

## **Chapter Three: The Kairos Document - Yesterday and Today**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The circumstances surrounding the publication of the Kairos Document (KD) can be found in the Report of the South African Council of Churches (June 24 – 28 1985). It was at this conference that Beters Naude, the then newly appointed General Secretary of the SACC, gave a prophetic statement:

I believe that there is general agreement within the rank of the SACC that apartheid is crumbling and that the clear signs are there of it only being a matter of time before the massive edifice is going to topple and fall. The when and how of this process can be debated but the fact that it is already beginning to happen there need not be a discussion. (SA History Archives, Wits Library)

(When the Kairos Document came into being, the writer of this thesis, based in Durban at that time, was one of the signatories to this document. The Rev Frank Chikane, who had flown specially from Johannesburg with the document was the General Secretary of the Institute for Contextual Theology at the time).

### **3.2 The context of the KD publication**

There were compelling reasons that brought about the production of this document. In the words of Charles Villa Vicencio then:

The intensity of the political situation in South Africa has compelled the Kairos theologians to look again into the theological tradition of the church to locate resources with which to meet the challenge of the times. (A Social History of the Church, 1988:162)

The early 80's saw South Africa slide into more and more chaos because of the intransigence of PW Botha the then apartheid State President of South Africa and the determination of activists and organisations throughout South Africa to bring about democracy in the country. Des van der Water, a minister in the United Congregational Church of South Africa, has given a detailed account of the build-up towards the publication of the KD in his PhD thesis. He correctly points out that the trigger for the publication of the KD must include the State of Emergency proclaimed by PW Botha on July 20 1985:

The imposition of the State of Emergency in 1985 represents a particularly brutal chapter in the Nationalist government's all-too-familiar kragdadige (strongman) retort to the burgeoning popular resistance to apartheid. (1998:16)

Whilst van der Water traces the repression from the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, and with the Soweto Uprising in 1976, the researcher would place the beginnings of serious promotion of conflict from the time when the colonial power, Great Britain, agreed to the formation of the Union of South Africa without the inclusion of indigenous people of the country in 1910, to the time when the Nationalist party won the elections in 1948, with the inclusion of forced removals in 1955 in fulfilment of the Group Areas Act which came into being after the National Party came to power.

To understand the context and the importance of the KD, it is equally necessary to understand the context of the document. What was the state of the nation during the years leading to the KD?

### **3.2.1 Soweto students' uprising (1976)**

The then apartheid government had gone too far by ordering students to learn certain subjects in the Afrikaans language. Representations were made but they fell on deaf ears. Apart from the Afrikaans language issue, there was the fact that the so-called Bantu Education had been designed as an inferior education compared to that of whites:

Although state spending on African education increased dramatically under the Botha administration (from R68, 84 million in 1978 to R237 million by mid-1985), the South African Institute of Race Relations reported that in the period of 1982-83 R1 385 was spent on educating every white pupil, compared with R871 for every Indian, R593 for every coloured pupil and R192 for every African schoolchild. Africans were particularly bitter that in many areas their education system was still rooted in the Verwoerdian theory of preparing them only for manual work. (The Reader's Digest Association, 1988:481)

The Soweto uprising of students had been preceded by another catalyst for change: the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre. As stated above, the Sharpeville massacre resulted in the calling of the Cottesloe consultation which the World Council of Churches facilitated. Within the Dutch Reformed churches the battle continued to rage with those who supported the outcomes of the Cottesloe consultation and those who did not. There were individuals within the DRC who continued to suffer exclusion from essential church structures because of their support for change (Elphick and Davenport 1997:148). Individuals such as Benjamin Keet and Barend J Marais (professors in Systematic theology and Church History respectively) were ostracised by their church for speaking out against the Verwoerdian idea of social engineering which relegated black people to the doldrums of poverty and quasi-literacy in South Africa. (ibid.)

### **3.2.2 Mounting pressure during the 1980s**

Going back to the 1980's, the General Secretary's report of the SACC gives a general view of what the situation was at the time when the KD was written. Under the sub-title *Unrest and Conflict*, Dr Beyers Naude wrote:

From September 1984 when the first major clashes between communities and the police in the black townships occurred, there has been an ongoing situation of unrest in our country. It has developed to such a degree that one is fully justified to describe the situation as the

beginnings of a civil war. The situation of conflict has been aggravated by police actions, by calling in the army to support the police, by constant deaths, woundings and arrests in many parts of the country. (June 24 – 28 1985, *SA History Archives*, Wits Library)

From the above statement alone, it is clear that the oppressed people of South Africa had already made up their minds that they were going to fight for their liberation. One wonders sometimes whether the contribution of the oppressed masses towards their own liberation is being fully recognised by South Africans today in general, and the ruling party, in particular. Frank Meintjies, for example, in explaining rising anger from people even after the democratic elections, states the following:

Generally speaking, there is a need for black people's personal experience of suffering under apartheid to be heard. They want acknowledgement that they were hobbled and constrained by a system designed to feather white people's nests. They want to know that what they have endured will not be forgotten. Somehow, in their workplaces and in business circles, they find this affirmation, by and large, not forthcoming, hence the outburst of anger and bitterness. (2006:45)

### **3.2.2.1 A brief report of the SACC concerning the situation**

The sub-headings of the General Secretary's report to the National Conference quoted above showed the seriousness of the situation then. The General Secretary spoke of the unrest and conflict that was enveloping the country. South Africa had become a pressure cooker. The black community itself had become restless and there was conflict within it. The SACC had given the green light for the day of prayer for the end of unjust rule. In addition there were the treason trials that were in process, the South African Defence Force had killed people in Botswana. There was also the disinvestment issue which had also become a very useful and effective tool against the regime. The report also spoke of an alternative society. Naude, the author and Acting General secretary, ended the report with the following words:

May I close this report by sharing with you the conviction that the period awaiting us could increasingly be one of tension, conflict and crisis and that both the SACC and its member churches should prepare ourselves for increasing demands which will be made upon us in our witness to Jesus Christ, His identification with those who suffer and are oppressed, and His prayer that true peace and reconciliation may be the gift and the experience of all His people. More than ever we will need the strengthening with prayer, biblical reflection on faith and hope... (SA History Archives)

The above are sombre words which spelt out clearly what awaited activists and the community of South Africa. People's anger rose sharply because in 1983, the SA Government had passed a new constitution which the General Secretary of the SACC correctly diagnosed as an act of provocation aimed at the oppressed and would therefore arouse the anger and bitterness which had been suppressed for years because the new constitution was a further entrenchment of isolating black people from the main stream of government while giving a small group to wield power over the rest:

...in concentrating power in the hands of a small leadership group, the government has created a situation of increasing resistance which cannot be resolved as long as the new constitution remains in operation... (General Secretary's Report, June 24 -25, 1985)

Naude continued to hold the valid and only plausible view that unless the government released all political prisoners and allowed political exiles to return and conducted free and fair elections, there would never be peace in the country.

Those were prophetic words indeed and stated three months before the publication of the KD in September 1985, and six years before FW de Klerk's famous February 1990 announcement of exactly what Dr Beyers Naude had stated as a prerequisite for peace.

### 3.2.2.2 The effect of the state of emergency and rent boycotts

There was also an announcement from PW Botha on July 20 1985, that there would be a state of emergency imposed on 36 magisterial districts. A state of emergency is very harsh because it curbs the very little freedom that there is and is very dangerous because people get hurt. In Durban, the violent death of Victoria Mxenge who was a leading civil rights lawyer and had defended many activists, sparked widespread uprisings which led to many deaths. (*The Readers Digest Association*, 1988:483)

The above-mentioned state of emergency then had to be understood in the light of the kairos - the given opportunity – which Nolan says:

The kairos or moment of truth has come *because the day of liberation is near*. Throughout the Bible a kairos is determined and constituted by imminence or nearness of an *eschaton*. (1988:183)

Colleen Ryan mentions that there was an eruption of anger from the black townships of the Vaal Triangle:

The trigger for the uprising was the promulgation of rent increases by the Lekoa Town Council and, as the violence spread to other areas, it was clear South Africa was entering a new phase of resistance and unrest. More than ten people died on the first day of the uprising – including four black town councillors who were set alight and burnt to death – and there was widespread burning of schools, shops, beer halls and other facilities. For the first time South African Defence Force soldiers were sent into the townships. (2005:202)

The facts are that it was the sacrifices and contributions of the people who had left the country, and those who died inside and outside South Africa, and those who were arrested and detained, and others who remained within the country and confronted the apartheid machinery head on with business

boycotts and black Christmases amongst other serious efforts that all together, brought about the significant change in the country.

### **3.2.2.3 The rise of trade unions and impact of industrial action**

In 1922 there had been a miners' strike that led to the introduction of the Labour Relations Act (LRA) which was drafted in 1924. The one major flaw of the LRA was that it only recognised white labour unions for wage negotiations. By 1972 there had been a lot of disquiet amongst the black work force because of rising inflation and an inability to meet their material needs.

As early as 1974, a British parliamentary committee had called for a 'code of practice' for British companies operating in South Africa and which would press for job advancement, put an end to wage and other discrimination at work and recognise African unions. (The Reader's Digest Association, 1988:461)

But as profits were falling because of a highly dissatisfied workforce a number of stayaways ensued which forced employers to request the Government to act. In 1977 the Government appointed the Wiehahn commission under Professor Nic Wiehahn. After two years of this commission, the Government was forced to extend the LRA to include African workers.

There were many other efforts by workers to force change. In 1979, there was the formation of a non-racial Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) which had become the largest union with 95 000 members in 387 factories (ibid). In 1980 there was also a black-consciousness-aligned union bearing the name Council of Unions in South Africa (CUSA). In 1982 one of the strongest unions, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) was formed with more than 100 000 workers (op cit 489). It is from these ranks that formidable leaders like Cyril Ramaphosa (one of the leaders in negotiations for a democratic South Africa) had come.

In 1985 the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) was formed. This was a giant federation of trade unions with the exception of black-consciousness-aligned trade unions such as the Azanian Confederation of Trade Unions (AZACTU) and the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU):

The formation of COSATU was accompanied by a massive wave of strikes, with 1985 seeing the highest number of strikes in 10 years. A May Day stay away in 1986 was supported by more than 1.5 million people countrywide. (ibid.)

It was at this time when the Sullivan Code was also adopted in the USA, started by the Reverend Leon Sullivan, urging the removal of all discrimination in the workplace. (op. cit. 461)

It is important to note that mobilisation against the apartheid Government intensified. There were a number of protests organised by trade unions, student organisations and other civic movements. This whole unrest spread to a number of townships within the country and it was becoming impossible to stop. With the intention of wrecking the economy and forcing big business to take note, there were a number of what was termed “stayaways”. They were called stayaways because workers boycotted going to work and students would also stay away from school. (Ryan, 2005:202)

By March of that year, the focus of resistance had shifted to the Eastern Cape. On 21 March, on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sharpeville shootings, police in the Eastern Cape shot and killed 19 people in Langa, sparking an escalation in the bloodshed... (ibid.)

#### **3.2.2.4 Internecine fighting: Another contributor to the Kairos moment**

From Dr Naude’s report, quoted above (June 24 – 25 1985), there are further pointers to what the situation was when the KD was written: There had been internecine fighting between followers of the United Democratic Front (UDF)



and Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO) in the then Transvaal and in Port Elizabeth. The then Bishop Desmond Tutu and Dr Alan Boesak had successfully mediated a truce between the organisations. It was going to complicate matters to have the suffering groups fighting among themselves. Even if the perpetrators of apartheid would rejoice in this type of fighting, in the end the whole country was going to suffer the consequences of such fights.

### **3.2.2.5 SACC's call for a day of prayer for the end of unjust rule**

Dr Naude had also reported on the call by the SACC for a day of prayer to end unjust rule. The Government had attempted to divide the churches but the Church leadership had succeeded in stemming the intended division. The call for the end to unjust rule in South Africa was a very sensitive matter for the Government because it had pursued the policy of apartheid on scriptural grounds. For the SACC, to call for an end to unjust rule could have been, and was, something traumatic to both the apartheid Government in particular and the DRC membership in general.

In retrospect, this was a decisive moment in the church struggle. The SACC had now publicly declared the state to be a 'tyrannical regime' and was praying for its removal. In this tense context the internationally celebrated Kairos Document was published by the Institute for Contextual Theology. (Elphic & Davenport, Eds. 1997:168)

The Theological Statement makes it plain that the Sharpeville massacre had also been part of a kairos moment: The prayer for an end to unjust rule was particularly irksome to the apartheid Government because it was a Government that erroneously believed that its actions had been sanctioned by God to lead the country according to "separate development" – a euphemism for apartheid.

The reality of the Sharpeville atrocity was recognised throughout the world, in the wake of which South African and world church leaders

met at Cottesloe in December 1960 to reject the apartheid system as unchristian. (Theological Statement On Prayer For The End To Unjust Rule' June 16 Memorial Service, SACC documents, History Archives, Wits, 1985, dated according to SACC Minute of the Executive, 18-19 February 1986)

The Soweto uprising was also seen as a kairos moment within the theological statement: The uprising had forced the Church to pay attention to the pain that had been plaguing the country for a very long time. This pain had just been experienced again in the country by the killing of people at Uitenhage (ibid). Churches within the SACC and SACBC had continually voiced their condemnation of oppressive political and unproductive economic structures. The basis of this condemnation was supported by the theological belief that God is a God of justice and was therefore uncompromisingly against the oppression of people. (ibid.)

The most telling statement in the June 16 Theological Statement was the unequivocal call for a regime change. That call in itself was a clear statement from the Church that it was standing where the poor and oppressed were standing and was prepared to risk the wrath of the State:

We have taken the reluctant and drastic step of declaring apartheid to be contrary to the declared will of God. We now pray that God will replace the present structures of oppression with the ones that are just, and remove those in power who persist in defying his laws, installing in their place leaders who will govern with justice and mercy. (ibid.)

The June 16 statement, though brief, was a thoroughly theologically researched statement. It quoted theologians such as Tertullian, St Augustine, St Thomas, including the Dutch Calvinist Abraham Kuyper and Karl Barth.

### 3.2.2.6 Khotso House bombing (1988)

The Security Police raided Khotso House during June and July 1986. The General Secretary of the SACC reported to the executive that it had become well-known that not just the SACC but a number of other organisations had been raided in June and July that year (1986). A number of operational files had been removed from Khotso House and that obviously affected programmes such as Inter-Church Aid which assisted the destitute. Other documentation consisted of other funds which had to do with relief work such as the National Emergency Fund which dealt with those who were being affected by the situation of detentions, arrests, and which was assisting families whose bread-winners had been detained. (General Secretary's Report to the Executive, Johannesburg, 19 -20 August 1986)

The General Secretary mentioned that there were fears that the Government might act against the SACC. The bombing of Khotso House happened at the time when Frank Chikane was the General Secretary in 1988 when two very powerful bombs were planted by security forces serving under Adriaan Vlok, who was then minister of "Safety and Security". The irony was, of course, inescapable (John Allen 2006:7). The bombing of Khotso House merited a very strongly worded editorial from ICT News:

Khotso House is more than a building. It had become over the years an outstanding symbol of the church's stand against injustice. For so many of the poor and the oppressed people of South Africa, Khotso House had become a refuge, a haven, a place of comfort and hope. It represented in many ways the caring heart of the Churches, the house of compassion and justice – or as its very name suggests, the house of peace. (*Editorial, ICT News, September 1988, VOL 6 NO. 3, SAHA, Wits Library*)

That edition of ICT News went further to show how the bombing of Khotso House had become an exhibit of the dividedness of Christendom in South Africa: The phenomenon of militant right wing Christians appearing on the

side of the government complicated the situation. This was the point raised by the KD except that right wing Christianity, an oxymoron, did not even fall under “Church Theology”. It was some kind of sectional angry belief with a blind desire to protect white interests. There was thus a crisis of faith within Christendom:

Christianity today in South Africa is divided, just as Judaism in the time of Jesus was divided. ‘Brother will deliver up brother to death...and you will be hated by many for my name’s sake (Mt 10:21-22)... The rise of right wing religion in our country in recent times has highlighted the divisions in Christianity. (ibid.)

What had become a challenging time was that right wing Christians who were against the people who were struggling and agitating for justice had become militant. Thus the bombing of Khotso House would be supported by them:

Militant right wing Christians are now going out of their way to ‘malign’ anyone who takes sides with the God of justice. They do not seem to have any theological arguments to justify their defence of the status quo. (ibid.)

These are strong words and just emphasises what was mentioned above about the dividedness of the Church and worse still, divided on issues of justice which should have been beyond debate.

### **3.3 The publication of the Kairos Document (1985)**

In 1985, the institute for Contextual Theology held a conference from May 30 to June 2 at Hammanskraal. At this conference, church people and church practitioners expressed dire frustration at what was going on in the country. There was a strong criticism of English-speaking churches for their inability or unwillingness to confront Apartheid. It was at this conference that the idea of

the publication for the KD itself but also for a movement around the socio-political, theological and ethical issues addressed by the document came about. (Des van der Water, 1998:33)

Dr Bonganjalo Goba, according to van der Water, addressed the conference and made the submission that Christians who were involved in the struggle were marginalised by the Church. The institutional Church was being challenged by movements such as Ministers United for Christian Co-responsibility (MUCCOR), Christian Action Movement (CAM), Diakonia in Durban among others. The bombing of Botswana by the apartheid forces in June 1985 prompted a group of Christian leaders to meet secretly. Among the people in this group were the Rev Frank Chikane, who was then General Secretary of ICT, Fr Albert Nolan, the Rev Dr Goba, Sister Bernard Ncube, Rev Molefe Tsele and Fr Chris Langeveldt. The meeting was at Ipelegeng Community Centre in Soweto. The aim was to situate the crisis theologically and to map out an appropriate response that could be adopted by the churches and Christians in general. (Van der Water, 33f)

In an interview with Frank Chikane, the researcher gave a detailed process of the manner in which the KD was born. He had returned from detention to find that the State apparatus was inflicting the worst violence on the people. Chikane further asserts:

I returned to a situation where the pain was deep and it was like the end of the world. I had to ask “where is God? What is God going to do about this? What does God want us to do?” The *kairos* concept is the moment of crisis and it was such that you could *not just not* (*my emphasis*) do anything about it. When we realised that there were people who had abandoned the struggle but were still detained, it became clear to us that we would rather suffer doing something than be detained for doing nothing. (Interview)

Chikane then mentions how they started redefining terminology pertaining to what had been happening:

It is at that stage that that we said “No, I would rather suffer doing something”. So we began to call it meaningful suffering and differentiated it from senseless suffering. Meaningful suffering meant that I would rather suffer doing something than and let me die doing something. I will die but I will leave something behind. It might be for the coming generations. But others suffer just for doing nothing. They have retreated, but they are still suffering. That is useless suffering – senseless suffering. (ibid.)

