moral transformation

I have highlighted the need to confront the consequences of evil. It may also be necessary to address the root causes of evil to eradicate it. Eradicating evil may indeed be evasive, if not impossible. The persistence of racism in South Africa may serve as a good example here. It thus becomes necessary to tolerate the presence of evil. In most cases, any attempt to eradicate evil only creates more evil through the instruments that are used. It then becomes a question of how evil may be limited to prevent the situation from deteriorating in future. In this sense, Conradie may indeed be correct in stressing that a new beginning (for instance, the democratic South Africa) does not guarantee that evil will not emerge again.[21] In reality, the state of the country, over 20 years into democracy, leaves much to be desired. The persistence of racism, rampant corruption in the public and private sectors to name but a few, confirms this assertion. It is, therefore, necessary to reflect on appropriate guidelines to safeguard society against future evil.

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There is, of course, no guarantee that evil will ever the brought under control. History has many examples indicating that the more radically this is done, the more dramatically evil may manifest itself in other forms, including in what is supposed to be good and in the apparatus set up to repress evil. It is therefore wise to reckon with a much wider compass of latent evil. Evil is more evasive, more widespread and less fathomable than one may wish to admit.[22] In the biblical roots and the subsequent history of Christianity, there are numerous examples where the importance of minimising injustice, conflict, and violence is

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[21] Conradie, "Healing in soteriological perspective", 14.

[22] Conradie, "Healing in soteriological perspective", 15.

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recognised. Here the examples of prophets, judges, kings, priests, saints and martyrs etcetera serve as an apt example. Moreover, the Christian symbol of the incarnation, life, and ministry of Jesus Christ deemed the most important in this regard. The example set by Jesus of Nazareth is celebrated and glorified by his followers. What is at stake here is his vision for a new social order, labelled the coming reign of God, based on solidarity with the marginalised and care for the victims of society. The inspiring example of love, even to the point of death, as demonstrated in the life of Jesus, evokes a similar response from humanity. In Conradie's words:

> His imaginative example of the first concrete steps which may be necessary to actualise something of this coming reign now already is significant here. This emerged from his ministry to the sick, the helpless, lepers, prostitutes, sinners, tax collectors and soldiers. However, there is also a sense in which suffering in this world cannot always be avoided. Here notions of solidarity in suffering (the suffering servant), kenosis, lament and consolation are crucial. In the biblical texts, this is expressed both Christologically and pneumatologically (the groaning of the Spirit in Romans 8). In addition, one may consider the apostolic admonitions and guidelines for Christian living.[23]

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This emphasis on inspiring examples for Christian living is typical of many modern theologies, possibly because it eschews intellectual questions regarding the resurrection and cultural resistance against the bloodiness of the cross. Here Abelard's moral influence theory of the subjective appropriation of Christ's atonement is often emphasised. Furthermore, Friedrich Schleiermacher's view that redemption consists in the transmission of the God-consciousness of Jesus to later believers to Albert Ritschl's understanding of the ethical significance of the proclamation of God's reign is emphasised. There is a tendency in such accounts of salvation to focus on subjective feelings of guilt and underplay the objective disruption of the social order through human evil – sometimes

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[23] Conradie, "The salvation of the earth from anthropogenic destruction", 131.

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liberation from oppression and victory over evil is required first to re-establish a just social order.[24] In South Africa, the emergence of a theology of reconstruction after the fall of apartheid may serve as such a notion of salvation. Here the focus is on reigning in the latent forms of evil, to express an appropriate vision for building a free, democratic dispensation in the company of people from other faiths and worldviews, calling for a sense of solidarity for those experiencing victimisation.