Chikane says when he returned from prison he still found friends in the struggle – comrades - running the ICT even though he had been the Director. It was the thoughts mentioned above which made him engage again. A decision was then taken in which these friends suggested that they should call other people to discuss the question: What is it that God wanted us to do in the midst of this crisis? Chikane said that he had thought they were engaging in non-violence. But then he had to change his mind about this thought. He said that when a hit-list was discovered which had thirteen names of himself, of the then Bishop Tutu and Father Lebamang Sebidi, among others. Someone had come to tell them that they had been militarily trained at Westgate even though the trainees had not been told why they were being trained. It was when they discovered what they had to do that they decided to go and inform the people who were being targeted. Many people who were on the hit list took cover but he could not because he had been restricted. The choice was between taking cover and going to jail or going into exile, neither of which were preferable to him. It was at that time that he reflected on the matter of non-violence when people who came to guard him came with arms. When he remonstrated with them about his non-violence stand it is when they responded by telling him that in order for him to have the luxury of non-violence, they had to use violence to guard him. That is when the contradiction of non-violence began to dawn on him. It was then that for the first time in his life he felt he needed to have an AK 47 because:

At that moment I felt strongly that I wanted one person to die with me so that the body of that person could be traced and used by others to identify the person who had come to kill me. (ibid.)

With regard to the KD, Chikane says they never had a document in mind when the discussions started. The ecumenical nature and the mix of theologies that had come together necessitated explanations for the terms that were being used. For example, Chikane's point of reference was more from a Pentecostal perspective and this to a Dominican like Albert Nolan was not everyday language; similarly, Nolan's terminology of the state being tyrannical was foreign language to a Pentecostal like Chikane. It was then that people were asked to write some explanatory notes for the next meetings to make sense of what was being said. These notes gradually developed into the KD as more progress was being made. (Interview)

Several people were requested to write chapters and Fr Nolan was asked to write a preface. In September 1985 the Kairos Document was released by ICT. It immediately became a watershed event in the country. In the SACC report mentioned above, Beyers Naude wrote in glowing terms about the KD. He introduced it as the Theology of Liberation and that it had received unprecedented and significant attention from overseas and elsewhere:

The interest displayed around the world in the Kairos Document was unprecedented in the theological history of South Africa. Never before have so many millions of Christians of all confessions around the world occupied themselves so seriously in theological discussions and debate with a theological document as happened in the case of the Kairos Document in relation to the policy of apartheid. (ibid.)

The statement further stated that the apartheid machinery immediately went into action to brand the document "Marxist". But according to the quoted report, the Kairos Document had inspired the writing of another document with similar strong views as the KD called the Evangelical Witness in South Africa. and which had been signed by:

...32 clergy and preachers of Evangelical, Pentecostal, Baptist churches and charismatic organisations – a document which clearly shows the reaction which the Kairos Document has evoked in the minds of many Christians in South Africa. (ibid.)

The report went on to urge member of the SACC to respond as soon as possible to both the KD and the Evangelical Witness in South Africa. Thus it could be seen that while there were many efforts towards the fight against apartheid as generated by the different church groupings chief among which were the SACC and the SACBC, the KD remained the one document that became of tremendous importance to the debate around the world especially on apartheid, even though the KD was not the sole player in the field of religious struggle against apartheid. It could no longer be disputed that the struggle and attack against apartheid in South Africa involved a very large majority of people and many groups. Sub-headings of minutes of the SACC of 1986 and 1987 give an ominous context of the time of the KD and also reveal efforts with which the SACC was involved. Villa- Vicencio's words are apt here:

In terms of doctrine and principle the English-speaking Churches cannot be faulted, and they have produced numerous courageous leaders, both black and white, who have endured both the wrath of the government and the opposition of the Afrikaans Reformed Church leaders for their stance. But it is in their *general practice* that the English-speaking Churches are found wanting. (de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio, 1983:67)

### **3.3.1 Rightwing attack on the KD**

#### **3.3.1.1 Signposts**

Equally true is the fact that it was not the DRC only, nor the majority of Afrikaners alone, who supported apartheid. There were other groups and other publications that tried hard and tirelessly to counter the SACC and other



church efforts to fight against apartheid. One of these was called *Signposts*. Its mission statement read:

*SIGNPOSTS* is a periodical to inform Christians of all denominations of the threat posed to their faith by the infiltration of Marxist-based ideas under the guise of new interpretations of the Gospel. *SIGNPOSTS* adheres to the conservative Biblical understanding of faith as traditionally held by Christians. (*SIGNPOSTS, History Archives, Wits, undated*)

Its editor was Edward Cain, and it was based in Pretoria. The thrust of *SIGNPOSTS'* attack was aimed at the ecumenical movement which included the SACBC and SACC. *Signposts* did not differentiate between political movements such as the ANC and the UDF, and the Church. It lumped them into one:

In fact the religious faction within the revolutionary “church” is drawn from the leadership of many of the institutional churches which are members of the SA Council of Churches and from the SA Catholic Bishops Conference. The proposal was to make the Methodist Church a “Peace Church”. (ibid.)

There is a sense in which lumping the ANC, UDF and the Church into one was correct in so far as all three were concerned with justice. But *Signposts* intention was clearly meant as a “smear” tactic so that the Church could be undermined in its contribution to the fight against apartheid. *Signposts* was not just conservative in its attack but it was precisely its display of carelessness about people’s suffering and its strong support for the status quo which made it such an opponent of the KD. The KD therefore, in its critique of State Theology mentioned the following:

State Theology needs its own prophets and it manages to find them from the ranks of those who profess to be ministers of God’s Word in some of our Churches. What is particularly tragic for a Christian is to

see the number of people who are fooled by these false prophets and their heretical theology. (1986:8)

*Signposts* worked tirelessly to entrench the conservative, mainly white-held views, against the liberation of South Africa from the clutches of apartheid. One edition of *Signposts* dedicated the whole publication under the title: THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT'S LONG CAMPAIGN AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA (sic). The World Council of Churches was described as:

...one of the 13 International Communist front organisations established since 1945, by *An Encyclopedic (sic) Dictionary of Marxism, Socialism and Communism* by Josef Wilczynski. (*Signposts*, Vol. 6 No. 4 1987)

This document, which propounded the then minority Government's view that the ecumenical struggle against apartheid was nothing more than a smokescreen for Marxism, covered quite a wide period, starting from 1975 with WCC Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) to August 1987 when the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) would be meeting where similar "anti-south African resolutions will be passed".

The above-quoted *Signposts* publication went on to give some details of almost all the ecumenical efforts to normalise the South African community branding those efforts as the "campaign against South Africa". In its view, that campaign was made up of organisations such as the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches which "are housed in the same building in Geneva, Switzerland and work very closely together". The End Conscription Campaign (ECC) as well as the Dutch Reformed Mission Church also fell in this group because it also called for the release of ANC leader, Nelson Mandela. The National Initiative for Reconciliation (NIR), launched in Pietermaritzburg in 1985 by Africa Enterprise and funded by World Vision was also seen as an organization which was against the then regime in South Africa because it called for, according to *Signposts*, the removal of police and army from the

townships, the release of detainees and political prisoners, the dropping of charges against treason trialists and the return of exiles. Signposts then connected NIR to the “campaign against South Africa” with this statement:

These demands were very similar to ones made by the SACC, ANC and UDF. Eight of the 13 people who signed the Statement of Affirmation were senior officials of the SACC or closely linked to it.

NIR was also “accused” of:

...providing a platform for churchmen who have met with the ANC leaders to give their impressions and appeal for the government to negotiate with the Marxist organisation. (ibid.)

The NIR consisted of Christians who were merely trying to work out a way of beginning the long process of reconciliation. Yet *Signposts* continued to attack the NIR while at the same time attacking the *Kairos Document* and the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT). The statement of the *Evangelical Witness to South Africa* was not spared either. It was viewed as a:

...rehashed version of Kairos, entitled *Evangelical Witness to South Africa*... Its message was the same as Kairos’s except that it was aimed at drawing in Bible-believing Christians who are outside the SACC circles. (ibid.)

The researcher has quoted extensively from *Signposts* because it is also very important to know the type of influences with which conservative white and black people had to deal with and why it had become a serious uphill challenge to change people’s attitudes towards oppression and hatred within conservative circles. It should therefore not be surprising that it took so long for South Africa to come to its senses.

### 3.3.1.2 Gospel Defence League (GDL)

Apart from *Signposts* there were other publications such as the Gospel Defence League (GDL) and the Catholic Defence League, which played a major role as apologists for the repressive government. Ironically all these attacks on the KD and associated institutions were purported to be in defence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not clear where their funding came from but it is clear that these publications were heavily subsidised because they were issued free of charge.

The GDL released a two-page document with a clear bias against the SACC and related organisations. Its writers varied from time to time, and it was published in Cape Town. This publication also launched a vicious attack on the KD. It regarded the KD as a “marxist (sic) revolutionary” document. But more seriously, the GDL published a report of a convention that was purportedly held in Frankfurt, Germany, by a grouping calling itself Germany’s Confessing Fellowship. It had a very interesting theme: “*Revolution in the name of Jesus? The Gospel in the Face of the South African Conflict*”. This document then went on to report how this Confessing Fellowship saw the KD.

Most of these critics were superficial in their critique of the KD. They did not go into the detail or substance of the KD. What one finds is a general condemnation of the KD. Beyerhaus, already cited earlier and who had become the guru of the GDL, had very strong words against the KD even before he had given reasons for declaring it a catastrophe:

I have the strong impression that the KD, indeed, is a manifestation of false prophecy which, if heeded, will prove fatal not only for the future of South Africa and its people, especially its churches, but also for the rest of mankind, whose destiny is closely intertwined with the destiny of this beloved country at the southern end of Africa. (1987:13)

These are strong words indeed. Interestingly, the format of the publication was almost similar to that of the KD – a booklet of an A4 size with 23 pages.

The irony was that Beyerhaus had not found it fit to condemn a policy that discriminated and oppressed so many indigenous people of South Africa. His attack was quite surprising, to say the least. He was condemning the KD because it was attacking the system of apartheid. In his words:

In the 2nd chapter the sponsors wage an all out attack on their main opponent, the present political system of South Africa. It is not an attack on the State as such, but rather on the underlying philosophical and moral foundation by which the system is upheld. (op. cit.14)

The words of Beyerhaus above are baffling. He agrees that the KD is not attacking persons but “the underlying philosophical and moral foundation by which the system is upheld”. One would have thought that what Beyerhaus is saying would actually make the KD a great document. The KD, even Beyerhaus agrees, is not attacking persons but the system. His point was that the KD should have stuck to racism (his words). That is so superficial as to perhaps not warrant a further word. Beyerhaus is attacking the very strength of the KD.

Those who attacked the KD failed to appreciate this very fundamental position of the KD, not to attack persons but rather the system of oppression. Albert Nolan, in his book, *God in South Africa*, gives a very clear explanation of the system people were struggling against:

The most characteristic form of suffering in South Africa, though by no means the worst form, is the suffering through humiliation. Anyone who was not legally classified as white was treated as inferior not only by individual whites but by the whole system of laws with their “whites-only” restrictions. This legalised humiliation, this systemic attack upon the dignity of so many human beings, shocked and scandalised the world. (1988:51)

It is very interesting that Professor Beyerhaus wrote on behalf of the Gospel Defence League a critical analysis of the KD in which he was attempting to

answer whether the KD was a “challenge or danger to the church”. The GDL was dead against those who were struggling against apartheid. Beyerhaus, for example, mentioned that in the KD “Jesus Christ is in no way the centre (sic) of this kairos. In the decisive statements *He is not even mentioned*” (his emphasis) (1987:11). Beyerhaus ignored the statement of the KD in which the writers clearly mention that:

A prophetic theology would have to have in it the mind of Christ, his willingness to suffer and die, his humility and his power, his willingness to forgive and his anger about sin, his spirit of prayer and action. (KD, 1986:18)

Furthermore, the adherents of the GDL ignored many aspects of the KD which were clearly biblical and Christ-centred. The writers of the KD also mention unequivocally that:

When we read the Bible from the point of view of our daily experience of suffering and oppression, then what stands out for us is the many, many vivid and concrete descriptions of suffering and oppression throughout the Bible culminating in the cross of Jesus Christ. (1986:19)

### **3.3.1.3 Letter from the Confessing Fellowship of Germany**

The letter focussed on ‘Liberation Theology’, and took a critical look at the ‘Kairos Document’. The letter stated that at the close of the convention “104 European (and African) Church leaders signed an open “*Letter from Confessing Christians in Germany to their fellow Christians in South Africa*”. The letter attacked one of the main donor partners of the SACC, the German Council of Churches (EKD) for supporting the SACC financially. Furthermore, “the EKD also propagates the Marxist revolutionary ‘Kairos Document’.

The “Letter” went on to condescendingly concede that though they could that the KD sprang from “an impatience” with continued suffering of the masses and lacked a clear reference to Jesus Christ. The letter ironically mentioned

the very contentious issue of putting forward the issue of reconciliation which the Cross of Jesus had brought in a way that gave the impression that the KD rejected reconciliation:

Indeed, the central message of the Good News, 'reconciliation', is rejected as irrelevant in the present South African situation. In the Kairos Document the Gospel seems to be intermixed with Marxist revolutionary ideology, which gives an alien, antibiblical content to familiar words. Jesus is presented chiefly as the political champion of the poor and oppressed, not as the Lamb of God, given for us, who takes away the sin of the world. He is therefore not the biblical, but a false Christ. (2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 1:6-9)

The insensitivity of the letter regarding the suffering masses of South Africa was mind-boggling. What the letter was unable to realise was that it had not been just black people who had suffered. There were many white people who were trapped first by the colour of their skin which they also could not change even if they wanted to, and also by the policy which made them sacrifice their young men at the alter of the oppression of other races by being members of the SADF, SAPS or other security agents. Had this not been true, there would not have been the End Conscription Campaign (ECC). The KD had made it clear:

It is therefore not primarily a matter of trying to reconcile individual people but a matter of trying to change unjust structures so that people will not be pitted against one another as oppressor and oppressed. (op. cit. 22)

The letter-writers of the so-called confessing churches of Germany, could not have known that the struggle for liberation by blacks had started as early as 1887 with "Imvo Zabantsundu" (Native opinion), edited by John Tengo Jabavu who had the following aim:

To give untrammelled expression to African views and to help bring about closer bonds between blacks and between blacks and whites. African grievances on a wide range of subjects were ventilated in *Imvo...* ( Odendaal, 1984:12)

#### **3.3.1.4 Further condemnation of the KD**

The researcher has concentrated on Beyerhaus because he represented the views of many who were of the mind that the then government was ordained by God. Thus making reference to him or responding to his ideas was also to respond to those who supported the GDL. It must be remembered also that the publication of the KD did not receive acclaim from some eminent Church leaders while others applauded it. The KD, however, became news because the reaction to it was reported in the media. Cas St Leger of the *Sunday Times* made the following report:

Fiery condemnations greeted the publication this week calling on Christians to disobey the State. Shocking, un-Christian and reprehensible were some of the views of eminent theologians on the controversial Kairos Document. (29 September, 1985)

What was surprising was that in the same article, Professor Ben Engelbrecht, then head of Religious Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand was quoted as saying “the document is ghastly and all serious Christians should reject it”. This was an English university and these English-speaking universities were viewed as far less culpable in colluding against the people of South Africa.

The KD does not say that “Church Theology” was useless. It maintains that church theology was lukewarm and superficial:

In a limited, guarded and cautious way this theology is critical of apartheid. Its criticism, however, is superficial and counter-productive because instead of engaging in an in-depth analysis of the signs of the



times, it relies upon a few stock ideas derived from Christian tradition and then uncritically and repeatedly applies them to our situation. The stock ideas used by almost all these Church leaders that we would like to examine here are: reconciliation (or peace), justice and non-violence. (KD, 1986:9)

The above statement is underscored by what Reeves also observed:

The remarkable thing is that the growing tensions and problems created for the churches by the implementation of the racist theories of the ruling National Party did not lead even in the first decade of that rule to a head-on collision between any church and the State authorities. We are bound to ask why no such clash occurred. (Reeves, op. cit.)

### **3.3.1.5 Scepticism over the KD manifested by some church leaders**

But then Bishop Desmond Tutu also did not sign the KD: He had a different reason from those of theologians such as Peter Beyerhaus who wrote a negative response against the KD. Tutu felt the KD had not been very fair to those whites who had fought and sacrificed against apartheid. Yet the KD's position was more to concentrate on the suffering of the black masses and took for granted that it was understood that there were many whites who were against apartheid.

Tutu did not sign it; he thought it too abrasive and too easily dismissive of the white leadership of the multiracial churches. But he supported its thrust. (John Allen, 2006:288)

It was not surprising that Tutu did not sign because much as he was forcefully against apartheid, he was also very much aware of the contribution that white clerical leadership had contributed to the struggle for liberation. Indeed there were many white people who had been involved in the struggle even though not with the same intensity. Having said that though, as a researcher one

needs to say that the KD was not meant as a catalogue of praise but a theological treatise aimed at galvanising the Church into action. In any case, the leaving out of the contribution of whites in the struggle was minor compared to what was actually happening on the ground. People were dying and their dignity was being trampled upon mercilessly by the system of apartheid. The involvement of white people is beyond dispute. The words of Bishop Ambrose Reeves come to mind:

...it has to be remembered that from the moment the National Party came to power a number of churchmen in all churches were vocal in their opposition to apartheid, and among them a few were prepared to match their words with their actions. (*Notes and Documents*, 9/72)

Reeves then went on to mention priests such as the Rev Michael Scot whose protests against oppression earned him the status of *persona non grata* by the apartheid regime and so was banished from South Africa (*Notes and Documents* 9/72). Reeves emphasised that there were also many individual churchmen (sic) who challenged many other ordinary white members of the church to reject the inhuman policy of apartheid. (op. cit.)

In spite of this view from Tutu, “thirty of the signatories – a fifth of the total - were Anglican”. (ibid) It has to be noted that there were serious diversities in the approach even of the Church to the manner of dealing with a difficult government such as the one headed by PW Botha around that time.

Perhaps Tutu was right in that the issue was not about people’s colour but about the systemic oppression that was going on. There had been many white bishops such as Jooste de Blanc, Bishop Reeves, Fr Huddleston, and many others from the different churches who also took up the banner against apartheid. Indeed among those who signed it were many other white people such as James Cochrane and others.

Therefore the KD was a broad stroke which, in this writer’s view, did not expect that whites who had been involved would take exception in the way it

had been written. Certain sensitivities had to be swallowed as long as the people's suffering could be alleviated.

One of the other difficulties that the Church has faced has been the very ethos that the Church created about itself. It moved from being a less visible "salt of the earth" which mingles with people within the community, especially the poor and vulnerable. Instead, it moved with the powerful and espoused values of power, almost vying with the State for turf.

### **3.3.2 Bias of the critics of the KD**

The difficulty with critics such as those who supported the GDL was that they were also extremely one-sided. They were never seen to criticise the apartheid government. They never bothered about the dignity of all South Africans on all sides of the struggle, for and against, that was being trampled upon by those in power. Many soldiers under the apartheid regime were fighting on the side that was protecting the system of apartheid under the banner of the South African Defence Force. Many of them did not know how to deal with it, and many also fled; while others joined the End Conscription Campaign (ECC). It is for this reason that the KD says:

A regime that has made itself the enemy of the people has thereby also made itself the enemy of God. People are made in the image and likeness of God and whatever we do to the least of them we do to God.  
(Mt 25:49) (1986:24)

It might be added here that this researcher has difficulty in trying to find meaning in the almost vehement opposition to the KD from those people who claim to stand for Jesus and thus have become his security agents as if Jesus was in danger of extinction. Brueggemann is right when he says:

In the imperial world of Pharaoh and Solomon the prophetic alternative is a bad joke either to be squelched by force or ignored in satiation. But we are a haunted people because we believe the bad joke is rooted in

the character of God himself, a God who is not the reflection of Pharaoh or of Solomon... He is a God uncredentialed in the empire, unknown in the courts, unwelcome in the temple". (1978:42)

It is clear that many opponents of the KD were not innocent critics of the document. They were part of the whole power structure that has dominated the world for so long. There was a genuine fear on their part that the benefits they were having by South Africa remaining in white hands, were going to either be shared or fall away. It was for this reason that they were so lacking in compassion. Brueggemann again hits the nail on the head when he says:

Empires are never built or maintained on the basis of compassion. The norms of law (social) control are never accommodated to persons, but persons are accommodated to the norms. Otherwise the norms would collapse and with them the whole power arrangement. (1978:85)

These words are so reminiscent of the words ascribed to Jesus in the Gospel where He was constantly being dogged by the hierarchy regarding His putting people first above the law which, according to Him, was made for people and not vice versa. The apartheid social context was inert and uncaring. The following criticism is apt:

...the compassion of Jesus is to be understood not simply as a personal emotional reaction but as a public criticism in which he dares to act upon his concern against the entire numbness of his social context. (ibid.)

This is very interesting because Jesus also tried hard to sensitise the hierarchy of the synagogue without avail. His reading of the words of Isaiah which Luke quotes in Chapter 4:18 were a clear manifesto as to His intention concerning the leadership He had come to exercise. Jesus was in the prophetic mode and His actions could also have been echoing the words of the Prophet Micah:

He has showed you...what is good.

And what does the Lord require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy

And to walk humbly with your God. (Micah, 6:8 NIV)

### **3.3.3 Impact of the Kairos Document**

The KD however did not only meet with opposition. Many voices went up in praise and support of it. The General Secretary's report to the Executive of the SACC (19-20 August 1986) is apt here:

...it was the publication of the Kairos Document in September 1985 which sparked off a tremendous interest and concern in the most unexpected quarters. The interest displayed around the world in the Kairos Document was unprecedented in the theological history of South Africa.

On June 18 1987, a seminar on "Legitimacy of Governments" was held jointly by the Centre for Applied Legal Studies (Wits) and the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT).

The seminar was in response to the demand for a follow-up to the debates resulting from the publication of the Kairos Document in 1985 which had been produced by theologians and lay people concerned with the issues of state legitimacy and tyranny. The seminar provided the theoretical background to the debate. (Press Release, June 18 Circa 1987, SA History Archives)

Speakers at this seminar included Fr Lebamang Sebidi, who was also regarded as a Kairos Theologian, Dennis Davis, the then Professor of law at the University of Cape Town, Edwin Cameron then of the Centre for Applied Legal Studies, Professor Charles Villa Vicencio, then of the University of Cape Town, and Frank Chikane, then of the Institute for Contextual Theology.

The most fascinating positive response to the KD is to be found reported in *ICT News* three months after the publication of the document. At Sing Sing prison in New York, 11 prisoners who claimed to have 105 years in jail among them, adopted the KD:

We have come together also to reflect upon oppression of blacks by whites in South Africa. The focus of our reflection has been on the Kairos Document: "Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa". (*ICT News*, Vol. 4 No. 4, December 1986, *History Archives*, Wits)

The statement was published in full by *ICT News*. The statement went so far as to call on:

Christians in South Africa to dissociate themselves from any church that supports apartheid, for the authority of the church cannot supersede the authority of the Word of God, and God is always on the side of the oppressed. (*ibid.*)

The above goes to show how influential the KD had become within a short space of time of its publication. According to a press release by then General Secretary of ICT, Frank Chikane, who had travelled through Europe, the USA and Canada. The KD had generated great interest and it was being translated into many languages around the world and distributed widely.

The Kairos Document is particularly used in Universities around Europe and the U.S.A. as part of the study material in faculties of theology or religious studies. (ICT Document titled: *Press Release 26<sup>TH</sup>* May 1987, *History Archives*, Wits)

Interestingly, Dr Smanga Kumalo, a lecturer at the University of Natal, mentions that they still refer students to the KD so that they can get some insights into the theology of the struggle at the time. In the researcher's view, this is an important contribution to raising awareness of the students so that

they are able to recognise when churches stop being critical as they concentrate on doing what they consider to be “church work “only. The need for a holistic approach to theology which emanates from a lucid socio-economic analysis will always be a vital part of any serious-minded theologian or religious activist, as Kairos theologians have so ably demonstrated.

Chikane had gone to Sweden in 1987 to receive a Peace Prize on behalf of ICT. Diakonia of the Free Swedish Churches gives this prize annually to:

...churches and church groups in the Third World which have done outstanding work on justice and peace in their countries. This Peace Prize therefore was a recognition of our efforts in the Institute to develop a theology that will help all South Africans to face the reality of the unjust nature of our society and to work tirelessly for a just society which will appropriate the ideals of the kingdom of God in the World.  
(*ICT News*, 1987)

It is to be noted that in that press release, Chikane expressed some strong views on the need for the normalisation of the situation in South Africa. Chikane asked some pertinent but rhetorical questions regarding the then oppressive situation in South Africa:

What do you do in a country where, all those who talk about a just society, where all will be equal before the law; about a non-racial society, where no one will be discriminated against because of the colour of his or her skin; [where all those who talk about a] democratic country, where all South Africans, black and white will participate equally in the decision making processes of the country? (ibid.)

Another significant part of the Press Release was the sub-topic titled: *In Solidarity with Southern African States*. In this sub-topic Chikane mentioned the suffering and pain brought on the surrounding states such as Zimbabwe, Botswana and Mozambique mainly because these states supported the liberation struggle of the people of South Africa. Chikane decried the fact that these states were:

...being held hostage economically, politically, and militarily simply because they receive our brothers and sisters who seek refuge there because of the system... We need to realise that their struggles [are] our struggle as much as they have taken ours as their struggle. We need to move beyond just sympathising with them and just condemning S.A. for its destabilisation strategy but our solidarity must be expressed in the form of action. (ibid.)

### **3.3.4 Some media coverage of the reaction to the publication of KD**

While those who criticised the KD found it wanting in theological and biblical grounding, the writers saw it as “Christian, biblical and theological”. The present writer strongly agrees with this latter view. The writer was a signatory to the document having agreed with its contents. The three identified theologies in the KD were an eye-opener to many of the concerned church practitioners and theologians.

The newsletter of the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT) found that the response from the townships had been far greater than had been expected. But the response internationally had also been exceptional:

The publication of this “Challenge to the Church” made front page headlines in some newspapers overseas. The Catholic Herald in London, for example, reported it under the headline, “S. A. theologians call grassroots Church to action”. Reports have also appeared here and there in the international secular press. (Dec 1985, Vol. 3 No.4)

*The Guardian* in London was quoted as saying:

Liberation Theology has taken giant strides in South Africa, promising... to put fresh vigour into the movement in other continents. (16/10/85)



The head of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa at the time, Bishop Peter Storey, had a guarded criticism of the document:

This document makes a contribution to an ongoing debate but it's certainly not the final word. In so far as it talks about the church's role, there are some sweeping statements which need to be worked out a lot more carefully. The question of identifying with the people in their struggle is one that cannot be uncritical or unqualified. (*Sunday Times*, 29/9/85 in *ICT News*, December 1985, SAHA)

What Peter Storey said in his comments was also of course stated in the preface of the KD and echoed by the then General Secretary of the United Congregational Church of South Africa (UCCSA):

The fact that the Kairos Document is described in the preface as an "open-ended" document which will never be said to be final is an important premise on which to base continuing dialogue...

On such a basis, the UCCSA welcomes the appearance of the Kairos document (sic) primarily, as a "Challenge to the Church" and not as a credo for the Church. (Joseph Wing, Secretary, Church and Society Department, undated papers)

It is of note that both Peter Storey and Joseph Wing were the leaders of churches which were predominantly Black in membership. These leaders were both regarded as very progressive. But they could not accept the KD without qualification. *ICT News* further noted that the media as a whole never canvassed the opinion of black Church leaders. There were other opinions from other leaders such as Professor Johan Heyns of the University of Pretoria who also had very strong views about the KD:

A very shocking experience... If the church is going to play that role, then it is no longer a church... They should exercise much more responsibility. (*Sunday Times*, 29/9/85 in *ICT News*)

It was not surprising then that a professor of theology at an Afrikaans University should view things this way. What was surprising was the reaction of Professor Engelbrecht of the University of the Witwatersrand, who is said to have described the document as “ghastly”:

All serious Christians should reject this. It steers in the direction of political involvement which also implies the church steps out of its own sphere into the political sphere to organise it... It was the church’s responsibility to be perceptive to changes that might occur in any morally unjustifiable government: there were obviously elements in apartheid which were unjust. But everything these people can point a finger at as unjust has already been detected by those in power and they know these things should change and have committed themselves to change. I therefore see in this call for civil disobedience an impatience and a lack of compassion which is totally unchristian!  
(*Sunday Times in ICT News*, Dec 1985)

Professor John de Gruchy’s position was that he:

...did not believe that the KD was saying anything new, though it spelt it out sharper and clearer, but merely reaffirmed the church’s position. To say that churches could not become involved in civil disobedience was to go against the whole thrust of Christian tradition. (*Sunday Times in ICT News*, Dec 1985)

The divided views of theologians and church leaders above actually showed how much the Church itself was divided. It is also to be noted that at that time there was a scarcity of black church leaders’ views which happened not to be canvassed by the media. Professor Heyns and Professor Engelbrecht did not acknowledge the struggle efforts that had been made by the masses of within the country and the fact that as amply quoted above, the situation had become very volatile and it was those efforts that were forcing government to have a rethink. Besides, the Church by 1985 was now only beginning to think of Blacks as also having the qualities of leadership.

Many theologians in Europe and North America and other places had begun to study the document, according to the Newsletter. For instance, a document written almost in similar format appeared later titled *Kairos: Central America – A Challenge to the Churches of the World*. It would not be an exaggeration to view the production of this document, which was written in June 1988, as having been influenced by the KD. Part of the introduction says the following:

Central America's "Kairos" arises from 464 years of struggle, agony and hope. The confrontation with the United States' neo-colonial and interventionist policy is coming to a head in the entire region...

We do not intend to give the last word with this "Central American Kairos Document". Rather, our desire is to share our faith and our Christian reading of this historical hour we are living out in Central America in humility, and in this we create an opening for reflection and dialog in communities and churches, together with all persons of goodwill...

The purpose of the Central American Kairos Document was spelt out as follows:

We ask all the churches of the world, but especially those of Rome, Spain, Portugal, England, the United States and the Latin American countries to hold penitential celebrations of great prominence on the occasion of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Latin America's subjugation, committing themselves clearly before their governments to its emancipation.

### **3.3.5 Current comments on the KD by some Christian activists**

The researcher interviewed ten people using a questionnaire. The people involved had been and still are most influential and knowledgeable regarding the KD. Among them are Fr Albert Nolan, a world-renowned theologian, Rev Des van der Water, who holds a PhD on the KD, Dr Luke Phato, a theologian

based at the SACC as Director for the Reconciliation and Healing Committee, Professor Tinyiko Maluleke, the current President of the SACC and head of research at UNISA, Dr Smanga Kumalo, a lecturer in Theology at the University of Natal, Dr Puleng-Lenka Bula, a lecturer at the University of South Africa has been the only woman to return a questionnaire so far, Dr McGlory Speckman, a previously very active member of the Institute for Contextual Theology and presently the Dean of students at the University of Pretoria, Professor Maake Masango, lecturer in Practical Theology at the University of Pretoria, Professor Jim Cochrane lecturer at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, and the Rev Frank Chikane who had until recently been Director in the Office of the Presidency.

On the question of whether the KD was one-sided the following answers were given:

It [the KD] began siding with blacks, which could be described as one-sided and then included others in terms of its broad theology. Looking back it had to side with the oppressed first, and then release the oppressor. (Masango's answer to the questionnaire)

Jim Cochrane, a professor who had been involved with the KD's conception and distribution, also felt that:

In its time, the theology of the KD was entirely appropriate provided one read it as a testimony and not a systematically worked out theological treatise... As a testimony its theology was a powerful representation of a pained, hurt, angry experience that was the reality for the majority of South Africans. (Answer to questionnaire)

Cochrane also was much more precise:

The established anti-apartheid churches were in that sense largely immobilised and failing their people. The KD broke that spell...

With reference to the hurt mentioned above by Cochrane, it is worth noting that Brueggemann also states:

Compassion constitutes a radical form of criticism, for it announces that the hurt is to be taken seriously, that the hurt is not to be accepted as normal and natural but is an abnormal and unacceptable condition of humanness". (1978:85)

In the light of the above, it was thus unfortunate that churches could not stand up and be counted. It was the kind of theology that was taught that insulated church people from rejecting the "abnormal and unacceptable". The survey this researcher has done through interviews and questionnaires reveals that since 1994 and even now, the churches have become concerned with denominational survival and individualism. There is also a realisation that churches are now more interested in increasing their membership than in dealing with serious issues such as poverty and HIV/Aids. (Masango: Questionnaire)

### **3.4 The KD's position on reconciliation**

It is apt to comment at this point on what the KD's position was concerning reconciliation. The KD's stance on reconciliation was rejected by many critics because for them reconciliation without justice was not an issue. This was therefore strange, that any group calling itself "Christian" could fail to empathise with a people that had suffered for so long. Ironically the kind of criticism above underscores precisely what the KD was trying to point out. One would have thought that the writers of the letter quoted above would examine the reasons for the publication of the KD, acquaint themselves with the facts in South Africa and then actually point out what exactly was unbiblical about the KD. The letter maintained that according to the KD "reconciliation' is rejected as irrelevant in the present South African situation". What the KD said of reconciliation was far from a rejection. What was needed was *reconciliation based on justice* (my emphasis):

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 to do with the Christian faith. (op. cit. p9)

It is difficult to understand the priorities of the critics of the KD on reconciliation and whether they had actually read the letter and spirit of the KD. It is a criticism that implies that Jesus is indifferent to the pain, suffering and deprivation of the poor and oppressed. The KD was, in no uncertain terms, according to the GDL, propagating “a false Christ”. The Confessing Fellowship also went further by likening the KD with the Barmen Declaration (BD) which had been issued in 1934 against Hitler’s Nazism. This comparison of the KD to the Barmen Declaration could be regarded as an unintended compliment to the KD because the BD also was a religious protest against the leadership of the German Evangelical Church for supporting Hitler. According to Ryan, the German Evangelical Church compromised with the Nazi regime because of the close historical ties that existed between Church and State. (2005:107)

## Chapter Four: The Kairos Document - A theological analysis

### 4.1 A general view of the Kairos Document in brief

#### 4.1.1 Introduction

A small group of Christian theologians and ministers decided to work on what was needed at the time. This group was influenced by the possibilities that were inherent in a radical interpretation of the Bible. The preface of the Second Edition of the KD gives some context for the writing of the KD (September 1986) as follows:

- There was a state of emergency.
- Sanctions were becoming a reality.
- Thousands of people were in detention, while many were missing, others restricted and some deported.
- People had become more determined to resist the regime even at the cost of their lives.

Wolfram Kistner had highlighted this resistance by stating that:

...no reconciliation is possible in South Africa in human relationships without repentance on the part of the people who uphold the present political structures and without an active participation in the struggle for justice to be accorded to all South Africans. (Brandt, Ed.1988:207)

While it may appear that the reconciliation that Kistner wrote about was meant strictly in a political sense, his view was holistic in that when he mentioned a struggle for justice it also implied economic justice. Repentance is inferred, as is a change of direction on the part of those who perpetrated apartheid.