6.3 Integrating the three approaches to reconciliation?

The approaches discussed have particular strengths and weaknesses, thus, highlighting the need for a more integrated approach. In this context, one would have to consider the relative-adequacy of these approaches. Moreover, no one model truly captures the theological breadth of Christ's atoning work. Here one is confronted with the limited adequacy of theological models to do justice to the diverse social contexts in which they exist. Generally, the range of soteriological concepts present in the discourse on reconciliation allows people to use whatever concepts they deem appropriate to address particular concerns. Firstly, in the *Belhar Confession* (drawing especially on the Anselmian or penal substitutionary theory) the focus is on addressing the root cause of social conflict. Here social conflict is traced back directly to our alienation from God. This, in turn, can only be overcome through God's gracious forgiveness of sins through Christ. Reconciliation in society without reconciliation with God is deemed inauthentic, shallow and misplaced, allowing the space for renewed conflict. In other words, God's reconciliation in Jesus Christ becomes the basis for Christians rejecting any social system that assumes the irreconcilability of people. In this approach, one runs the risk of using abstract theological language that only focuses on the church more than social needs. Secondly, in the *Kairos Document* (drawing especially on the *Christus Victor* theory) the need for political, economic and cultural liberation is emphasised. In this approach, social

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[24] Conradie, "The salvation of the earth from anthropogenic destruction", 132.

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conflict forms the starting point for the ministry of reconciliation. Reconciliation is understood in the context of both God's work of creation and salvation, given what is at stake is the tension between Creator and creature, which has emerged because of captivity to the principalities and powers of this world (Colossians 1: 18-23). God's cosmic reconciling activity precedes and provides the framework within which God's reconciliation of humanity occurs. In other words, the Christian message of reconciliation in Christ is rediscovered through engaging with social problems such as social and economic inequality and the need for restitution, especially in the context where there is a history of social injustice. In this approach, one runs the risk of self-secularisation, of reducing the Christian confession to nothing more than an example of religious affiliation that may be tolerated as long as its particular claims are not foregrounded. Thirdly, during the transitional period (drawing especially on Abelard's moral influence theory), the need for the reconstruction of society and social development was emphasised. This included coming to terms with the apartheid past including working towards the realisation of national reconciliation and nation-building. Rhetorically, this approach is aimed at calling for social responsibility and against the privatisation of religion. The main concern with this approach is that the biblical message of reconciliation is taken out of context and reduced to matters directly related to issues of social transformation and moral regeneration.

Following Aulén's analysis, this study suggests that the three approaches address the evil consequences of human sin (God's victory over evil, based on the message of resurrection), the roots of such evil in human sin (sinners are forgiven by God through grace, manifested in cross of Jesus Christ) and a way of life for the present in order to map a better future (following Christ's moral example, redemption is depicted as an achievement that human beings can reach themselves). Here one would have to consider whether an integration of these soteriological concepts would be appropriate, also for the discourse on reconciliation? After all, the history of the Christian tradition indicates that the symbols of the life, cross, and resurrection of Jesus Christ were integrated with one

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another in order to present a narrative whole.[25] In this sense, it would be problematic to emphasise a single approach at the expense of other existing approaches. Also, no one-size-fits-all approach can ever capture the theological breadth of Christ's atoning work. Respectively, we have used soteriological concepts such as forgiveness, justice, liberation, and reconstruction, and reconciliation among others, to better recognise and appreciate the message of salvation. However, in emphasising Aulén's analysis and applying these models to the South African context, one would need to come to terms that a focus on the forgiveness of sins in Christ (Anselmian or penal substitutionary theory) has not yet brought an end to injustice. In the same way liberation (drawing especially on the *Christus Victor* theory) from social oppression also does not necessarily translate into the end of injustice. Those proposing theologies which are more liberal in its orientation (drawing especially on Abelard's moral influence theory) also need to be reminded that knowledge and moral appeals alone is not sufficient in addressing the deep-rootedness of suffering. In this sense, the social roots of evil must be recognised. The realisation of the good relies on more than just a mere focus on the ideal moral example. In this context, it is clear that in order to make progress on the challenge of reconciliation in South Africa, one would have to go beyond the neat compartmentalisation of the various approaches. In other words, one would need an integration of the three approaches to reconciliation. This may very well lead to the distorting of soteriological metaphors and their implied *Sitz-im-Leben*. At the same time, it may also broaden what may otherwise be considered contrasting soteriological positions. This is often the case in South Africa where, for example, reconciliation and justice are often used in oppositional terms.[26] The same could be said, about liberation and reconstruction.[27] Instead, what I am proposing here is a broadening of our local understanding of these soteriological metaphors, thereby highlighting their theological relatedness beyond the false dichotomies that are often emphasised. However,

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[25] Conradie, "The salvation of the earth from anthropogenic destruction", 133.