The writers of the KD described the KD as:

...a Christian, biblical and theological comment on the political crisis in South Africa today. It is an attempt by concerned Christians in South Africa to reflect on the situation of death in our country. It is a critique of the current theological models that determine the type of activities the Church engages in to try to resolve the problems of the country. It is an attempt to develop, out of this perplexing situation, an alternative biblical and theological model that will in turn lead to forms of activity that will make a real difference to the future of our country. (KD, *Preface*, 1985)

#### **4.1.2 Core theological content of the Kairos Document**

The KD is renowned for having been able to identify three types of theology which developed in South Africa during the apartheid years. The Kairos theologians identified the following:

:

- State Theology
- Church Theology
- Prophetic Theology

The first chapter deals with “The Moment of Truth”. It spells out why there is a moment of truth it terms “the Kairos”: The writers give very clear reasons why the KD was written:

“We as a group of theologians have been trying to understand the theological significance of this moment in our history. It is serious, very serious. For very many Christians in South Africa this is the KAIROS, the moment of grace and opportunity, the favourable time in which God issues a challenge to decisive action. It is a dangerous time because, if this opportunity is missed, and allowed to pass by, the loss for the Church, for the Gospel and for all people of South Africa will be immeasurable”. (KD, 1985:1)



As mentioned above, the KD identified three types of theologies operating within the dynamics of the socio-political situation in South Africa. These were categorised as State Theology, Church Theology and Prophetic Theology. Up until that time, it had appeared as if there had been only one type of theology with a few differences in style. The differences arose because of the dividedness of the Church, which division was itself a crisis:

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. In the life and death conflict between different social forces that has come to a head in South Africa today, there are Christians (or at least people who profess to be Christians) on both sides of the conflict – and some who are trying to sit on the fence”.  
(KD, 1985:1)

In some cases it becomes clear that even the language of Christian activists was couched in apartheid terms, the very point Kairos theologians were fighting against. To say that there was a White Church and a Black Church can only have meaning if by white it is not meant the skin colour but the philosophy, worldview and ethos of being white during apartheid, and the same would apply in respect of the Black Church. Needless to say, there were a number of conservative Black people also just as there were a number of progressive White people, the Christian Institute and the Black Sash being two shining examples. For the purposes of the KD though, the manner in which the document had phrased certain matters was understandable because the theologians wanted to highlight the differences and disparities existing within South African society. The use of language, however, cannot be overlooked: The apartheid system was so strong that it created the prism or lens through which even its fiercest opponents focussed.

### 4.1.3 A critique of State Theology

In brief, the KD identified State Theology as a theology of the South African apartheid State which was:

...a theological justification of the status quo with its racism, capitalism and totalitarianism. It blesses injustice, canonises the will of the powerful and reduces the poor to passivity, obedience and apathy. (1985:3)

Of note is the emphasis of the KD to distinguish between 'State Theology' and the theology of the White Dutch Reformed Church. In the footnote of the KD the writers explain as follows:

What we are referring to here is something more than the 'Apartheid Theology' of the White Dutch Reformed Churches that once tried to justify apartheid by appealing to certain texts in the Bible. Our analysis of present day theological stances has led us to the conclusion that there is a 'State Theology' that does not only justify racism but justifies all the activities of the State in its attempts to hold on to power and that is subscribed to as a theology well beyond the White Dutch Reformed Churches. (*Notes*, Chapter 2:7)

The above-stated distinction is important because it does, in a sense, show that there were two streams within the White Dutch Reformed Churches themselves. In other words, while all of them could be accused of having supported apartheid, not all people within these churches did so theologically, thus the identification of 'State Theology'. In IsiZulu it is said:

Abantu abayi nganxanye bengewona amanzi (IsiZulu idiom)  
(People do not go only one way as if they were water)

It is also clear that the use of State Theology comes about when there is no clear distinction between Church and State. There will be another occasion to

further discuss the need for more clarity in relation to the Church-State debate because while the apartheid State used 'State theology' it also advocated separation of Church and Politics.

#### **4.1.3.1      Apartheid and the misuse of theological concepts**

State Theology was accused of misusing theological concepts for their own purposes. This kind of theology was mainly based on St Paul's Romans 13:1-7. The KD states that the:

...misuse of this famous text is not confined to the present government in South Africa. Throughout the history of Christianity totalitarian regimes have tried to legitimise an attitude of blind obedience and absolute servility towards the State by quoting this text. (1986:4)

Albert Nolan made the observation that the apartheid system was itself a religious one and had been under-girded by a church, the DRC. This religious aspect could also be seen the way the system became fanatical in its reaction to Black Theology or liberation theology. This is indeed an interesting point that Nolan makes concerning the assertion that the system is "also religious". It is this "religiosity" of the apartheid State that enabled Church activists to dent its image, otherwise the apartheid leaders would have further plunged the country into a burning furnace because it would have been a case of an immovable rock in the face of irresistible force. The leaders would not have understood the import of theological statements or Church statements decrying the apartheid system as ungodly and therefore a "heresy". The following statement by Nolan is therefore indisputable:

And that is why it makes sense for the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to declare apartheid a heresy. It is just as heretical for us as Christians today as the system of the scribes and the Pharisees was for Jesus in his time. Apartheid is just as much a religio-political system as the purity or holiness system was. The only difference, in this regard, is that the characteristic features of their system was religious,

whereas the characteristic feature of our system is racism. (Nolan, 1988:69)

Nolan has gone further by giving an apt description of what apartheid was about:

...when we speak of apartheid we are not only referring to those laws and policies that discriminate against people of colour, we are referring to the whole system with its security laws, press curbs and state of emergency and with its consumerism, money-making, labour laws and class conflicts. We call the whole system apartheid because its dominant characteristic is racial or ethnic discrimination. Some people now prefer to call it racial capitalism. (op. cit. p68)

From this quote it is clear that apartheid is much more than just racial separation. Racial separation affects the running of the economy for all concerned, so much so that those who make laws would make them to the economic disadvantage of the oppressed.

The KD emphasised that every text must be interpreted according to its context, as Romans 13:1-7 was written within a particular context. It went on to explain the context of the text as quoted:

State Theology assumes that in this text Paul is presenting us with the absolute and definitive Christian doctrine about the State, in other words, an absolute and universal principle that is equally valid for all times and in all circumstances. The falseness of this assumption has been pointed out by numerous biblical scholars. (1986:4)

The KD went on to show how this text is standing out on its own and not related to the manner in which God dealt with oppressive regimes such as those of the Pharaohs in Egypt, or the Babylonian kingdom oppressing the Israelites and so on. Correctly, the KD pointed out that Paul was not addressing an issue of an oppressive State or an unjust State. Paul assumed that the State would act justly because it had been an instrument that was

there to serve a just God. Paul did not need to address the kind of moral dilemma that was experienced by those who were under tyranny emanating from State machinery where the Church had to make the kind of stand Kairos was talking about. Furthermore, Paul was writing to a specific group of Christians – Christians of Rome – who were:

...’antinomians’ or ‘enthusiasts’ and their belief was that Christians, and only Christians, were exonerated from obeying any State at all, any government or political authority at all, because Jesus alone was their Lord and King. (1986:5)

Thus the KD theologians tried to put the Romans 13 text in the context in which that chapter was written. Furthermore, the caution of the KD must be taken seriously, even for the future:

Many authors have drawn attention to the fact that in the rest of the Bible God does not demand obedience to oppressive rulers. Examples can be given ranging from Pharoah to Pilate and through the Apostolic times. (1986:5)

#### **4.1.3.2 The state’s abuse of the law and order concept**

The second point under State Theology which the KD attacked was the concept of Law and Order as used by the apartheid government. The KD pointed out that the apartheid regime used language to de-legitimise those who fought against it. The words “law” and “order” were merely camouflage for a Government that was using illegitimate laws and dismembering South African society while using so-called law and order:

The State makes use of the concept of law and order to maintain the status quo which it depicts as ‘normal’. But this *law* is the unjust and discriminatory laws of apartheid and this *order* is the organised and institutionalised 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. (ibid.)

The use of the word “sin” is deliberate to show that the apartheid State had become a god calling for obedience, failing which people are sinners by not respecting the laws of this god. The State was working on people’s consciences so that they may experience feelings of guilt and so act in a manner that would make them subservient to a State that abuses law and order. As the KD says, it is good to have law and it is right to have order. But then these should not be used to terrorise but to benefit the people as a whole (1986:6).

The State had turned itself into an all-knowing god and therefore:

...told church leaders to ‘preach the pure gospel’ and not to ‘meddle in politics’ while at the same time it indulges in its own political theology which claims God’s approval for its use of violence in maintaining an unjust system of ‘law and order’. (op. cit. p7)

#### **4.1.3.3 The use of communism as a scapegoat for “Total Strategy”**

The other mechanism that was used by the State to continue to oppress black people was the use of the tag that people were being agitated by Communists to act in a hostile manner to the State (KD1986:7). The use of the word “Communists” was a well-calculated one meant to galvanise all people who were supposed to be “Christians” against these “godless” communists. Kistner captured this point quite accurately when he pointed out that the Apartheid government used the term “total onslaught” as a fight against Communism which was “targeting” South Africa. Once the Government’s constituents had accepted this erroneous notion it would be an acceptable rationale for it to use a “total strategy” approach against its own citizens who were agitating for a radical change in the policies of the country. It is also clear that for the security forces to remain loyal to that polarising policy they had to be given the idea that they were “forces of light” (the South African Defence Force and

the South African Police) fighting “forces of darkness”, that is, all the people and organisations which were clamouring for change. Kistner describes “total strategy” as follows:

The term “total strategy” indicates the determination that all aspects of public and private life are to be subordinated to the over-riding aim of upholding the present white-controlled political and economic power structures. (Brandt, 1988:24)

It is clear that the apartheid intelligence services were working hard to find ways of justifying their oppression of the majority of the people.

Even the religious life of people living in South Africa is to be subordinated to this aim. Further, the term “total strategy” is to direct attention to what is called “total onslaught” on the country from outside, and to divert from the root causes of unrest and dissatisfaction within the country, in particular the exclusion of black people from political power-sharing, from land-ownership, and competition in the area of economy. (ibid.)

It was this perceived threat of Communism which was used as a blanket to cover further oppression of the people. It is difficult to know for certain whether the government believed what it was saying or just used the threat of Communism as a decoy. What is not in doubt was the insult it directed at oppressed people. According to the apartheid government black people were not intelligent enough to see that they were being treated unjustly. Someone or some people were the instigators because black people could not think for themselves. This kind of insult, of course, was not surprising because the whole apartheid policy was based on the false view that black people could not be on equal terms with white people. It is indeed the nature of all tyrannies to always blame other forces to hide the true facts. It also does not seem to occur to tyrannical governments that they do themselves harm because they injecting those they oppress with the “virus” of oppression once the oppressed take over, although it is wise for the previously-oppressed to take heed of

Freire's words of caution that those who have emerged from oppression need to realise that if their goal:

...is to become fully human, they will not achieve their goal by merely reversing the terms of the contradiction, by simply changing poles.  
(Freire, 1970:42)

#### **4.1.3.4 Critique of State Theology is not time-bound**

The KD did enhance its importance by not just confining itself to South Africa. It was able to state clearly what happens when a regime (any regime) was no longer serving God. In other words, the critique of State Theology was not time-bound although certain principles need to be established to prevent a recurrence of State Theology. In other words, a state needs to afford people peace and justice so that people may be able to develop and contribute to the progress of the State. The principles contained within the KD will always be applicable where Christians form part of the population and need not be confined to South Africa or the time of apartheid only. It is for this reason that there were so many movements formed around the world fashioned after the KD. Wolfram Kistner's words come to mind. He observes that there is a common feature that keeps on recurring in human history after each liberation experience. Once people become oppressed the oppressor leaves something like a mark on the people so oppressed in the same way that a farmer would impress an identity mark on his ox or even donkey. Kistner argues very correctly that once the oppressor has been defeated or overthrown, the previously oppressed themselves become the oppressor so that oppression in fact never stops because the previous oppressor succeeded to leave an indelible mark on the oppressed. In that sense oppression begins to spread like a virus:

The oppressor has succeeded to impress his or her stamp on the oppressed. After liberation the new people in power practice the same methods of hatred against their opponents which they formerly experienced from their oppressors. They rely on cultivation of enemy



images. People who do not fit into their pattern of thinking are persecuted. In this way the liberation they have achieved, is lost and replaced by a new oppression. (Brandt, 1988:206)

This simply means that the oppression and methods tend to be adopted by those who had been oppressed before and are now wielding power. What is often encountered when dealing with this aspect of oppression is a denial, especially on the part of those who have benefited from the new system. If this happens, Brueggemann calls it reverting to a religion of *status triumphalism* and the politics of oppression and exploitation. Brueggemann was of course referring to the desire of those who wanted a king even after having left oppression in Egypt. (2 Samuel 7) (1978:16)

Russell Botman, states that the KD describes state theology as Calvinistic:

In a certain sense the Kairos Document accused neo-Calvinism in the Dutch Reformed Church of being a “state theology”. “State theology” it maintained was included as public theology, but at heart a theology of the oppressive status quo in South Africa. (In *Towards an Agenda for Contextual Theology*, 2001:118)

One of the most critical statements expressed by the KD against State Theology was that in its journey of oppression, the State used the name of God knowing that it is using God’s name falsely. For example, the then South African Defence Force (SADF), accompanied by military chaplains and in God’s name, was sent out to enforce its will as it killed and maimed people in both neighbouring States. The SADF was doing the same among its own citizens simply because they dared to fight against an oppressive regime. (KD, 1986:7)

#### **4.1.4 A critique of Church Theology – Influences that shaped the Church’s ambivalent stance towards apartheid and justice**

The KD described Church Theology in the following manner:

In a limited, guarded and cautious way this theology is critical of apartheid. Its criticism, however, is superficial and counter-productive because instead of engaging in an in-depth analysis of the signs of our times, it relies upon a few stock ideas derived from Christian tradition and then uncritically and repeatedly applies them to our situation. (1986:9)

These ideas are listed as “reconciliation (or peace)”, “justice” and “non-violence”. The arguments in this regard are clearly stated in the KD above.

#### **4.1.4.1 The Church’s compromise on issues of justice devalued true peace and reconciliation**

There were areas in which Church Theology was criticised, notably in its stance on issues of justice and reconciliation. The criticism was based mainly on the desire of the Church to be even-handed in a situation that clearly required choosing sides. Thus the fundamental problem was that the churches were slow to engage in social criticism. The Church, for example, was happy to talk reconciliation even when justice had not been attained. According to the KD, Christian Theology does definitely call people to *true* reconciliation and *genuine* peace. Kairos theologians agreed that these two attributes are essential, with the following caveat:

But 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. (KD, 1986:9)

This is how the KD spelt out the condition for true transformation which it urged the Church to ponder and act upon. In other words, reconciliation without justice was regarded as cheap. The KD rejected the “fairness”

principle that both sides of the struggle between oppressed and oppressor must be heard. It was not possible to act fairly when the antagonists were not of equal strength and where the other was clearly wrong:

But there are other conflicts in which one side is right and the other wrong. There are conflicts where one side is a fully armed and violent oppressor while the other side is defenceless and oppressed. (1986:10)

The KD was obviously uncompromising when it came to condemning apartheid and the oppression that accompanied the maintenance of it. That was the reason for its publication. The KD was therefore interrogating the essence of what the Church thought of itself. The question was why it took so long for change to happen in South Africa when the Church was made up of mainly black oppressed people? The Church was accused of offering a peace that allowed for oppression to go on for so long:

The peace that God wants is based upon truth, repentance, justice and love. The peace that the world offers us is a unity that compromises the truth, covers over injustice and oppression and is totally motivated by selfishness. (op. cit. p11)

The reason for this kind of compromise was that the Church had succeeded to preach a Gospel that emphasised the hereafter where there would be “pie in the sky” as the saying goes. One of the jokes that took the rounds at the time was that ministers of the church behaved like “pilots” because they were always flying people to heaven! The Church for black people was a paradoxical blessing: On the one hand it was offering dignity through the death of Jesus Christ according to John 3:16. On the other it was also preaching the blessedness of poverty while requesting tithes and money offerings. There are ministers of the Gospel who still use tithing as a condition for going to heaven as if the blood of Jesus was not enough! There are too many contradictions between what the Church preaches and what the Gospel demands.

While the KD recognised the Church for its role in fighting for justice, it nevertheless queried the type of justice that was advocated by the Church. But, according to the KD, “moralising” with the hope that “conversion” would lead to change was not going to bring about change:

The present crisis with all its cruelty, brutality and callousness is ample proof of the ineffectiveness of years of Christian ‘moralising’ about the need for love. The problem that we are dealing with here in South Africa is not merely a problem of personal guilt, it is a problem of structural injustice. (op. cit. p12)

An article by David J Bosch can be regarded as the forerunner of the Kairos Document, as he demystifies political systems:

All political systems, including democracy, are human inventions which do not have the character of divine revelation. Over all these the church has to adopt an attitude of the utmost reserve. She may not simply cooperate in programmes of nation-building as though she were mainly one partner among others. (*Missonalia, Church and Liberation*, August 1977, Vol.5 No.2)

When it is thought that Bosch is advocating some kind of aloofness from involvement in the life of the State he states that it does not mean that the Church has to be neutral nor does it mean that the Church should not be involved at all except to concentrate on dabbling in otherworldly issues. He does advocate a position in which the Church, while not following party political matters, should be involved in how the State is run. The researcher agrees with this view, and believes that party politics seems to go against the Gospel dictum of “love your neighbour as yourself” and the highly competitive nature of party-political engagement has a tendency of demonising one’s opponents. But the researcher believes that the Church must definitely and vigorously engage itself with issues of politics in general, of justice, of compassion and of development. This kind of involvement is timeless and

puts the Church in a consistently prophetic position. Bosch's views seem no different:

The church will therefore – albeit with fear and trembling, searching her own heart – have to distinguish between just and unjust state, between order and arbitrariness, between government and tyranny, between freedom and anarchy. (op. cit. p27)

#### **4.1.4.2 The Church's ambiguity on apartheid militated against its calling**

Boff, whose book was published the same year as the KD, describes the Church in a manner that shows that when the Church does not truly become what it should be – an instrument under God's direction for the concretisation of God's Reign on earth and a servant that would engender a dynamism of creativity to the world – it will become irrelevant. Boff warns the Church to be sensitive to its calling and not become a law unto itself to the point where it even becomes so rigid that it cannot accommodate new ideas and because of this, its intransigence leads to the fractionalising of the Church:

The Church as an institution is characterized by the rules of the game followed by its members. It runs the risk of losing the beat of history, of stagnating, of forgetting its primary function of service, of fostering passivity, monotony, mechanization, and alienation. It begins to understand itself ideologically, as the epiphany of the promises it safeguards. It imposes itself upon the community it is meant to serve. Truth is substituted by internal certainty and factions are created by cutting short those movements that will not be constrained by the institution. (1985:48)

In the introduction of his book, Charles Villa-Vicencio has also decried the position taken by the Church "throughout its existence". This researcher, however, would differ slightly and date the time of ambiguity mainly from the

time of Constantine when the Church began to align itself with a powerful State:

The Christian church has played an ambiguous political role throughout its history. At times it has blessed and legitimated the state. This has, at least since the Constantinian settlement, been the dominant position of the church. This it has done either by direct support or by default, through affirming a "future happiness" divorced from the existing order. (Villa-Vicencio, 1986:xv)

#### **4.1.4.3 The Church's inclination towards the status quo delayed change**

The DRC did not start as a church that was a tool of the ruling National Party. It is said that it was the issue of Holy Communion that actually made apartheid to be accepted within the DRC:

Until 1829 the NGK was still faithful to Scripture and to John Calvin's interpretation of texts in Scripture on the unity of the Church... But even as late as 1857 the NGK Synod declared: 'The Synod regards it as desirable and Scriptural that wherever possible our members from among the heathen (sic) be received and incorporated in our existing congregations'. (De Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio, 1983:137ff)

It is unfortunate that the same Synod, because of pressure from conservative whites, passed a resolution that allowed for the first time, separate buildings for whites and so-called coloureds while it conceded that this was because of pressure from conservative whites. (ibid.)

The irony again is that the DRC also had the interests of the poor Afrikaners at heart but not so much compassion for other races. It will remain a mystery as to how the Dutch Reformed Churches could accept Christ and reject other people because of the colour of their skin. It would appear that the DRC also at had to defend its stand against the then ruling party. But as time went on

and as ministers of religion within the DRC became interested only in the well-being of their people, it was when the DRC was now aligned with the ruling party that it became even bolder to publicly espouse apartheid. Villa-Vicencio's words are apt here:

When the church has promoted the ideology of the ruling class or legitimated a particularly revolutionary cause, it has found itself in ideological captivity. (1986:xvii)

This statement could be a veiled reference to the stance that was taken by both the DRC which supported Apartheid and the SACC which backed the struggle for liberation. The DRC had not taken a revolutionary cause, while Villa-Vicencio's statement above would be a prognosis of what could happen to the SACC-aligned churches if they also remain uncritical when a new Government is in place:

The central Christian theological tradition has, however, at its best managed to avoid both these extremes. It has recognised and affirmed the need for good social order while allowing for the possibility of rejecting and removing from office those rulers who do not rule in accordance with the divine demand for justice and peace. (ibid.)

The difficulty about this view of theological tradition, though, is that it gives the impression that the Church is immune from being a perpetrator of injustice and violence. "Christian theological thought" alone does not necessarily lead to the expected action which may promote justice, peace and reconciliation, thus, for instance, the publication of the KD. Villa-Vicencio's following input actually supports the observation made by the researcher:

Given the magnitude of socio-political and economic forces in society, the church has, in the course of its history often tilted in favour of the existing system, while at other times segments within the church, influenced by the forces of change, have been on the side of revolutionary change. At times, as is presently the case in the church in

South Africa, the church has been divided against itself. Those whose interests are served by the present regime favour a church of the status quo, while those who suffer under the prevailing political system affirm that part of the Christian tradition which rejects the existing order. (ibid.)

#### **4.1.4.4 The Church and political engagement**

It is very interesting to note that the White DRC was once a church which was involved in matters in which it spoke for and defended the poor Afrikaner and even had to defy the status quo of the time. Villa-Vicencio invokes the words of the Reverend C. B. Brink as he asserts that Brink was one of those Afrikaners who was outspoken about the plight of the poor. One of the submissions he had made to their Congress in 1947 was that the mission of the Church was to speak out for the poor and oppressed which was one of the aims of the Church. Brink felt so strongly about this that he encouraged the idea of a public that would demand a change in policy. The researcher also agrees very firmly with Brink when he says:

If the church does not exert itself for justice in society, and together with the help she can offer also be prepared to serve as champion in the cause of the poor, others will do it. The poor have their right today. I do not ask for your charity, but I ask to be given an opportunity to live a life of human dignity. (Villa-Vicencio, 1986:xxiii)

The KD actually accused the Church of the apartheid era of having a false kind of faith and spirituality arising out of a lack of social analysis:

As we all know, spirituality has tended to be an other-worldly affair that has very little, if anything at all, to do with the 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. Moreover, spirituality has been understood to be purely private and individualistic. Public affairs and social problems were thought to be beyond the



sphere of spirituality. And finally the spirituality we inherit tends to rely upon God to intervene in God's own time to put right what is wrong in the world. (1986:16)

The above-quoted text correctly encourages Christians to be involved in social and political matters. The apartheid Government was not in favour of the Church getting involved in politics. The irony of Afrikaans churches actually being the very ones underpinning apartheid escaped the apartheid Government. Some of the architects, especially Dr Hendrik Verwoerd, had studied theology at the University of Stellenbosch and had later changed to Psychology and Philosophy and belonged to the Afrikaner community which was generally regarded as a deeply religious and God-fearing nation but had been dangerously misguided into the apartheid wilderness by its church leaders. Whilst one agrees with the KD not to eschew politics and social involvement, it also depends on how people conduct themselves in politics. The researcher believes very strongly that political engagement should not lead to personal vilification and disrespect among the people involved. If this behaviour was unacceptable during the time of apartheid, it should not be acceptable today. People can disagree without being disagreeable. Difference in ideas is one of a healthy aspect of life but personal attacks and disrespect show a serious lack of maturity. Africans were used to engaging in long debates and discussions until a consensus was reached. This process took long, but time was superseded by respect for all people's views. The Western way of winner takes all was unknown when it came to arguments.

The KD further accused the Church, correctly in this researcher's view, of reformist tendencies which seemed to dictate the pace of change in South Africa. This reformist tendency was geared to address whites and the government with an appeal for a change of heart. It was a sense in which whatever would come from these appeals would be like favours being done to those who are oppressed. That is why the KD called it the *justice of reform*, because the pace then suited the oppressors and benefactors thereof.

#### 4.1.4.5 **Debilitating effects of the divisions within the Church**

But it can also be shown that the Church also delayed Africans from actually challenging their oppression and changing their socio-economic conditions materially. There had been a kind of Christianity preached to people, especially Africans, which used the element of fear, for example the fear of hell, as a means to convert people. Two things need to be observed: Firstly, it never occurred to Africans why people who brought a religion that talked so much about hell and the fear of God acted as if God did not exist by its careless destruction of African communities and their culture. The Church was also so divisive, and still is, of communities and families mainly because of doctrines which often go against the Gospel. Secondly, it never crossed the mind of the peddlers of religion, indeed of politics even, that no matter how strong the element of fear, it does wane with time and once the fear has vanished, an overreaction against the object of fear ensues and usually goes with a lot of counter violence, because of the so-called “mark of the beast”.

The inescapable paradoxes, contradictions and divisions mentioned above end up affecting how the Church relates to issues of justice. Much as the Church is viewed with suspicion at best and with disdain at worst, it has a presence within the lives of South Africans which cannot be ignored. It contains both the people who criticise it incisively and those who cause the problems:

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. In the life and death conflict between two different social forces that has come to a head in South Africa today, there are Christians (or at least people who profess to be Christians) on both sides of the conflict – and some who are trying to sit on the fence. (KD, 1986:1)

Interestingly today, more and more in the suburbs, the colour of the congregations is also becoming predominantly black, while the only colour that is changing in some township churches is the colour of the ministers who may be white in black congregations. Furthermore, as participant-observer, the researcher has noticed very little change in most of the churches with regard to a progressive theology in keeping with the democratic agenda that has gripped the country since the advent of democracy. The hymns are still the same old hymns that were sung over a hundred years ago although new choruses spring up from time to time. These choruses are people's compositions and have a powerful effect on worship services. The only challenge that these choruses face is that most of them are usually lacking in theological depth, and so tend not to last. It would also appear that ministers of religion are in no hurry to lead congregations that, because of their independent-mindedness, could challenge some of the undemocratic practices and some oppressive theological tendencies within the Church. It is also not surprising that the churches' confessions at the TRC were not just an exercise for its own sake but were necessary because the churches also had chosen to survive as apartheid churches during that sad episode rather than continue to bear witness to their calling by endeavouring to live as an alternative society of the people of God. Yet the churches continue to survive.

The KD recognised that the Church was mainly made up of those who were oppressed and tried to work with them:

Nevertheless it remains true that the Church is already on the side of the oppressed because that is where the majority of its members are to be found. This fact needs to be appropriated and confirmed by the Church as a whole. (op. cit. p28)

The KD has the following crucial statement which needs some attention:

Both oppressor and oppressed claim loyalty to the same Church. They are both baptised in the same baptism and participate together in the breaking of the same bread, the same body and blood of Christ. There

we sit in the same Church while outside Christian policemen and soldiers are beating up and killing Christian children or torturing Christian prisoners to death while yet other Christians stand by and weakly plead for peace. (op. cit. p2)

It is a paradox to think that expectations about church people are such that they would be people constantly aware of their calling to work for justice and at the same time there is the notion of people being nurtured with pie-in-the-sky theology. The fact that even those who are perpetrators of oppression are accepted by the Church rests on the following biblical understanding:

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.  
(Rom, 3:23 NIV)

#### **4.1.4.6 Doctrinal differences, traditions and practices distort the Church's message to the world**

The previous item mentioned above about the effects of divisions within the Church shows that Christians need to accept the challenge that there could be instances where churches could be wrong in their outlook and practice in society, and that the issues that divide them are elevated above the Gospel's injunctions. In a sense the Church seems to be operating on so many different interpretations of the Gospel that it can be surmised that each church has its own gospel. There were also churches that claimed to fight against apartheid and discrimination and yet themselves are not ashamed to practice humiliating discrimination and exclusion on the grounds of their own understanding of theology. Theology becomes far more important than the love of neighbour. This researcher has felt humiliated as a fellow-believer by what he experienced from a certain reputable Church when communion is served, simply because he and those who accompany him are regarded as Protestants and therefore not worthy to partake of the Lord's table. It can be argued that that very church which was so vehement in its fight against apartheid tolerated apartheid within Christendom whose cardinal belief is that

all people are created in the image of God. The church displayed a spirit lacking in ecumenicity especially regarding one of the holiest sacraments - that of Holy Communion. In this day and age this kind of practice should not be acceptable regardless of doctrinal differences. It should always be left to the individual to make a decision. Prozesky's words cannot be ignored when he writes:

What thus emerges from a critique of traditional church teaching as distinct from the message of universal love, in the light of the apartheid experience, is that the church has not yet found adequate ways of enriching society with the humane vision of its founder, and harbours within its stack of traditional teachings some major elements which do not square with the implications of the core message of Christianity itself but are uncomfortably akin to precisely some of the most morally and spiritually unacceptable parts of apartheid, in so far as they too involve things like inequality of access to the greatest benefits. How can we condemn political apartheid but condone spiritual apartheid? (Prozesky, 1990:133ff)

Prozesky's quote above was referring to the rejection of religious pluralism that has been the core of much of traditional church teaching. But this also applies among Christians themselves especially because there are Christians whose church teaching enables them to "boast" that they are more saved than others, unaware that they are negating the issue of justification by faith.

There is a further challenge found in Tutu's book, *No Future without Forgiveness*: People become judgmental in their outlook towards other people and then condemn them vehemently. Thus Tutu's words become poignant here:

There is a salutary riposte to our tendency to push blame on to others in a book by the Harvard theologian Harvey Cox with the lovely title, *On Not Leaving it to The Snake*. This helped me to be a great deal less judgmental and to avoid gloating at the misfortune of others. It was

particularly important in the Commission's (i.e. The TRC) encounter with the perpetrators of some of the most horrendous atrocities... (1999:74)

Tutu argues correctly that theology should remind us that regardless of the person's evil deed, it must be possible to respect the person while rejecting the deed, otherwise the perpetrator will be turned into a demon which view then removes responsibility from the individual to take responsibility for his/her actions as a moral being.

The point is that if perpetrators were to be despaired of as monsters and demons then we were thereby letting accountability go out of the window by declaring that they were not moral agents to be held responsible for their deeds. (ibid.)

Here there is agreement between Tutu and the KD theologians to some degree because the KD also made the point that hatred is not justified just because the State is tyrannical. Christians are called upon to love in all circumstances as Mathew 5:44 urges its readers. Where there is a slight distinction between Tutu and the KD is when he would differentiate between the perpetrator as a person and the actual deed. Emotionally, one would view the perpetrator as an enemy whereas as a human-being – especially if one is a Christian - the enemy is the action that has produced the evil deed that should be dealt with. The KD is direct in this regard:

It is not said that we should not or will not have enemies or that we should not identify tyrannical regimes as indeed our enemies. But once we have identified our enemies, we must endeavour to love them. That is not always easy. But then we must also remember that the most loving thing we can do for *both* the oppressed *and* our enemies who are oppressors is to eliminate the oppression, remove the tyrants from power and establish a just government for the common good of *all the people*. (1986:24)

At face value it might appear as if Tutu is advocating for cheap forgiveness until one realises that he actually wants the person to take responsibility for his or her actions. As he says:

If, however, they were dismissed as monsters then they could not by definition engage in a process that was so deeply personal as that of forgiveness and reconciliation. (Tutu, 1999:74)

#### **4.1.4.7 The Church's colonial history, its use of violence and the influence of money militated against its fight for justice**

No one will ever know how Africans would have evolved in the southern tip of Africa if the radical and irrevocable colonial intervention of 1652 had not occurred. No one will ever know how South Africa would have been today. There is a belief that colonialism was just a political excursion practised by colonial powers. Documentation does show, however, that there was a brand of Christianity that accompanied colonialism which, when considering the Spanish conquistadors for example, shows that there was a time when the Church was extremely and unashamedly oppressive. According to Maurice Rowdon, writing about Spanish imperialism in the sixteenth century, he says the following:

Violence became basic to Christian life in the sixteenth century. It even became an essential condition for survival. (1974:10)

The above was with reference to an assertion that in the sixteenth century a new factor had been introduced into Christendom: money. Rowdon makes the point that most of the progress, for example in medicine or making books accessible in the vernacular language, could be traced back to the sixteenth century:

Present-day society – whether we are talking about medical science or the printing of vast numbers of books in vernacular languages or communications or the banking system or exploration or racial or

religious persecution or the arts and literature or state debts or techniques of war or espionage or the ‘whitewashing’ of human minds – was developed at that time. One factor underlay all these activities, a new factor for Christendom: money. Of course money had always been used. But now it had an unprecedented role. The fact that it went far beyond a mere symbol of exchange to become the sine qua non of power had a great deal to do with the violence. (op. cit. 11)

One of the issues that the KD appreciated was that there was a fallacy that tended to be ignored when referring to the Church, namely, that the Church is monolithic. Few organisations can be likened to the Church which usually can have people of opposing views existing side by side. The missionary-instituted churches, for example, had both white and black people being members of the same church in South Africa: The following submission is a case in point:

In most cases, faith communities claimed to cut across divisions of race, gender, class and ethnicity. As such, they would seem by their very existence to have been in opposition to the policies of the apartheid state and, in pursuing their own norms and values, to have constituted a direct challenge to apartheid policies. However, contrary to their own deepest principles, many faith communities mirrored apartheid society, giving lie to their profession of a loyalty that transcended social divisions. (*TRC Report*, 1998, Vol. 4. 65)

Rowdon has pointed out that until the advent of money, life was easy-going and predictable. But the introduction of money started creating wars which were fuelled by the need for money. States started borrowing large amounts of money which ended up with exorbitant interest. The borrowing was to finance war (1974:11). The Church had also become very powerful in the sixteenth century so much so that at most times it was very much aligned with the State. (ibid.)

In the fifteenth century war became used as an investment possibility! This is the time when human beings became even more expendable and



communities became unsettled and some irreparably. Princes at the time used war to amass wealth. The Church and the sovereign states were soon at war with each other, and within themselves, in what looked like a permanent state of unrest. It could even be said that from that time violence became the distinguishing mark of the Christian world. Rowdon again asserts:

Yet thirty years before the [sixteenth] century opened violence was neither expected nor thought necessary... Less than half a century later there were new standards of violence which were more reminiscent of the barbarian period than anything else. Men became strangers to each other over trifling definitions of words – men in the same camp, the same court, the same Church. The divisions were so great that only one factor held sixteenth century Christendom together at all and that was the threat of a Turkish invasion. Without this Europe might very well have reverted to its tribal condition of a millennium before... (ibid.)

This is indeed a sad note that shows how Christianity had been taken for granted and abused throughout the ages. The material aspects of life have always been the guiding factor even in Christendom because Rowdon argues convincingly that it was all because of the growth of the value of money which resulted in exploitation for the sake of profits. It may be said today that things have changed. But human beings seldom change when it comes to matters of greed and power. Indeed this view expressed here does create a crisis not just for the Church or the State but for communities who usually bear the brunt of that exploitation.