[26] M. Volf, "Forgiveness, reconciliation and Justice: A theological contribution to a more peaceful social environment", *Journal of International Studies*, 29 (3), 2000, 869-872.

[27] Maluleke, "The proposal for a theology of reconstruction: A critical appraisal", 252-256.

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here one would need to be cautious not to blur the distinct character of the three approaches.

6.4 The quest for reconciliation deferred?

More than 20 years after the TRC had started its work reconciliation remains a contested concept, and the progress in the reconstruction of society had fallen short in many areas.[28] Along with the legacy of apartheid, the democratic dispensation has brought with it an array of new challenges.[29] Among other things, rampant corruption in the public and private sectors has undermined much of the progress made in the short democratic history of the country.[30] In this context, the ruling ANC's performance as the champion of the aspirations of the majority of South Africans has been more than disappointing. In the absence strong ethical leadership, the ANC has progressively become the fiefdom of crude political entrepreneurs, the corrupt and the cynically ambitious. As the ruling political party, the longer the ANC continues on the trajectory of patronage politics and the abuse of incumbency the more harm will be done – thus relegating the ideals and aspirations on which the democratic dispensation was founded. Though the ANC still dominate the political landscape, the challenges to its electoral power are already starting to take shape.[31] Nevertheless, today it would be fair to say that the quest for reconciliation still forms part of the public discourse in South Africa, albeit in a way more hidden from

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28 J. Kollapen, "Reconciliation: Engaging with our fears and expectations", In: F. Du Toit and E. Doxtader (eds.), *In the balance: South Africans debate reconciliation,* Johannesburg: Jacana, 2010, 23.

29 See for instance, X. Mangcu, *The state of democracy in South Africa,* Scottsville: University of Kwazulu-Natal Press, 2008; E. Mckaiser, *Run racist run: Journeys into the heart of racism, Johannesburg: Bookstorm,* 2015.

30 See Pieter-Louis Myburgh's recent exposé on the level of corruption between government officials and those in the private sector. P-L. Myburgh, *The republic of Gupta: A story of state capture,* Cape Town: Penguin Random House, 2017.

31 The ANC's relatively poor electoral performance in South Africa's 2016 municipal elections, especially in its traditional urban strongholds, is an indication that its traditional support base no longer believes in the values espoused by the party or they may be looking somewhere else by voting for opposition parties. Although the ANC is still by far the strongest political party in the country, its electoral performance is at its lowest point since its democratic victory in 1994.

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public attention. Moreover, the concept has lost its premier status as a guiding vision for social transformation in South Africa. Along with this, the legacy of Nelson Mandela and his vision is being contested more than ever before. Notwithstanding his status as the father of the nation and chief reconciler, it is now not uncommon for black people to talk about Mandela as the one who "sold out". Such views are prompted by the notion that under his leadership the (over)emphasis on reconciliation and forgiveness did very little to disrupt the socio-economic vestiges of apartheid. Here forgiveness and reconciliation, without addressing the root causes of injustice are often cited as a concern.

In the meantime, many young South Africans have become disillusioned, even cynical about the state of the nation. This scepticism is best expressed in the tension between the work of the TRC and the reality that South Africa remains one of the most (if not the most) unequal country in the world.[32] This is hardly surprising given the social divisions, marked especially by race and class, which continue to characterise the country. Such divisions are monitored through the annual publications produced by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (SA Barometer Survey). From this it is evident that South Africans continue to associate strongly with identity groups based on language, ethnicity and race. More recently, the Diagnostic Report released by the government's National Planning Commission acknowledged that the country remains a "deeply divided society". These divisions were ascribed to economic underperformance and deeply entrenched patterns of historic privilege and deprivation. This is further aggravated by high unemployment, low quality of education for blacks in particular, inadequate infrastructure, significant spatial development challenges, a resource-intensive and unsustainable growth path, an ailing public health system unable to cope with the national disease burden, uneven public sector performance, and corruption. In response to such divisions, the government's National Development Plan for 2030 recognises the need to prioritise reconciliation, social cohesion and nation-building in order to strengthen the

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32 Conradie, *Reconciliation*, 65; Kollapen, "Reconciliation", 24.