There has been a lot of unrest during and after the fifteenth century. War was favoured by princes because it enhanced their profits. War, during this time, became the one engagement which became a money maker for princes. But Rowdon also mentions that the Church became embroiled in wars with sovereign states:

It rocked the foundations of society. The Church and the sovereign states were soon at war with each other and within themselves, in what looked like a permanent state of unrest. It could even be said that from that time unrest became the distinguishing mark of the Christian world. The gap created by the interest rate...was, so to speak, the guarantor of this unrest. (Rowdon, op. cit. p14)

Today, as Rowdon says, the wars which were fought by sovereign states have been transferred to the workers through their trade unions:

Nowadays the chase to close the gap has descended the power hierarchy to the worker who, through his (sic) trade unions... searches for new wage settlements. But prices rise with wages, and the fact that modern society has turned into a frantic animal chasing its own tail is now for all to see. (ibid.)

Rowdon is quoted extensively here because it is important that the reader remembers that talking of church-state relations at times gives the impression that the Church has always been on the side of justice and the poor. This is a fallacy because it is well-known that the Church often had a bloody history. Church theology in South Africa and everywhere, for that matter, tends to prefer to work with people who are subdued, subservient and afraid to voice dissent. This kind of Church theology is continuing today, especially in black areas. In white areas the researcher has found that the Gospel preached there is meant not to afflict the consciences of its hearers. The religiosity and ignorance of a good number of people, both black and white, is often exploited by a Church leadership that enjoys power while its followers refrain from challenging that very power in the light of the Gospel.

Rowdon's words make very sad reading indeed and unfortunately are still relevant today: He mentions that while Spain was playing a leading role in the wars, it was by no means the only country doing this. Switzerland and Germany were also involved in the war games which became the rule rather than the exception. Catholics and Protestants could vent their anger on their

opposition equally. Spain became prominent simply because it was the most powerful nation. (1974:15)

Indeed the need for modesty about the ability of the Church to play a restraining or even moderating role in the face of State power should not be forgotten, especially when Church-State relations are discussed. The Church, by its very nature, is not a liberal institution and may itself be urgently in need of a radical transformation. The account given by Rowdon on the havoc that was caused by violence makes sad reading and shows a deterioration and moral decay that had befallen both Church and State at that time. Rowdon concludes that this violence was not just on people and property but had also negatively affected the whole of nature. He gives the example of Peru where Spanish conquistadors disrupted the life of people by ruining an agricultural system that had served those people for centuries being passed on from one generation to another:

And [managed] to render almost extinct the fine breed of llamas on which Peru depended for its wool and, partly for its meat. They tore down fabulous cities, they massacred where only friendship had been shown them... *The Christian seemed to lose his respect for man (sic) and beast and earth, and regarded them as endlessly expendable for market purposes; which is perhaps to say* (and there is much evidence for this in the religious struggles of the time) that he had lost respect for himself. (1974:16)

#### **4.1.4.8 The Church paradoxically incubates political leaders and societal transformers**

The Church has never been a monolithic movement as has already been stated earlier. Flawed as the Church was, it still acted as a support for the very activists who were fighting the system as pointed out above. Some activists like Beyers Naude, Desmond Tutu and Frank Chikane were ostracised. But by and large you had others who were able to operate using the Church as a launching pad. It is truly a paradox that whatever the Church

in South Africa was, it was also supplying the very prophets who spoke against it. It can therefore be said that in spite of its huge weaknesses, the Church intentionally or unintentionally produced many leaders of the struggle for liberation.

There are compelling reasons why the Church could be regarded as an enigma: it is the very Church from which its critics come and from which they also draw sustenance, while the same church will also nurture those who oppress and torture others. It also gives cover and sustenance to those prophets who would otherwise lack legitimacy and credibility if there had been no Church to belong to. Perhaps it should also be noted that the Church acts through individuals. It is a springboard for many revolutionary activities. In an article titled *The Power of the Church*, Kistner quotes from Professor Danie Oosthuizen's address to Catholic students in 1967:

For the history of the Church has indeed shown that the onus for the fulfilment of the moral, social and political mission of the church has already fallen on solitary individuals, on actions and statements made by men and women in the name of Christ, in the freedom and commitment of their personal responsibility as Christians. History has shown that the burden of action has fallen on people who did not consider that they could shelve their responsibility, and thus the issue, until such time as an organised church had officially given some directive... (Brandt, 1988:10)

Many of the political leadership were people who had been trained in so-called mission schools. Albert Luthuli was a leader of the ANC and was also educated in a mission school. ZR Mahabane, also a stalwart and ANC leader, was another. People like Samora Machel who led Mozambique to its independence and was educated at a Catholic school should also be included, as should Robert Mugabe and Nelson Mandela. Oliver Tambo was going to train as a priest when the call to lead the African National Congress in exile came to him and he had to accept. Robert Sobukwe was a Methodist preacher in Kimberley while Steve Bantu Biko was a staunch member of the

United Congregational Church. Perhaps the fact that that these leaders, with a few exceptions, were people of great integrity says a lot about the sense of values that were instilled through those church schools, coupled with the way Africans are brought up and nurtured on the Ubuntu philosophy and worldview and spirituality. There were many others who were not of African descent who were also either church products or church leaders.

The words of Charles Villa-Vicencio come to mind here:

At other times the church, although more often minority groups within the church, has rejected the status quo by affirming the rule of God, which has meant a renunciation of the existing social order. To take this argument one step further, on occasions, and more often than not, the same church has played two different social functions in society, depending on the cultural and ideological milieu which has impinged on that particular church at a given time. (op. cit. p:xv)

It is clear from this critique of Church theology that there was something about the Church's strength, nevertheless, which could not be destroyed by apartheid. In the African townships churches still play an important part when it comes to bereavements and the Church continues to be the glue which gives coherence to the community. The Church on the ground is fully ecumenical, and there is less of an institutional gate-keeping as happens in church leadership circles. It is unfortunate though, that the Church which commands so much respect and so many numbers, is unable to utilise these strengths to assist the community to be self-reliant. In Klaus Nurnberger's article *The Impact of Christianity on Socio-economic Developments in South Africa*, he tries to show how the Church had started picking up some of the pieces left by colonialism and the disintegration of African society. (In *Christianity in South Africa*, Ed. Prozesky, 1990)

It also needs to be mentioned that in a time when the churches were virtually the only visible non-state and non-tribal organisations left in the black community, they played an inestimable role in structuring

social relationships, providing social identity, leadership and cohesion and acting as training ground for democratic procedures and financial administration. (1990:159)

#### **4.1.4.9 The Church's position on the poor and oppressed**

The position of the Church concerning the poor is very clear if the Church takes Jesus' mission statement in Luke 4: 18 seriously. A study guide entitled *Evangelism and the Poor* by Samuel and Sugden, states the following:

Throughout history the church has understood the gospel (sic) in a variety of ways. But most have ignored the priority of the poor, the present activity of the kingdom in restoration and the incarnate stances of Jesus in his society. (1982:20)

Thus the writers of the KD were not alone in stressing how the Church needed to be biased in favour of the poor. Moltmann also is clear on this. He cites Matthew 25:31 – 46 at length, where Jesus had spoken about how he had been hungry and no-one had fed him and so on because:

...according to this story, the Son of Man who is also the world's Judge, calls all men (sic) to their account, judging them according to what they have done to him in his hidden presence in the poor... (1977:126)

We may link the above observation of Moltmann with the God who shows Himself through releasing the children of Israel from bondage and shows Himself to be the God who sides with the weak and powerless. To further expound on this point, Deist asserts that God:

demonstrates his power in rescuing the weak and the powerless. He intervenes in history to demonstrate his power of salvation. (1981:18)

It would seem today that the above statement may not be that crucial because of the culture of human rights that has developed almost universally. It is still baffling though as to how the previous apartheid Government of South Africa could have been governed by an undoubtedly God-fearing people such as the Afrikaners and yet who still failed to see that that very God was a God of justice. Emmanuel Kant, quoted by Bradley, felt so strongly about justice that he states:

If justice perishes, then it is no more worth while that man (sic) should live. (In Hart, 1995:26)

It is thus to be noted that those who supported the KD and actually signed it are in full agreement with the fact that the KD was biased in favour of the poor. As if echoing Moltmann above, the KD quotes Matthew 25:49:

People are made in the image and likeness of God and whatever we do to the least of them we do to God. (KD, 1988:24)

This researcher also agrees wholeheartedly with Maimela when he says:

If God is acknowledged to be the creator (sic) of all human life in all its aspects, then the conclusion cannot be avoided that the arena of human relationships – in all its socio-political, economic and judicial arrangements – is the sphere in which God is actively involved through the creative and redemptive acts of love. (1987:2)

It is thus incompatible to have, as the apartheid regime had, a love of God through large well-built Afrikaans churches while passing restrictive laws for the oppression of black people in their own country. It is the core of Christianity that it gains its strength from working with the poor and the destitute. It is for this reason that Michael Taylor tried to look at the part played by Theodicy (the vindication of divine providence in view of the existence of evil) in theology today. Michael Taylor cites John Parratt's Book,

*Reinventing Christianity*, where Parrat attempted a survey of African Theology today (1995) and came out with the conclusion that:

Throughout its two hundred and twelve pages, theodicy is never mentioned except for one passing sentence to suffering as possibly 'a means to a higher good'. (200:26)

Taylor goes on to say:

This silence does not mean that suffering in the form of poverty and oppression is ignored. Far from it. It is central to one of what Parratt regards as the two main concerns of African theology. One is to relate Christianity to African culture, with its sense of solidarity, respect for human lives, and for community with the living and with the ancestors. It is a deeply religious culture. The other is to address contemporary political issues. (ibid.)

It might also be added here that, in answer to Beyerhaus above in his criticism of the KD's theology that it was not theological, theology is not just about the correct beliefs, it is also about doing the things that need to be done. And so Parratt observes:

The task of theology is essentially practical. It has to do with orthopraxis rather than orthodoxy: taking sides with God to overcome oppression and social disturbance and eradicate poverty. Liberation is a central theme of the Bible as it is of much African theology. (ibid.)

Further emphasising the need to tackle poverty, Archbishop Tlthagale wrote a letter to President Jacob Zuma:

Poverty diminishes all of us. If you are to leave a life giving legacy, focus your government's attention on the weakest – the old who are not appreciated, the electronically excluded, the sick who don't have strength, the hurt, the victims, the illegal immigrants, the single parents,



the orphans and the vulnerable. Society is measured not by the success of the strongest, the richest or the most powerful, but by its care for the weakest and the most defenceless. I hope that you will inspire all South Africans, so that the vulnerable in every home and community become our first concern. (*Sunday Times*, Article: *Hopes on Which to Build as a New Era dawns for South Africa*, April 26 2009)

It is unnecessary here to expound further on the devastation and havoc caused by the HIV/Aids pandemic and as exacerbated by poverty. The effects of this serious scourge have been well-documented.

If South Africans were to adopt the family view of African culture, then the question of highly paid executives and business, the unemployed and other disadvantaged people, would be dealt with differently. In the African family, there is very little boasting about one's education, status, or possessions. The more educated a person is, the more his/her responsibility towards contributing to the well-being of the less fortunate within that family. In South Africa, particularly, it should be a known fact that there are many people who would have been highly educated and extensively skilled had it not been for Bantu Education, material deprivation, job reservation, and the often forgotten fact that most people who earn very little spend most of their time travelling to work and most of what they earn to pay for transport. In the African family there are no disabled people because those who are able fend for them. An indaba with all stakeholders in South Africa would be highly desirable. Systems are created by people and they cannot be used to stifle the economic growth of others.

At one time the SACC made a pronouncement about the preferential option for the poor. If the Church was a follower of Christ, then it should be clear where it would be. Echegaray's words are poignant here:

Jesus chose the way of complete solidarity with the masses, A power not based on this kind of solidarity would have been power founded on a lie. (1980:30)

This solidarity is one of the pillars of building a solid base against poverty which came about because of inequality. It is to be accepted that poverty is unnatural and has to be eliminated. But this elimination cannot be done remotely. Involvement of both the Church and the State as essential partners is vital especially when the State is a democratic one. Taylor again makes this point:

Solidarity... is part of the every day jargon of the struggle against poverty. (2000:103)

Then he goes on to relate his own experiences in South Africa with people like Beyers Naude who gave up his own church and own people to be in solidarity with the suffering black masses.

He belonged to social and religious circles which could be described as bastions of apartheid. He had cut ties with all of them to stand instead with their victims who had come to regard him as one of their great friends and a most revered colleague and confidant. (ibid.)

It is because of this kind of solidarity that the KD advocated that there should be sides taken. In its critique of Church theology the KD asks:

Why has Church theology not developed a social analysis? Why does it have an inadequate understanding of the need for political strategies? And why does it make a virtue of neutrality and sitting on the sidelines? (1986:15)

#### **4.1.4.10 The Church's position on the sacredness of people's liberation**

One of the issues that was not debated or expressed by the KD was the sacredness of the liberation of those who had been oppressed and indeed of all people. The document confined itself to the thrust and efforts that lead to the eradication of the oppression of apartheid. The KD's stance was quite

understandable then and correct. But the KD, whilst admitting that the Church was not totally apathetic towards justice or fighting for justice (1986:11), nevertheless accused the church that through its statements, gave the impression that it wanted the “justice of reform”. The KD explains this as:

...the justice that is determined by the oppressor, by the white minority and that is offered to the people as a kind of concession. (ibid.)

The KD also criticised the above approach on the basis that it relied upon ‘individual conversions’ when responding to moralising demands to change the structures of a society (1986:12). Here the KD seems to have grossly underestimated the power of individual conversion that can even influence a radical change in structures. Perhaps, because of the scourge of apartheid, Kairos theologians removed their eyes from the ball, namely, that what Christianity is about is also found in the Lord’s prayer: “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth, as it is in a heaven”. The echoes of that refrain continue to shake earthly kingdoms throughout history. Jesus showed that God’s rule was not just the desire of God for God’s people, but was also a hunger of God’s people for God’s kingdom. It is this heavenly-induced moral change that can also bring about true structural change. In Norman Perrin’s book he has the following relevant words:

Jesus saw in the kingdom of God the moral task to be carried out by the human race, and... it is the organization of humanity through action inspired by love. Christianity itself is therefore completely spiritual and thoroughly ethical. It is completely spiritual in the freedom given to the children of God through redemption, which involves the impulse to conduct through the motive of love – and it is thoroughly ethical in that this conduct is directed towards the moral organization of mankind (sic), the establishment of the kingdom of God. (1963:16)

It is therefore not just a political battle to fight against injustice. It is a deeply spiritual matter, as the KD also maintains that Prophetic Theology should not only give hope but must itself be deeply spiritual. Individual conversion does

lead to structural change and Kairos theologians should never underestimate this. Church history has seen a number of social transformers who were deeply spiritual such as John Wesley, William Wilberforce, John Calvin, John Knox, Martin Luther, Martin Luther King Jr., South Africa's own John Knox ka Bokwe and other African leaders who were mentioned earlier. A further shining example is the prophet Ntsikana who prophesied that the great God will bring people together in a new form of gathering. He said it in an inspired IsiXhosa hymn:

UloTixo omkulu, ngosezulwini...

(He is the great God of heaven...)

Ulohlanganis' imihlamb' eyalanayo. (Hodgson 1980:19)

(He who brings together those groups which reject each other)

The struggle for liberation is not an option for some. All Christians should share the responsibility and ensure that nothing destroys it again. From a Christian perspective, it is a liberation that is found in the words of Moses and Aaron to the king of Egypt:

The Lord, the God of Israel, says, 'Let my people go, so that they can hold a festival in the desert *to honour me*. (My emphasis. Exodus 5:1b, Today's English Version)

It is a freedom in order to live out a life as God intended it to be lived by His people. Liberation goes with responsibility: to hold a festival, a celebration of life, in God's honour. Hans Kung captures this when he says the following:

There can be no talk therefore of the future of the kingdom of God without consequences for present day society. But neither can there be any talk of the present and its problems without looking to the absolute future by which they are determined. If anyone wants to talk about the future in the spirit of Jesus, he must speak of the present and vice versa. (1976:221)

And so perhaps church theology will remain “church theology” and be of no use to the world but to itself? Presently, in the face of the new dispensation, the Church in South Africa has withdrawn into its shell – almost as if it has quarantined itself – and has reverted to institutionalism. There is almost an attitude of: “now that we have delivered freedom, we can turn our backs on South Africa and build our institutions.” Albert Nolan puts it this way:

The church (sic) is in a much weaker position to face the issues of today for several reasons: Firstly because the churches have lost a great deal of their moral authority and credibility because of the behaviour of so many of their representatives. Secondly because the churches do not seem to be addressing the real issues of the day. What they say appears to be irrelevant. On the really important issues the churches appear to be silent. Thirdly, there seems to be no prophetic voice of the recent past. (Answer to questionnaire)

The question, of course, is, “what has changed?” Nothing seems to have changed because since Constantine, the Church lost its bearing and almost could be likened to Isaiah before he saw the vision after the death of his king, Uzziah (Isaiah 6:1 -8). It is possible that much is expected of a Church which is unable to deliver that which is expected of it. It could be meant to be a reservoir for producing prophets. It could also be that prophets arise in spite of the Church.

#### **4.1.5 A critique of Prophetic Theology in the KD**

##### **4.1.5.1 Introduction**

Prophetic theology was propounded as the major reason for the publication of the document. The KD’s diagnosis was very clear:

Our present KAIROS calls for a response from Christians that is biblical, spiritual, pastoral and, above all, prophetic. *What is it then that*

*would make our response truly prophetic? What would be the characteristics of a prophetic theology? (1986:17)*

The first thing to notice in the above was that, in spite of their progressive outlook in theology, the KD theologians were still parochial in their approach to the challenge facing South Africa at the time. The exclusion of people of other faiths confined the Kairos to calling for a response only from Christians and this gives the impression that apartheid was a scourge visited only on people of the Christian faith. This aspect does not, however, reduce the importance of the KD. From the text quoted above, KD theologians were fully aware of the need for a biblically-based analysis and that it also had to be spiritual.

#### **4.1.5.2 The nature of prophetic theology in the KD**

The KD argument for prophetic theology was an either/or, black or white approach to the situation in South Africa and in general. The language of the KD when dealing with Prophetic Theology was narrow in the sense that it concentrated on one thing: the obnoxious policy of apartheid and its oppressive nature. The KD then created the impression that the oppressed themselves could not be subjected to Prophetic Theology because they were oppressed. This was understandable because the KD was trying not to fall into the trap of extending criticism to the oppressed who were already suffering. This point is, however, dealt with elsewhere.

The KD identified the following elements with regard to Prophetic Theology:

- It includes reading the signs of the time.
- It is always a call to action. The prophets call for repentance, conversion and change.
- Prophetic theology is always confrontational.
- It emphasises hope.

- It is thoroughly practical and pastoral. It will denounce sin and announce salvation.

One of the most significant contributions made by kairois theologians was that it was not enough just to denounce sin:

But to be prophetic our theology must name the sins and the evils that surround us and the salvation we are hoping for. Prophecy must name the sins of apartheid, injustice, oppression and tyranny in South Africa today as “an offence against God” and the measures that must be taken to overcome these sins and the suffering that they cause. (1986:18)

All the above elements are important if the Church is to make a significant contribution to South Africa. It is understood though that since the Church is not a monolithic institution there is always a small group that always remains faithful to biblical imperatives on justice. The reason for this is that the Church comprises of both oppressed and oppressor, both poor and rich, Black and White. The researcher invokes the words of Fr Smangaliso Mkhathshwa when he says the following:

The unbiased examination of the church shows the following:

It is deeply divided – morally, physically, geographically, culturally, economically, racially, ethnically, as well as socially. The scandal of such division has precipitated the alienation of hundreds of thousands of politically aware Blacks from the White dominated congregations. (Vorster, 1986:62)

Interviewees felt that the KD came at the right time. On the question of how the theology in the document could be rated, there were these responses:

Clearly the KD took a strong prophetic rather than pastoral or priestly theological orientation. It did not seek to be theologically all-inclusive or comprehensive, and rightly so. (Des van der Water, Questionnaire)

Others, like Speckman, made the point that the document was biased towards the poor and oppressed, although “it was founded on shaky biblical ground”. (In answer to questionnaire)

Smanga Kumalo felt that he did not think he had exhausted his understanding of the document.

I see its theology as open-ended. It is not put as a final word, but [is] a tool. There are students still doing their Master’s degree and PhD’s on it... (Interview)

#### **4.1.5.3 The significance of prophetic theology according to the KD**

According to the KD, prophecy has the following important aspects:

It is always confrontational. It emphasises hope, it is deeply spiritual, it is thoroughly practical and pastoral, denounces sin while announcing salvation. (1986:18)

On being always confrontational, it means prophetic theology is not afraid to take a stand and naming the sin. (ibid.) It stands where truth and justice stands, regardless of the consequences. Clear examples are those prophets who were mentioned above, in addition to which there were many others over the years. This was a repudiation of the reformist theology mentioned earlier. The apartheid regime was no longer in the realm of rational debate.

The KD highlighted the importance of Prophetic Theology as a means to bringing about God’s will. As this thesis examines this very backbone of and reason for the KD, a deeper analysis of its essence is in order here. It is necessary to repeat what the KD says about Prophetic Theology:

...prophetic theology concentrates on those aspects of the Word of God that have an immediate bearing upon the critical situation in which



we find ourselves. The theology of the prophets does not pretend to be comprehensive and complete. It speaks to the particular circumstances of a particular time and place – the KAIROS. (1986:17)

The nature of prophecy is such that it is often not compatible with church teachings. In most cases, prophets come from the church. They are spiritually nurtured by a church. Prophets do spring from the Church to actually do the analysing. The issue to be addressed is whether prophets are not part of the Church when they act as prophets? Secondly, the Church does become the incubator in spite of itself, or put differently, it becomes the incubator quite reluctantly. In almost all the cases where prophets have arisen, they have done so through the ranks of the Church. It is not possible to be a prophet without belonging to a church, even though it is possible to be prophetic outside the institutional Church (ref. Beyers Naude and the DRC) and even though the Church may expel them (Frank Chikane, like Beyers Naude, had also been expelled by the church to which he belonged, the Apostolic Faith Mission). If the Church is the people of God where two or three are gathered, it follows that even prophets are part of the Church even when they are out of their churches.

The KD describes how the Church could be truly prophetic.

To be truly prophetic, our response would have to be, in the first place, solidly grounded in the Bible. Our KAIROS impels us to return to the Bible, and to search the Word of God for a message that is relevant to what we are experiencing in South Africa today. This will be no mere academic exercise... prophetic theology concentrates on those aspects of the Word of God that have an immediate bearing upon the critical situation in which we find ourselves. (ibid.)

According to Villa-Vicencio:

The moment of crisis in church-state relations has repeatedly dawned for the church through the ages when there has been a direct

confrontation between the church's restrained yet expectant aspirations for society and the naked and at times tyrannical power of the state. In this situation the inevitable question has emerged: is capitulation, compromise, or martyrdom the only alternatives available to the church? (1986:xix)

Although it is also to be noted that Villa-Vicencio also speaks of the Church as if it was a monolithic entity, the Church has always had a small number of people that stood up against tyranny. Martyrdom is not an easy matter. It is a fulfilment of the words that those who follow Jesus must be prepared to lose their lives. A clear interpretation of Jesus' words would mean that to be his follower a person had to stand for truth and justice regardless of the consequences. The KD states:

Prophetic theology differs from academic theology because, whereas academic theology deals with all biblical themes in a systematic manner and formulates general Christian principles and doctrines, prophetic theology concentrates on those aspects of the Word of God that have an immediate bearing upon the critical situation in which we find ourselves. (1986:17)

In other words, prophetic theology is relevant to a particular situation and within a particular context. This means, according to the KD, that there is a need for constant reflection on the happenings of the time and how the Word of God has a bearing on that. Albert Nolan points out that the KD was an address to the Church. It was described as follows:

It is an attempt by concerned Christians in South Africa to reflect on the situation of death in our country. It is a critique of the current theological models that determine the type of activities the Church engages in to try and resolve the problems of the country. (Preface)

The KD, in its action to address the Church in South Africa, was also giving the Church a recognition that had already been lost. Many young people, in particular, began to take the Christian faith seriously.

#### 4.1.5.4 The KD as a people's theology centred on the Bible

Christian activists, believers in the God of Jesus Christ, took it upon themselves to interpret God's Word through the prism of their own suffering and pain. People had reached a point where they could no longer rely upon the way in which the Church appeared lukewarm against blatant oppression. This document was indeed regarded as a people's theology as evidenced in the following statement:

The origin of the Kairos Document (KD) is a direct result of and reaction to the intensified implementation of the apartheid policy and the state of emergency... It is the product of a process of discussions which started in the ecumenical Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT) in Johannesburg. It has its origins in the grassroots of society. This document was not produced by the various churches or their leaders at the synods or ecclesiastical meetings. It was revised five times before being published in September of the following year. (Hofmeyer & Pillay, 1994:288)

The KD was not a theological treatise in the sense in which western theology could be interpreted. It was a document produced out of the crucible of the situation existing during that time. It was no doubt inspired by the Christian conviction of those who wrote it. It was a call to action. Or perhaps, it was a call to put prayer into action.

Puleng Lenka-Bula, a theologian based at UNISA, responded to the researcher's questionnaire in this manner:

The Kairos document represents in the tradition of the church and theological scholarship a prophetic witness in the midst of structural oppression and abuse which sought to bear witness and proclaim God's justice in a world that was and continues to be unjust. (Response to questionnaire)

#### 4.1.5.5 Prophetic theology also targets the Church

But there has also been tyranny in the manner in which the Church has operated, especially during the time of the Crusades. The hierarchical nature of most churches attests to this and in most times flies against the teaching of the Jesus of the New Testament. Throughout history, there have been church people who have co-operated with tyrannical powers and sold their souls for luxurious living.

Within the Church Brueggemann identified two trajectories, namely, the Davidic trajectory which follows the triumphal royal route, and the Moses trajectory which follows the egalitarian strand which identifies with the poor. The dominant culture has led to “numbness” and “lack of compassion” by the dominant group towards the poor and oppressed (1978:46). Brueggemann further identified these trajectories as contending forces within the Church and were characterised as the “dominant consciousness” and the “alternative consciousness”, the “dominant community” and the “alternative community”. The “dominant consciousness” was represented by Pharaoh, Saul, David and Solomon, and the “alternative consciousness” was promoted by Moses and the prophets (op. cit. p80).

It would seem therefore that, according to Brueggemann, the alignment with power by the Church did not start with Constantine taking the Church under his wing; it started much earlier with the “church” of the Old Testament. And so, if one follows Brueggemann, Christianity tends to see the Messiah more in the form of a Davidic descendent, read “royalty”, than in the manner of the prophets, read “servant”.

Albert Nolan, for example, asks a pertinent question almost echoing Brueggemann:

Why is it that in Western Christianity so much emphasis has been laid upon God as king or monarch with royal majesty and absolute

sovereignty? This God has been made in the image and likeness of the kings and emperors of Europe. (1988:191)

Coming back to the question of the Church, it has to be accepted that when the institution “church” is mentioned it is not just an amoeba-like entity. The generalising that follows from Villa-Vicencio can be read with this in mind:

The different doctrines of church and state that have emerged throughout history are attempts by the church to take its responsibility with the utmost seriousness. This responsibility concerns primarily the obligation to ensure that the state provides just an orderly government for the benefit of all its citizens. At the same time it is the obligation of the church to concern itself with the eventuality which arises when the state resolutely refuses to heed the call of its people for justice and uses its power to impose tyranny rather than good order. (1986:xix - xx)

From the above the deduction can be made that when the KD called this period of oppression in South Africa a “kairos”, this was a correct assessment. But in his book *God in South Africa*, Albert Nolan, one of the renowned Kairos theologians, makes the following point concerning what he considered to be the limitations of the KD.

The limitation of the Kairos Document, however, is that it does not provide us with sufficiently plausible reasons for believing that our time is kairos. There can be no doubt that our time is experienced by many Christians as a kairos, but the document does not explain why, or at least adequately and rigorously. The impression is given that our time is a kairos simply because there is a serious crisis and conflict in the country and especially because the Church is in crisis on account of the divisions in its ranks. That is true, but it is not the fundamental reason why our time is experienced as a kairos. (1988:183)

This observation of Nolan is not only surprising but could also be a case of splitting hairs. It was a *kairos* because it was a defining moment in which the struggle of the people had come to a head in a way as never before. In 1976, the United Nations had declared apartheid a crime against humanity and this declaration had been ratified by a number of states (*Report to the Catholic Bishops*, from The Theological Advisory Committee of the SACBC, 1985:167). When Nolan wrote the book in 1988, little did he know that the events were escalating so much that they would lead to the famous, history-making, paradigm-shifting words of FW de Klerk in parliament on 11 February 1990. At any rate, Nolan's remarks could not fundamentally alter the *kairos* matrix.

Nolan, quoting his own book which he had written earlier (1976), mentions that a *kairos* is the fact that the moment of truth brings with it *liberation*). In this case, what would then constitute "the moment of truth" now that liberation has come?

The *kairos* or moment of truth has come *because the day of liberation is near*. Throughout the Bible a *kairos* is determined and constituted by the imminence or nearness of an *eschaton*. (Nolan, 1976:86; *Missonalia* 1987:61ff)

#### 4.1.5.6 Prophetic theology also as manifestation of a holistic God

Prophetic theology speaks of a holistic God who is Lord of all. Christianity - the way it had been practised by the Church, as both English and Afrikaans churches has some measure of discrimination within a continuum of liberation and oppression – showed a fragmented god who had not been able to influence socio-economic life in South Africa. This researcher therefore agrees with Maimela when he says:

...if God is acknowledged to be the creator (sic) of all human life and thus the Lord over this created life in all its aspects, then the conclusion cannot be avoided that the arena of all human relationships – in all its socio-political, economic and judicial arrangements – is the sphere in

which God is actively involved through the creative and redemptive acts of love. (1987:2)

Maimela also captures this holistic aspect of God well when he says:

...because political and theological concerns are not separable, the situation in South Africa leads us to ask questions such as: What does God mean in a situation of oppression? What has God to say to such a political arrangement? What is God willing and capable of doing about the evils that threaten to destroy Blacks directly and physically and to destroy whites indirectly and spiritually? (1987:6)

It is also a matter of interest to note that in the townships there were many efforts to alleviate people's sufferings but these were not taken into consideration when documentation was being kept. There were formations such as the LAGUNYA Fraternal in Cape Town. LAGUNYA was an acronym for the Langa, Gugulethu and Nyanga Fraternal which operated in the 1970's during the time of the Crossroads informal settlement removals and the students' uprisings. There was also MUCCOR, which was a fraternal based in Soweto which was fighting rent increments and other unfair local government practices. Even within the South African struggle, there has always been the danger that this dominant consciousness from the privileged class of academics and professionals could still be discernable. In most cases White and Black academics would tend to flock together and legitimate each other as they relate only among themselves to the point where they neglect the efforts of others who may be outside the sphere of academic life. For example, more research still needs to be conducted on formations such as the Soweto Committee of Ten which also made some serious interventions in the early eighties as they gave direction to particular issues during the most difficult times when Soweto was like a pressure-cooker.

#### **4.1.5.7 Some limitations of prophetic theology in the KD**

##### **4.1.5.7.1 Prophetic theology in the KD was confined to the oppressor**

The KD dealt with one part of the whole struggle. Correctly, it dealt with the root of the problem facing South Africa. It therefore dealt extensively with prophecy meant for the oppressor and that was its stated objective in the first place. The KD had no deliberate intention to adopt a holistic approach to its prophetic stance. A holistic approach would disturb the trend of the KD because it would mean acknowledging that the period of oppression had exuded toxic social fumes that affected all. The whole environment was poisonous for both oppressor and oppressed. If the oppressor were the beast, then the oppressed would also exhibit the mark of the beast (Revelations Chapter 13). While the oppressed could not be expected to take the blame neither could they be absolved from their own responsibility where they acted incorrectly or made poor choices in their own lives. Pobee makes the following valid point:

...we need to get away from the idealization of poverty and indiscriminate damnation of the rich. If indeed 'the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it:' and if indeed God's love goes out to all and God punishes sin wherever it is found, then it cannot be said that God has a bias against the rich. We can only say after Jesus, it is often harder for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. (1987:30.31)

Indeed the above statement may appear strange for the topic under discussion. But it cannot be ignored that Pobee talks of those who have gained their riches legitimately and the struggle for liberation must not be used to discourage rewards for hard work. Pobee's statement is merely a caution that prophetic theology should not be a one-sided theology. Let the reader consider further Pobee's following comment:

It is not as if all the poor are righteous. The poor also cheat; they oppress their wives; they tell lies like the rich... (ibid.)



In other words, the poor are no less human – responsible beings - just because they are poor or oppressed, and that is the point the researcher is making. Otherwise it makes nonsense of Paul's statement that all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God. (Romans, 3:22, 23)

Niebuhr is also not very far off the mark in making the following point:

Orthodox Christianity has held fairly consistently to the Biblical proposition that all men (sic) are equal sinners in the sight of God. The Pauline assertion: 'For there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God'... is an indispensable Christian understanding of sin. (1941:233)

The one outcome of the serious oppression under apartheid was the distortion of the Gospel understanding of sin and oppression because even if one could have been free politically, sin would have continued to oppress. It would compound the problem if the oppressed, simply by virtue of being oppressed, were to be denuded of their full humanity in the sense that they are regarded as so helpless that they are like dough in the oppressor's hand. True enough that there would be a number of people who accepted without question that it does not matter as long as they are alive and thereby abdicating their responsibility to do something about it, not aware that to accept oppression is also sinful unless one is actually doing something about it. One recalls what Frank Chikane said above, namely, that it was better to die fighting than to die like sitting ducks. Freire's words come to mind:

Within their unauthentic view of the world and of themselves, the oppressed feel like "things" owned by the oppressor. For the latter, *to be is to have*, almost always at the expense (sic) of those who have nothing. For the oppressed, at a certain point in their existential experience, to be is not to resemble the oppressor, but to be under him (SIC), to depend on him. Accordingly the oppressed are emotionally dependent. (1970: 51)

That is how many people under continuous oppression would behave while others, as history and the recent post-colonial past has shown, rebel against this with all their might. It is understandable, though, that the KD was addressing a particular situation that needed a single-minded approach. It is for this reason that Church Theology was criticised for advocating even-handedness. Neither is this researcher advocating even-handedness, but rather a holistic approach. Niebuhr's words make the above point even clearer:

The Biblical analysis agrees with the known facts of history. Capitalists are no greater sinners than poor labourers by any natural depravity. But it is a fact that those who hold great economic power are more guilty of pride before God and of injustice against the weak than those who lack power and prestige... (1941:240)

The KD agreed with some of the leadership of the churches, for example, Peter Story, at the time head of the Methodist Church, and Joseph Wing, then secretary of the United Congregational Church, when they said that the KD was not the last word on the debate (see above under church reaction on the publication of the KD). In this regard the KD also stated the following:

The theology of the prophets does not pretend to be comprehensive and complete, it speaks to the particular circumstances of a particular time and place – the KAIROS. (ibid.)

The nature of the KD was such that it had to be precise and reader-friendly. If it were to be bulkier than what it was, many people would not have the time to read it. Its strength was also its weakness. Its strength was that it was brief and to the point. Its weakness was that because it had to be brief and to the point, it could not cater for other concerns.

#### **4.1.5.7.2 The exclusion of women during the production and signing of the KD**

One serious limitation of the KD – the lack of women signing the KD - that was not pointed out by others, was exposed during a Laverna Conference that had been organised by the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT) with the theme: Feminist Perspective to the Kairos Document. This conference was attended by about eighty women from across the country, including delegates from Namaqualand and Namibia. (*ICT News*, Vol. 5 No. 3 September 1987). A delegate at the conference, Denise Ackerman, made the observation that:

The document had been circulated mostly among men theologians, and that it was not compatible with Feminist Theology as she understood it. The document does not point out the oppression of women adequately if at all... The inclusion of sexism and feminist in particular should have been included in the analysis of the document. (ibid.)

#### **4.1.5.8 Prophetic theology manifested through individuals within the Church**

The difficulty with prophetic theology, though, is the nature of prophecy and the carriers of prophecy. Prophetic Theology tends to be idiosyncratic. It is unusual to have a mass movement of prophecy. It is usually carried out by individuals who then move others to action. It is for this reason that the struggle for liberation has outstanding figures who are well-known and a host of followers who also made sacrifices but are unknown.