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social fabric of the country.[33] In the meantime, the lack of expectation and cynicism has often turned to anger and violence. The recent spate of student and public service protests in the country are good examples. These protests often accompany views expressing disenchantment with democracy in the country. In this context, many understand democracy primarily in instrumental terms, as a political form through which inequality is to be curtailed and essential services, such as housing, water and food, are to be made available. This understanding of democracy, together with the disparity between what many believe, is, and what ought to be, leaves South Africa's democracy vulnerable should socio-economic inequalities continue.[34] It is for this reason that the quest for reconciliation gets less attention than what some believe it deserves. In fact, some question whether reconciliation should be prioritised at all.[35] Hence the question, does reconciliation matter? In this context, one would have to once again (re)consider, as Dirkie Smit did in the 1980s, whether the reconciliation symbol has the potential to transform society.[36] Since the term needs constant clarification, it often loses its power as a symbol. A symbol is precisely something that is self-evident and needs no explanation – it grips the imagination. It is exactly for this reason that some often find it necessary to talk about "true", "genuine" or authentic reconciliation, thereby implying that they reject a notion of reconciliation considered "cheap" or "inauthentic". If anything, the question whether reconciliation has a role to play in addressing some of the most difficult challenges facing us at present would have to be addressed. The assumption that it lacks the incentive to do this could very well be contingent to a secular (political) as opposed to a theological understanding of reconciliation's potential.

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33 The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, Barometer, Online: http://reconciliationbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/2011-SA-Reconciliation-Barometer.pdf [Accessed 12 August 2017].

34 Butler, *Contemporary South Africa*, 216.

35 Harvey, *Dear white Christians*, 5

36 Smit, "The symbol of reconciliation and ideological conflict", 88.

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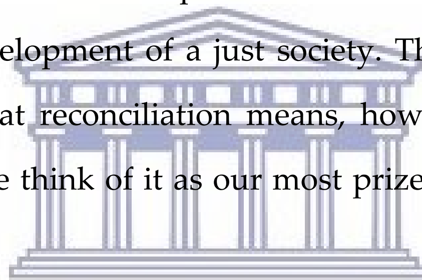
6.5 The quest for reconciliation as a shared dispute

Fanie du Toit and Erik Doxtader underscore the persistent nature of reconciliation as a shared dispute and the challenges it brings. In their words:

> There is a good chance that reconciliation was a necessary condition for the negotiated revolution that ended apartheid *and*, that at the same time, it directed us away from, if not distracted us from, some of South Africa's most pressing problems. It is possible that the TRC taught us a great deal about reconciliation's value *and*, at the same time, did not teach us a great deal about how to carry on the process ourselves. Today we have likely grown tired listening to the debates over reconciliation's promise *and yet*, at the same time, we still hear the commission's profound claim that reconciliation is fundamental for the development of a just society. These ambiguities make it difficult to agree on what reconciliation means, how it works and why it is important. Sometimes we think of it as our most prized idea, the next moment as cheap deception.[37]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It is for this reason that some speak of reconciliation as a secular, political process instead of the spiritual, religious process, as the event of the TRC seems to have been.[38] Others dismiss the "spiritualisation" of reconciliation because in their estimation the Christian notion of reconciliation simply sets the bar too high. They simply refer to a more modest notion of reconciliation. Villa-Vicencio remarks that this involves

> …pardon, mercy, understanding and a willingness to seek ways to live with adversaries, despite past scars that refuse to go away. It involves political common sense rather than religious magnanimity; clear-headedness rather than heroism; responsible living rather than monk-like self-denial. It involves

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[37] F. Du Toit and E. Doxtader (eds.), *In the balance: South Africans debate reconciliation,* Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2010, ix.

[38] C. Villa-Vicencio, *Walk with us and listen: Political reconciliation in Africa,* Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009.