The question remains as to whether the whole Church can be prophetic. It is a moot point whether it is in its nature to be prophetic. Throughout Church history it has never happened that the Church has acted uniformly in a prophetic manner. John de Gruchy however, treats the Church as if it does act uniformly:

The prophetic witness of the church derives from the biblical mandate to which the church is called to be faithful. It is the mandate of proclaiming God's justice and grace to the nation. So our prophetic task and witness in society remains much as it was and ever must be. (Guma and Milton, op. cit. p 92)

There have been movements within the Church that have been prophetic. The Church has always been conservative by nature and the hierarchical nature makes it an unwieldy organisation that carries within it all sorts of people. There is also an assumption that all people who are in church have a synoptic view of life. This researcher's experience within the Church is that the Church has a tendency of, at best, co-opting all those who appear to speak strongly against injustice in general, and particularly relating to socio-economic situations and the political environment, or at worst, would expel them as had happened with people like Beyers Naude in the Dutch Reformed Church and Frank Chikane in the Apostolic Faith Mission, and many others.

When the KD states that a prophetic theology must be deeply spiritual it uses the term "spiritual" differently from what is commonly known about the term. In a common manner, the term "spiritual" is wrongly used to mean "religious". But the KD used the term much more comprehensively:

All its [prophetic theology] words and actions will have to be infused with a spirit of fearlessness and courage, a spirit of love and understanding, a spirit of joy and hope, a spirit of strength and determination. (1986:18)

The above goes against the Church's general portrayal of Christianity as a religion of fear, compromise and general acceptance of suffering. The researcher refers to the times when throughout Christendom, sermons were fraught with hell-fire and brimstone, pie-in-the-sky types that used to be the norm in churches. New converts to Christianity were not imbued with the spirit of "fearlessness and courage" as its founder, Jesus Christ had been imbued,

and it was this failure on the Church's part that enabled apartheid to last longer than it should have. People who joined the struggle were demonised and regarded as non-Christians. Christians were supposed to be the religious people with holy looks and constantly having their heads down.

The KD goes further as it describes Prophetic Theology:

A prophetic theology would have to have in it the mind of Christ, his willingness to suffer and die, his humility and his power, his willingness to forgive and his anger about sin, his spirit of prayer and action. (ibid.)

If the above were true for all Christians, churches would have fewer members because of the very high price of being a follower. The reason for this decline would centre around what Bonhoeffer called a "costly discipleship". What type of church does exist, especially amongst the suffering masses? Pobeie gives this answer:

It is a truism that African churches have become carbon copies of the churches of the North which themselves were built on the basis of the idea of Christendom. That model makes for grandeur...well-fortified edifices like the huge cathedrals, church vestments and vessels of gold and silver. The churches like their functionaries are quick to acquire riches. The clergy, by their training and attire, are at the very least middle-class persons. What we have is a model of the Solomonic temple. That model, transplanted to Africa, which is by and large poor, not only lacks relevance but also queers the pitch for churches. (1987:60)

Pobeie's words must be taken seriously because of the challenges faced by the personnel of the Church in general. The challenge is that in most cases, the majority of the people who are church congregants are among the poor, especially when considered within the context of and with reference to the KD. It is a moot point whether prophetic theology can truly come from those whose lifestyle is different and infinitely better than that life as experienced by the

poor. Consider this: Jesus mentions the things that militate against the prophetic mode: Speaking against the Scribes and Pharisees he says:

So you must obey them and do everything they tell you.

But do not do what they do,

for they do not practise what they preach... (Matt, 23:3)

Everything they do is done for men (sic) to see. (Matt, 23:5a)

They love the place of honour at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues;

They love to be greeted in the market-places and to have men call them "Rabbi". (Matt, 23:6,7)

In spite of the above serious caution from the writings of the Gospels, the missionary-instituted churches have gone ahead ignoring the fundamental principle of being in solidarity with the oppressed and the marginalised. According to the above-quoted scripture, spiritual leaders of the Church encourage their being put on pedestals and centre-stage. Thus even those who may consider themselves prophets would move on occasions from the centre to the periphery - where the marginalised are - to comfort, and to express anger at the treatment of, the afflicted. Being put on a pedestal by congregations has been the Achilles' heel of almost all church leaders and ministers of the Gospel. Frantz Fanon makes the following telling point:

The Church in the colonies is a white people's Church, the foreigner's Church. She does not call the native to God's ways but to the ways of the white man, of the master, of the oppressor. And as we know, in this matter many are called but few chosen. (1963:32)

Mkhatshwa, much later, also makes a similar assertion:

This model [of the church as Mother and Teacher] betrays the church's former links with colonialism. In this model, the church was present in

the world by virtue of a pact or treaty with secular powers. The latter provided for all the church's needs and guaranteed its existence. A relationship between two hierarchies was established – the sacred and the civil. Needless to say, such a close identification of the church with the high and mighty could only alienate the poor and weaken the witness of the church... (In Vorster, Ed, op. cit. p64)

Following upon what Pobee, Fanon, and Mkhathshwa say above, it then would explain why, with that kind of leadership, particularly pertaining to South Africa, the Church had a majority of lukewarm Christians who espoused peace at all costs – thus a false peace - and so could not make a dent in the fight against apartheid. It is therefore to be deduced from this that it is the leadership of the churches that actually have control over change. For a very long time the missionary-instituted churches were led by people who could be regarded as non-indigenous. These churches became very powerful and were most influential in South Africa, particularly in black society. Mkhathshwa made the following submission:

It is not an exaggeration to say that the church in South Africa reflects the greater society – its values, ethos, attitudes and aspirations. In my opinion most Whites still suffer from a colonial hangover. Hence the disproportionate influence of Whites in church life, leadership and financial control. (Vorster, 1986:62)

In the same way that South Africans will not be able to just immediately be in a transformed mode, the same can be said of the Church and church people. Consider how vast the difference is from the time Fanon wrote and the time when Mkhathshwa wrote – a difference of almost three decades - but the Church has not changed much. Its conservative nature is not geared to promote change and throughout history the Church has never acted in unison to effect change. In fact, the Church has always stood against change if it is remembered that it took time before it could accept the Copernican revolution.

#### **4.1.5.9 The position of prophets against apartheid joining the democratic government**

There is also the question that has arisen since 1994 concerning the position of Christian activists who were active against the apartheid regime. There has been a silence which shows that they do not seem to have continued with the same critical stance that they had taken before the new dispensation. It is easy to criticise these Christian activists for their silence now that they are in the new Government and many of them can be erroneously accused of having reneged on their past pledges within the struggle. This question of the position of former Christian activists is crucial if the past is not to be repeated where a church (The DRC) had been too close to the then ruling party that, instead of challenging the minority Government, it actually assisted in the propagation of State Theology.

The silence of the activists could be in part because the present Government is the first democratically-elected one and needs all the support it can get to rebuild a socially-ravaged country. The silence, then, should not be mistaken for colluding with the ruling party and thus aligning themselves with the powerful at the expense of the poor.

Jesus has arrived and was preceded by the imperative: Repent! The strange thing about the call of Jesus is that it was preached by Jesus to the very poor who had come to hear them (Luke 13:1 – 5). But when John saw the Pharisees and Sadducees he called them a “brood of vipers” (Matthew 3:7-10). With the ordinary people, they are admonished to “repent from their sins” (Matthew 3:1-6). Prophetic Theology is not just meant to speak against the oppressor. The oppressed could also be candidates for prophecy. The researcher refers to the words of Professor Bonganjalo Goba concerning moral decay from which many people who had been engaged in a long struggle tend to suffer:

It is always dangerous to draw parallels between events in the Bible and our contemporary experience, because the socio-political contexts



are not the same. But what is significant is the way God responds to moral decay, particularly that depicted by the apostasy of the people of Israel. God intervenes by providing a new vision, a new moral perspective. This in my view is the significance of the prophetic traditions of the Bible. Today the prophetic task is embodied in the mission of the church... Churches are searching for a new prophetic vision, at a time when our country is in a state of moral crisis. (Guma and Milton, 1997:66)

Goba further notes that people may argue that morality is a relative term and that people would differ on what morality is depending on the context. But he does concede that from a Christian perspective the following definition is appropriate, even though Christians may not be in agreement on what constitutes Christian morality:

In the Christian context the rules of conduct and patterns of behaviour are shaped and informed by a biblical vision which seeks to demonstrate a sense of loyalty and deep faith in Jesus Christ. (ibid.)

Part of the moral decay has been as a result of the demoralisation suffered under the apartheid system and the erosion of the Ubuntu values, as people fought a heinous system which left them scarred in the process. Goba invokes the philosophy of Black Consciousness when he argues that moral decay came about because apartheid had denigrated people to the point where they began to also hate and despise themselves, as the values by which they lived were eroded by the destruction of their culture and cultural norms. Goba again correctly captures some of the symptoms of a nation that had been pushed to the brink:

The way activists were killing their enemies was by necklacing. They also were exhuming dead bodies from graves and burning them. This system of deep moral decay created deep cleavages and divisions between whites and blacks, between adults and youth, women and men, and in fact produced a very sick society. Our focus as churches in

that context were driven by a passion for justice, especially addressing political structural injustice at the expense of facing the moral consequences of that oppressive political system. (op. cit. p67)

The KD had not envisaged that there would be such a decay and had not prepared for it because the one major confrontation was apartheid and no one could have foreseen that things could degenerate to that level. The KD made the following submission:

In the time of Jesus the Jews were oppressed by the Romans, the great imperial superpower of those days. But what was far more immediate and far more pressing was the internal oppression of the poor and ordinary people by the Herods, the rich, the chief priests and elders, the Sadducees and Pharisees. These were the groups who were experienced more immediately as oppressors. In one way or another they were puppets of the Romans and to a greater or lesser extent they collaborated with in the oppression of the poor. (1986:20)

It has always baffled and intrigued this researcher as to why Jesus preached to the poor and oppressed the type of sermons such as the famous "Sermon on the Mount". The other way of looking at it is that Jesus was not prepared to waste his time preaching to the rich and powerful except those who went to him like Nicodemus and Zaccheus, being the two most prominent names mentioned. Jesus gave them time and spoke to them. But generally, it appears that Jesus spent most of his time with the poor and oppressed, including his own disciples. It is this researcher's position that Jesus knew that the oppressed had been doubly oppressed by the constant marginalisation they had experienced from their oppressors and by their internalisation of that oppression. People do not react in the same way to oppression. A few people are able to rise above their position of oppression and out of their own conviction, fight gallantly against it. Others engage in the fight because they are afraid that the leaders of the revolution might punish them.

#### 4.1.5.10 Prophetic theology is discerned from social analysis

Prophetic Theology has to do with reading the signs of the times and, having reflected upon the Scriptures, discern God's will in a given situation. This reading of the signs of the times is the one part of transformation that is necessary if one has to act correctly in a situation which demands a particular response or remedy. It is this lack of analysis by the Church during apartheid that led to Church Theology instead of Prophetic Theology. At the time of the pressure being piled upon by all the formations that were fighting for liberation from apartheid, no proper analysis could be made of the core of oppression that was impacting on people's lives. It is for this reason that the KD advocates for a proper social analysis or diagnosis so that it can then be interpreted in the light of God's Word. In other words, there should be a continuous search for God's will so that transformation is seen as a process rather than a once only event (1986:17). The kairos always called for action. It was not enough to just keep on denouncing without any follow-up to correct what is wrong.

[The prophets] call for repentance, conversion and change. They are critical, severely critical, of the status quo; they issue warnings about God's punishment and in the name of God, they promise great blessings for those who change. Jesus did the same. "Repent", he says "the KAIROS has come and the Kingdom of God is close at hand". (1986:18)

This social analysis is also taken from Jesus' words when he tells people to read the signs of the times. The idea of social analysis came from the see-judge-act method. Not much has been said by the KD on how social analysis must be done. But reading from the text, one can glean some methodology that brings out what is actually happening from a socio-economic and religio-political perspective.

Analysing the situation in South Africa the KD said:

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 or unjust interests. The oppressed are people who knowingly represent the opposite cause and interests, the cause of justice and freedom. Structurally in our society these two causes are in conflict. The individuals involved may or may not realise this but the structural oppression that in South Africa is called apartheid will sooner or later bring the people involved into conflict. (1986:21)

The word “today” is an important word because it speaks of the present rather than what was or could be. The social analysis therefore must be done regularly using the Bible and also looking at South Africa. The churches must therefore engage communities so that people can educate themselves. They have to “see” and observe what is happening. They have to apply their minds as to the “who” is doing “what” and “why”. After that, there is also the question of “What needs to be done so as to change the situation”. The present researcher had been involved in the Institute of Contextual Theology workshops in which social analysis started by asking people present to give their own experiences and to say why they thought they were having such experiences and what causes them. Eventually the discussions moved towards determining what actions could be taken in those situations. This need for continuous social analysis is another very valuable contribution that was made by the KD especially for Church activists. The ICT was a gathering place for all those who wanted to make a meaningful and lasting contribution to change in South Africa.

There has to be the will to participate in social analysis. There are times when leaders, of whatever hue, are themselves afraid to conduct social analysis or to train their people to do this. Social awareness assists people to have a proper diagnosis of the problem and to look for appropriate answers. Social analysis is a self-directed learning which assists people to make up their own minds as to what to do. It is a method that eschews paternalism and promotes respect for the people involved. There is a sense in which practising social

analysis becomes participatory research in which individuals learn also from their own experiences.

It is from the above methodology that the KD was able to identify the two sides, where some gained from the system of apartheid and others were losers in that system:

On the one hand we have the interests of those who benefit from the status quo and who are determined to maintain it at all costs... (1986:21)

On the other hand we have those who do not benefit in any way from the system the way it is now. They are treated as mere labour units, paid starvation wages, separated from their families... (ibid.)

The KD then goes further by showing how each of the two sides can be subdivided further according to their different opinions. According to the KD there were only two sides:

There are two conflicting projects here and no compromise is possible. Either we have full and equal justice for all or we don't. (op. cit. p22)

The above conclusion would echo what the *UBUNTU* philosophy says: *UMUNTU NGUMUNTU NGABANTU* (literally: a human being is human because of other human beings): "I am because we are". In other words as long as there is one person hungry and suffering, there can be no happiness.

What the KD should also have insisted on is the need for a continuous social analysis of the situation so that the Church does not find itself again repeating the mistakes of the past. It would be interesting to do social analysis today to find out whether the issues of oppression have been truly addressed or are being truly addressed. It is worth repeating what was quoted above to use that as a barometer for progress. The KD correctly observed that there were people who did not benefit in any way from the system the way it was then.

The KD mentioned that people were “treated as mere labour units, paid starvation wages” and so on. It is debatable whether, if a social analysis were to be conducted today, the findings would be different. The economy of the country is still firmly in control of those who had been privileged before with a few elites who have joined them. A lot still needs to be done in this regard.

#### **4.1.5.11 Prophetic theology and tyranny**

The KD was at pains to explain what tyranny meant by explaining that by definition a tyrant is “an enemy of the common good”.

The purpose of all government is the promotion of what is called the common good of the people governed. To promote the common good is to govern in the interests of, and for the benefit of, all the people. (1986:22)

The KD went on to show that a tyrannical government would of necessity rule with violence because people would have to be suppressed. This view led to the question as to whether the Nationalist Party’s apartheid form of government did not fall under that category. The KD went into the detail of why the apartheid government should be regarded as tyrannical:

Apartheid is a system whereby a minority regime elected by one small section of the population is given an explicit mandate to govern in the interests of, and for the benefit of, the white community. Such a mandate or policy is by definition hostile to the common good of all the people. In fact because it tries to rule in the exclusive interests of whites and not in the interests of all, it ends up ruling in a way that is not even in the interests of those whites. It becomes an enemy of all the people. A tyrant. A totalitarian regime. A reign of terror. (1986:23)

The KD did not end there. It went ahead to relate this view as to why then Christians do need to act against that tyranny:

A regime that has made itself the enemy of the people has thereby also made itself the enemy of God. People are made in the image and likeness of God and whatever we do to the least of them we do to God. (Mt, 25:49, 45)

It is also the measure of the document that it did call upon people not to hate other people but to “love our enemies”: As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the KD admonished its readers not to hate the perpetrators but to hate what they were doing and deal with that (1986:24). The main action to be taken was to establish a just government that would rule in the interests of all.

#### **4.1.5.12 Liberation and hope in the KD**

Prophetic Theology is not just about doom and gloom. It is done so as to bring about change. It is not just a condemnation for the sake of expressing anger. It is a judgement meant to transform society for the better. It is for this reason that the KD did not end up just with the anger against oppression and injustice. It ended up on a note of hope that true liberation will come:

There can be no doubt that Jesus, the Son of God, also takes up the cause of the poor and the oppressed and identifies himself with their interests. (1986:25)

The writers mention that they also, like all people, desire true peace and true reconciliation and that these are “assured and guaranteed”. That phrase was truly prophetic because five years later, South Africa was to hear words from the National Party President announcing in parliament the arrival of a new dispensation. The reason why the KD had a revitalising influence on all those who loved justice was also its hopeful tone:

There is a hope. There is hope for all of us. But the road to that hope is going to be very hard and very painful. The conflict and the struggle will intensify in the months and 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 the hope of participating in his resurrection. (1986:27)

The very last sentence ends with a call to action and a pledge to act with full confidence and trust in God. Indeed, Moltmann, in a form of a paradox, boldly states that the cross helps believers to distinguish reality from fantasy. The cross of Christ is a statement that God cares:

The cross of Christ is the sign of God's hope on earth for all those who live here in the shadow of the cross... The cross of Christ is the presently given form of the kingdom of God on earth. In the crucified Christ we view the future of God. Everything else is dreams, fantasies, and mere wish images. (1975:57)

It becomes clear therefore that hope as stated in the KD is not misplaced. It became the sure knowledge that just as the Children of Israel eventually moved out of bondage and found themselves in the promised land, so also would the poor and oppressed in South Africa reach their promised liberation. The rest is now history.