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> treating others in the kind of way we would like them to treat us. We do not necessarily have to forgive one another in order to live together in peaceful-coexistence. We do not have to respect one another and establish certain economic, social and political ground rules that enable this to happen. This level of political realism may be the only realistic political option we have.[39]

In some respect Villa-Vicencio echoed what Jakes Gerwel raised a few years earlier when he warned that a "spiritual" or the theological understanding of reconciliation creates a utopian dream that contradicts what human beings are able to achieve. In his view the spiritualisation of reconciliation poses the risk of "pathologising" a nation in relatively good health by insisting on the perpetual quest for the "Holy Grail" of reconciliation. Gerwel further maintained that the framing of reconciliation in the context of "love" and "forgiveness" take us back to "primitive" notions not suitable for modern societies. And that "mechanisms of solidarity" of contemporary South Africa are no longer "love for neighbour" but rather "commitment to consensus-seeking, cultivation of conventions of civility and respect for contracts."[40]

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There are others, like Boesak and DeYoung who insist on a more "radical" notion of reconciliation.[41] For them the discourse on reconciliation can only be sustained if shallow or cheap forms of reconciliation are contrasted with what they describe as "radical reconciliation". Here the tension between cheap and radical reconciliation is related to a tension embedded in the very nature of the discourse, which, Boesak and DeYoung believe should be returned to its biblical (theological) roots – biblical reconciliation is radical reconciliation.[42] In their estimation, the reconciliation promoted through social

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39 C. Villa-Vicencio, "Reconciliation in Bloemfontein", unpublished paper, University of the Free State, February 25, 2011, 1.

40 J. Gerwel, "National reconciliation: Holy grail or secular pact?", 283-286.

41 A. A. Boesak and C. P. DeYoung, *Radical reconciliation: Beyond political pietism and Christian quietism,* Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2012; Boesak maintains this position in a recently published book. See, A. A. Boesak, *Pharaohs on both sides of the blood-red waters, Prophetic critique on empire: Resistance, justice, and the power of the hopeful sizwe – A transatlantic conversation,* Oregon: Cascade Books, 2017, 159-161.

42 Boesak & DeYoung, *Radical reconciliation*. 154.

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cohesion polarises the notions of justice and peace, whereas justice and peace are inextricably linked together in biblical reconciliation. In their words biblical reconciliation consists of the following: Firstly, "The God of justice calls for a love that transforms relationships, societies, indeed the world, so that justice and peace can embrace (Psalm 85: 11). *Reconciliation without social justice, equity, and dignity is not reconciliation at all*. Reconciliation and social justice are two sides of the same biblical coin."[43] In this context, reconciliation is more than just political accommodation that accommodates some at the expense of others. For Boesak and DeYoung the mechanisms of solidarity promoted by those who propagate political reconciliation has failed – this, they maintain is simply not enough. In contrast, "radical reconciliation questions the assumption that justice can be served, social contracts honoured, and solidarity enacted through politics and policies grounded in a neoliberal capitalism whose very survival depends on the exclusion of the powerless, the exploitation of the poor, and the nurturing of inequality the scale of which is devastatingly clear in South Africa." Secondly, in their view forgiveness entails more than just forgetting or moving on. "Forgiving is not forgetting, but holding the memory as Holy before God, so that the victim is honoured and the atrocity is never repeated again. *Reconciliation is holding the memory holy before God as a means of responding to God's demands for justice for the vulnerable and the powerless, the neglected, and the excluded*. There is nothing sentimental about it." Thirdly, Christian reconciliation is radical, costly reconciliation that can only take place between equals. This calls for addressing systemic injustices and the reordering of social structures. Importantly, this also calls for the transformation of the heart and mind. In their view, this does not oppose the call for justice. Instead, through this reconciliation is sustained. The essential point for both personal and societal reconciliation is the restoration of justice, equity, and dignity. They point that "*radical reconciliation means that the deeply personal does not cancel out the thoroughly systemic*". Fourthly, there is a need to oppose unreal or idealistic notions of biblical reconciliation. In this, they oppose the more modest approach posited by Villa-Vicencio in his search for

[43] Boesak & DeYoung, *Radical reconciliation*. 154.

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political reconciliation.[44] In their words, "*reconciliation makes it incumbent on us to change this situation by liberating the global poor, and radically so*."[45] Finally, they posit that "*reconciliation emerges from the margins and not from the centers of political or religious power*."[46] In this context the voices from the margins invigorate the discourse on reconciliation, calling those in authority to join the process meant to "re-humanise" all the children of God.[47] Ultimately, for them, there is a place for secular (political) reconciliation. As the "litmus test of a successful political transition and peace endeavour" as Villa-Vicencio observes, there is certainly a place for it.[48] Given the fragility of the country's transition, one could even argue its necessity. However, Boesak and DeYoung contend that a Christian understanding of reconciliation demands more. In their words:

> We are saying that Christians are called as agents of reconciliation, that that reconciliation is radical, and that the demands of that radical reconciliation should be made applicable to the political, social, and political realities within which they live and work. As such, Christians are suspicious of reconciliation as pure political accommodation, which secures only the world of the powerful, distrustful of a minimalist process that does not make compassionate justice and transformation the heart of the endeavour.[49]

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The idea of equating the reconciliation concept with the political settlement strips the word of its deeper theological meaning, thus prompting the need to reaffirm the theological roots of the discussion. Notwithstanding its shortcomings, Dirkie Smit reminds us that: "The Christian church has naturally been in the business of truth and

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44 Villa-Vicencio, *Walk with us and listen*, 2.

45 Boesak and DeYoung, *Radical reconciliation*, 155.

46 Boesak and DeYoung, *Radical reconciliation*, 155.

47 Boesak and DeYoung, *Radical reconciliation*, 154-155.

48 Villa-Vicencio, *Walk with us and listen*, 2.

49 Boesak and DeYoung, *Radical reconciliation*. 156;

Elsewhere, Boesak posits that, "Reconciliation is not just secular political settlements. It is about 'healing'. It is not the Christian understanding of reconciliation that confuses the issue." See Boesak, *The Tenderness of Conscience*, 178.

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reconciliation, guilt and forgiveness from its beginnings. This is our job, the industry we work in. This is the reason for our existence."[50] This makes reconciliation and the quest for conceptual clarity more important in future.

6.6 Navigating the discourse on reconciliation in South Africa

Navigating the discourse on reconciliation, one would have to ask whether indeed the Christian Gospel offers hope in a country such as ours. Gregory Jones reminds us that "the restoration of our communion with God requires something beyond my repentance, beyond my initiative or any human initiative, but not beyond God the Father's gracious will for communion with Creation."[51] In this context, one would have to come to terms with the distinction between the church's ministry of reconciliation and what Christ has done outside (*extra nos*) and on behalf (*pro nobis*) of us, and not only in us and through us (*in nobis*), once and for all (the *ephapax* of Rom 6: 10).[52] At this point, we need to recognise that what holds the ecclesial community together is not a common moral activity but the fundamental asymmetry between divine and human action underscored by the work of Christ through which God reconciled the world to himself (2 Corinthians 5: 19) and our ministry of reconciliation. John Webster posits that:

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> The church, therefore, lives in that sphere of reality in which it is proper to acknowledge and testify to reconciliation because we have been reconciled; in which it is fitting to make peace because peace was already made; in which it is truthful to speak to and welcome strangers because ourselves have been spoken to and welcomed by God, and so have become no longer strangers but fellow-citizens.[53]

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50 Smit, "The Truth and Reconciliation Commission", 3.

51 G. Jones, *Embodying forgiveness: A theological analysis,* Grand Rapids, MI: WB Eerdmans, 1995, 18; Also quoted in Conradie, "Reconciliation as a guiding vision", 77.

52 Conradie, "Reconciliation as a guiding vision", 77.

53 J. Webster, "The ethics of reconciliation", In: C. Gunton (ed.), *The Theology of Reconciliation*, 120; Also quoted in Conradie, "Reconciliation as a guiding vision", 77.

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In this context, Volf's cautionary remark reminds us, however, that final reconciliation is not the work of human beings but is attributed to the new beginning offered by the Triune God.[54] Emphasising Christ's atoning work in its proper Trinitarian perspective helps widen the multifaceted meaning of reconciliation. In the South African context, this has particular relevance for healing and the bringing together broken relationships. In the context of all the soteriological metaphors discussed above, reconciliation has the potential of being the most inclusive and comprehensive. Ross Langmead remarks that the comprehensive potential of reconciliation includes "cosmic reconciliation, the Hebrew notion of *shalom*, the meaning of the cross, the psychological effects of conversion, the work of the Holy Spirit, the overcoming of barriers between Christians, the work of the church in the world, peace-making, movements towards ethnic reconciliation and the renewal of ecological balances between humanity and its natural environment."[55] In all of these examples, the most important facet of reconciliation is undoubtedly the motif of restoring broken relationships.

Wolfhart Pannenberg underscores the goal of reconciliation as the restoration of the sin-broken fellowship of humanity with God, the source of life. This does not mean human relationships are relegated from this equation. In fact, filial human relationships are positively affirmed by God. However, through the affirmation of human relationships independent from God, human beings run the risk of being separated from God. In Pannenberg's words:

> In the process the creaturely independence of humans had to be, not set aside, but renewed. It had been eliminated by the bondage of sin and by death, though sin had deceived us by picturing an autonomy in full possession of life that it would make it possible for us to attain. If, however, our reconciliation to God is to renew us in independent existence, to free us for the first time for true

54 Volf, *Exclusion and embrace*, 110.

55 R. Langmead, "Transformed relationships: reconciliation as the central model for mission", *Mission Studies* 25. 2008, 5-20, 6.

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independence, this cannot come solely from the Father, nor can it be achieved solely by the sending of the Son into this world. It must happen on our side as well.[56]

In other words, "this taking up is not merely in the sense of something that happens to them from outside but as a liberation to their own identity, though not in their own power. This takes place through the Spirit. Through the Spirit reconciliation with God no longer comes upon us solely from outside. We ourselves enter into it."[57] On this point, Christoph Schwöbel's formulation is to the point. In his view, "the gift of the Spirit places the life of believers in a twofold horizon: it bridges the gulf between the past death and resurrection of Christ and the present of the life of believers, and makes the eschatological horizon of the ultimate future already present for believers as a transforming power which includes them and the universe in relationship to the love of God in Christ."[58] So, whatever else Christ's atoning work may be about, its central focus is the restoration of broken relationships. This is not just a past event but an ongoing process through the work of the Holy Spirit. Here Paul Fiddes uses the example "forgiveness", not just as the "cancelling of debt" but moreover as the restoration of a broken relationship leading to a new covenant-based relationship of mutual love and commitment.[59] In this context, one may suggest that the theological perspectives provide not only inspiration but also underscore the accountability of Christians to continue engaging in the ministry of reconciliation in church and society. God has reconciled the world to himself in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit; this means that South Africans (and Christians in particular) should continue working towards reconciliation irrespective of the social markers that continue to divide us. The cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ provide hope that injustices and enmity,

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56 W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Translated by G. W. Bromiley, Vol. 2, New York: T & T Clark, 2004, 449-450.

57 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 449-450.

58 C. Schwöbel, "Reconciliation: From biblical observations to dogmatic reconstructions", In: C. Gunton (ed.), *The theology of reconciliation*, London: T & T Clark, 2003, 20.

59 P. Fiddes, *Past event and present salvation: The Christian idea of atonement,* Louisville, KT: Westminster John Knox, 1989, 15.

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even death and destruction, do not have the final word. Desmond Tutu cogently reminds us that God's forgiveness yields the imperative to forgive one another and furthermore, that the grace bestowed on those who receive it simply has to be shared with others.[60]

In the deepest theological sense of the word, reconciliation is best conceived as an elusive mystery, a dream that cannot be fathomed or achieved. It is what may sometimes be referred to as an eschatological reality. However, this should not allow anyone to domesticate the vision of reconciliation. In Conradie's words:

> It is precisely this vision, juxtaposed with current realities, that provides the source of hope, inspiration and dedication to engage in the ongoing process of reconciliation, precisely in the midst of enmity, faction fighting and structural violence. If this eschatological vision of reconciliation is retrojected into the distant past, one can indeed do justice to the 're-' in reconciliation: to be together *again* - even where no such togetherness existed in the past.[61]

Taking Aulén's typology into consideration, the *Belhar Confession* as one of the theological texts discussed in this study represents the most complete account of Christ's atoning work and its implications for the church. Article 3 of the confession states that:

> We believe that God has entrusted the church with 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 (2 Cor. 5:17-21; Matt. 5:13-16; Matt. 5:9; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21-22).
>
> [We believe] that God's life-giving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity, that God's life-giving Word and Spirit will enable the church to

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60 Tutu, *No future without forgiveness*, 218-220.

61 Conradie, "Reconciliation as a guiding vision", 78.

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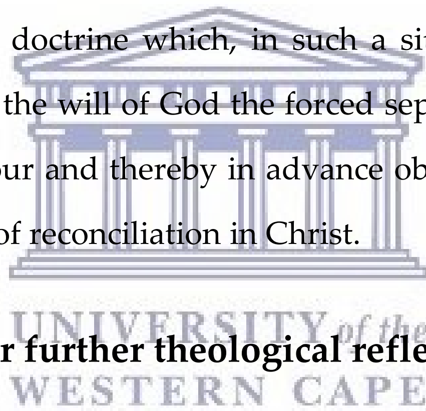
live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world (Eph. 4:17–6:23, Rom. 6; Col. 1:9-14; Col. 2:13-19; Col. 3:1–4:6);

[We believe] 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.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6.7 Towards an agenda for further theological reflection on reconciliation

The discourse on reconciliation continues to provoke an array of responses. It tantalises and annoys, refusing to be quantified, adequately explained or named. It is elusive and for now at least, beyond conceptual grasp. Moreover, as a theological discourse, it refuses to go away. It is for this reason that we need to ask what specific contribution Christian theology can make given the new challenges that have emerged. Here I identify at least three areas where theological engagement will be crucial.

Firstly, there is no shortage of calls for justice within the South African context. Such calls seek to address a number of concerns that are widely recognised. In this context the title of John de Gruchy's significant contribution, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* is illuminating. The advantage of this, as Van der Borght observes, is that there is broad consensus that

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reconciliation will only succeed if it includes the notion of restoring of justice. As a concept, restorative justice has deep biblical roots that could be helpful in articulating an alternative to neoliberal capitalist approaches to life and reconciliation in South Africa.[62] Despite an almost overwhelming emphasis on justice in the South African context, there is a curious lack of theoretical reflection among scholars on the notion of justice, at least in the fields of philosophy, ethics, religion, and theology. The word appears very often, of course, but typically as something self-evident, given the urgency of the issues addressed. It is almost as if there is some hesitation to theorise on justice in case this may create the impression of a distancing, objectivising, cold, all too rational approach, removed from the heat of the contestation.[63]

Secondly, Van der Borght refers to "the embodiment of reconciled diversity of people in faith communities".[64] Here the issue relates to how the diversity of peoples, cultures, ethnicities, and national identities is celebrated, and at the same time the unity of the faith as expressed in common Scriptures, common confessions and common rituals can be lived out? In other words, how can this be realised in the now and not as explained in *Ras Volk en Nasie* as an eschatological reality? Van der Borght reminds us that "Sunday morning is the most segregated hour", not only prompting the need to address the issue of confessional differences but moreover, the matter of socio-cultural identities. In this context, faith communities that provide examples of embodied reconciliation may have enormous potential for contributing to reconciliation in divided societies – where societies, like South Africa, tend to be split along the lines of race, ethnicity and class.[65]

Thirdly, if reconciliation is to be taken seriously by blacks, the need for a "reparations" paradigm would have to be addressed. Given the actual situation in which we find

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62 Van der Borght, "Reconciliation in the public domain", 426.

63 This particular issue is already being explored in one of the post-graduate modules convened by Ernst Conradie and myself at the University of the Western Cape. The lack of conceptual clarity is explored in the Course Outline of the Ethics 735 module offered in the second semester of 2017.

64 Van der Borght, "Reconciliation in the public domain", 426.

65 Van der Borght, "Reconciliation in the public domain", 426.

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ourselves – with our history of inequality, unaddressed violence, oppression, subjugation for which whites who have benefitted have yet to apologise, never mind make meaningful repair. On this basis, to presume that interracial relationships are even desirable for blacks is highly problematic. A focus on a "reparations" paradigm requires us to ask the question that seems unthinkable to many whites: that without repentance and more visible efforts to make meaningful repair, why would whites even assume reconciliation to be desirable or beneficial to blacks? In my estimation, blacks have more pressing concerns than merely focusing on their proximity to whites. These are but some of the issues that need to be addressed if reconciliation is to once again occupy the position as a guiding vision for South Africa.

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